

# M·E·T·R·O



## Russia's Paper Provocateurs

BY LOIS NESBITT

young Soviet architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, both 34 (bottom, right). Their fame, however, is rooted in two dimensions, not three.

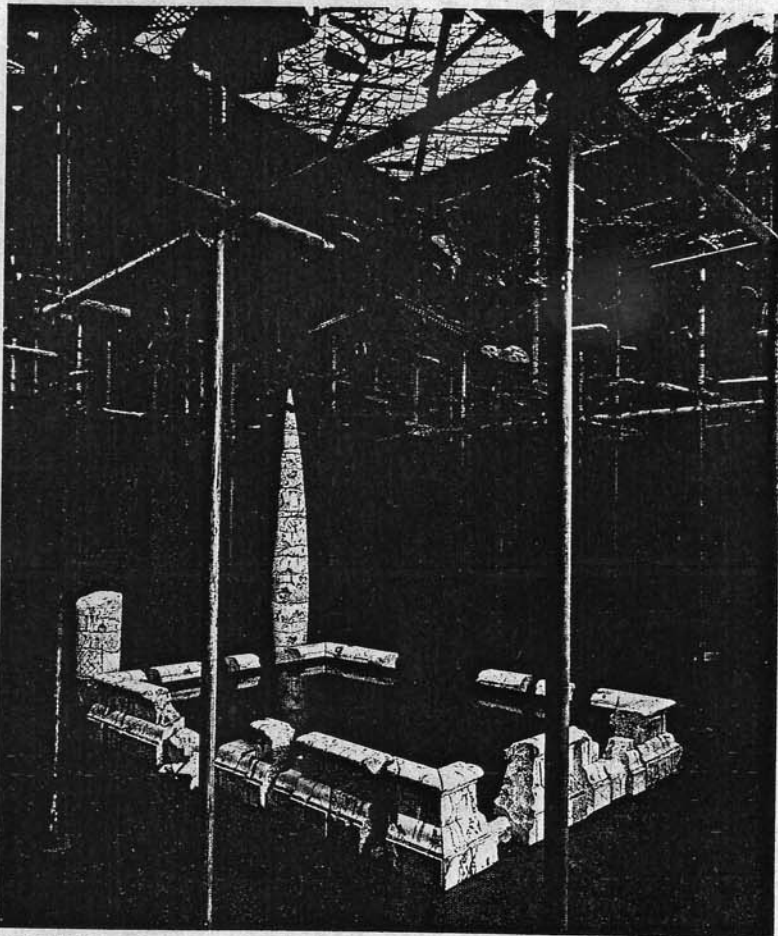
frustration—if they build it—of explaining, 'It's not my project.' "

The installation, with its mix of dreams, nostalgia and satire, is indis-

of age: the "period of stagnation," as Russians call the Brezhnev era.

The visionary pair escaped the architectural bureaucracy by turning within. They conjured up obsessively rendered, sepia-toned and sometimes wildly comic etchings such as "Untitled (Head No. 3)," below. They first entered their fantasy

Moscow's Atrium restaurant. (The Atrium happens to serve some of the city's best cuisine.) The look of the place is classical Roman, but with a contemporary, barbed edge—the architects have jokingly included self-portraits as gargoyles. They've chosen humble, inexpensive faux marble, not as a



RICHARD NICOL

● IN THE untitled installation above, industrial scaffolding, topped by chicken wire and chain-link fence strewn with debris—boots, gloves, machine parts—surrounds a faux Roman ruin. The pool mirrors the mesh—transforming the room into a mysterious, magical kingdom, infinitely deep.

This sense of wonder pervades the work of the

They, and a dozen or so like-minded Moscow comrades, self-mockingly call themselves "Paper Architects"—refusenik designers who would rather build castles in the air than official architecture. In state projects, Brodsky maintains, "You're not free. You do something, then you have to show it to everybody above, and they all make changes. Then there's the

putably Brodsky and Utkin's. (It was created for "Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism," which opened in Tacoma, Washington, and moves to Boston in November, then to Des Moines, Iowa, next February.) The partners say they're apolitical. But their work is a nose-thumb to the world in which they came



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drawings in design competitions sponsored by foreign, often Japanese, architecture magazines—and started winning prizes.

Brodsky and Utkin's architecture hasn't been all just for art's sake. For a private client, they designed the interior of

post-modernist gesture, but for economic reasons. They admire architects such as Japan's Tadao Ando, who use what Brodsky and Utkin call "real" materials. Says Brodsky: "We long to build in stone."