



BRODSKY & UTKIN
RONALD FELDMAN FINE
ARTS

Soviet architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin escape the often suffocating constraints of conventional practice by concentrating on speculative drawings and the fabrication of artifacts. Their fantastic visions first became familiar to the international architectural community through their proposals for the annual Central Glass Competitions in Tokyo. Obsessive, psychological drawings and bizarre structures provided a vivid contrast to the surprisingly sober speculations of other "paper architects" responding to similar frustrations with the limitations of building.

Brodsky and Utkin pack their architectural propositions with multiple images, narratives, studies, and assorted creative musings, and it is this density that supplies their work with its particular urgency. For this exhibition, the architects filled the gallery to near overflowing. An enormous plaster arrow suspended in the vestibule supplied the first hint of the challenging abundance within. Encrusted with scratches and marks, it pointed to the focus of the south gallery—a bowler-capped figure straining to push a large, irregular, 12-foot sphere resting on an island of white sand. Like the

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arrow, the egg's surface was carved with hieroglyphics. This existential vignette was entitled *Portrait of an Unknown Person or Peter Carl Fabergé's Nightmare*, 1990.

The north gallery was devoted to a grid-like installation entitled *Forum de Mille Veritatis* (Forum of a thousand truths, 1990), in which 16 floor-to-ceiling cardboard columns covered with small scraps of sketches and assorted notations rose from a black Plexiglas surface suggesting a nocturnal sea. A solitary gondolier holding a small beacon attempted to navigate this bewildering situation.

Though these enormous, pivotal installations provided the exhibition's focus, there was a strong pull to gallery walls filled with Brodsky & Utkin's funny and disturbing etchings. Visions of the architectural anomalies of the modern city, each drawing exposed a new dimension of alienation. *Columbarium Habitabile*, 1989-90, depicts the corner of a courtyard. The surrounding elevations consist of a grid of open volumes, each containing an individual house. A nostalgic collection of small-town specimens, the facades are assembled in a vast urban system. A large sphere suspended above the courtyard menaces the tiny figures who shuffle through the cavernous atrium. An etching entitled *Stageless Theater*, 1986-90, consists of a flatbed truck with walls and a ceiling attached to create the interior of an ornate theater. An audience gathered in tiers of seats faces the open back of the truck which slowly creeps through the city. The unscripted performance is the ordinary spectacle of life encountered along a particular route.

Brodsky and Utkin possess a spectacular vision of the strange confusions of contemporary life. Their view is both romantic and technically restrained, simultaneously funny

and fatalistic. The work registers and excavates the pressures of a place and time, and of the interior conditions of embedded lives in exile. There is a sense of underground refuge in these works, yet they are drawings of worldly resistance, not indulgent retreat. —PCP