

Alexander Brodsky & Ilya Utkin, Dome, 89/90, Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc, New York, NY.

BRODSKY & UTKIN

Russian Artists and Architects
present

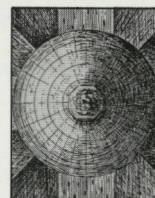
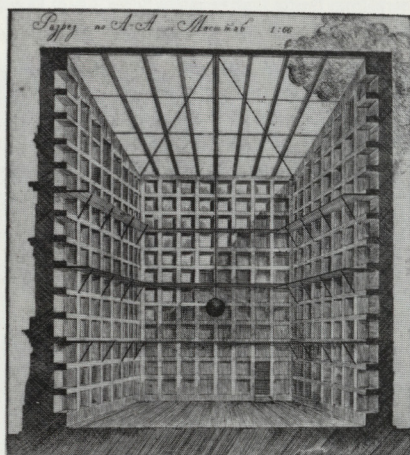
Palazzo Nero

Monumental Sculptural Constructions ■ Large Scale Etchings

WELLINGTON CITY ART GALLERY

3 MARCH - 3 MAY 1992

50-52 VICTORIA ST, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND PH: 64 4 473-2625 OPENING HOURS WEEKDAYS 10AM - 6PM WEEKENDS 11AM - 5PM
CLOSED GOOD FRIDAY ADMISSION \$3.00 CONCESSIONS \$2, \$1 GUIDED TOURS: THURSDAY 12.30PM, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY 1.30PM
Assisted by the International Programme, Visual Arts, QEII Arts Council of New Zealand, Fletcher Development & Construction Ltd., and Saatchi & Saatchi



Welcome to Palazzo Nero

The Wellington City Art Gallery has a strong commitment to provide community access to artists and their work through an ongoing artist-in-residency programme, focused on the realisation of exhibition projects. The International Festival of the Arts is an ideal opportunity for the Gallery to participate in a cultural exchange project highlighting contemporary Russian artistic activity — a project which has fostered goodwill and international co-operation.

Palazzo Nero follows in the tradition of commissioning temporary outdoor artworks for inner-city sites. The installation in the Civic Square by Russian artist/architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin will allow Festival-goers and Wellingtonians to engage with the artists and their work in an outdoor environment. It heralds the Gallery's relocation to permanent premises in the Civic Square redevelopment in early 1993.

The exhibition catalogue, with commissioned essays by New Zealand and Russian writers, has provided the chance for new research and writing and continues the Gallery's emphasis on publication.

A two-day forum *In the Metropolis* and a Wednesday Night Series of lectures and films will encourage an interchange of ideas and experiences and follows the tradition of critical debate in our public programmes.

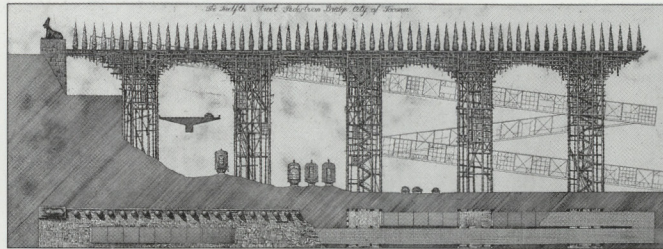
An exhibition project of the scope and complexity of **Palazzo Nero** would not have been possible without the support of many individuals and organisations. First and foremost we express our appreciation to the Wellington City Council for their continuing commitment to the Gallery and its projects.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the QEII Arts Council of New Zealand Visual Arts Programme. Saatchi & Saatchi and Fletcher Development and Construction also provided generous sponsorship assistance, for which we are indebted.

We are very grateful to Ronald Feldman Fine Art Inc. New York, the New Zealand Ministry of Art and Culture, Victoria University School of Architecture and The Wellington Architectural Centre for their involvement with and support of the project.

Finally, with enormous respect and appreciation we would like to thank Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin for sharing their vision with us by creating **Palazzo Nero** and to acknowledge their major contribution to the theory and practice of architecture.

Paula Savage
Director



Palazzo is a term for palace or grand Italian home. Nero refers to black. The name is suggestive of the classical Italian period.

Alexander Brodsky & Ilya Utkin. Photo: Neil Price



THE ARTISTS BRODSKY & UTKIN

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin were both born in Moscow in 1955. They met as students in 1972 during their first year at the prestigious Moscow Architectural Institute. They worked closely together through six years of study, then collaborated on a final thesis project.

Both Brodsky and Utkin's families have long been involved with the visual arts. Ilya Utkin's grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and wife are all architects. Brodsky's father Sava was a famous architect, graphic artist and book illustrator.

The artists work from what was Brodsky father's studio, near the old part of Moscow which they love. It still retains fragments of the social, architectural and literary layers from this great city's rich cultural past which Brodsky and Utkin's work seeks to restore to the present. The studio itself looks like an archeological dig — crammed with years of accumulated art, plans, drawings, prints, letters, books, bootleg videos, memorabilia and junk. It has the same feeling as their work: a chaotic zone where many elements of the past layer and recombine. Ilya Utkin lives nearby with his wife and four children in an apartment which he has altered in a manner similar to their etchings.

After graduating Brodsky and Utkin completed their obligatory three year term together in a large architecture/engineering firm, a typical situation in which individual contributions were lost. Buildings erected in the late '70s, the 'era of stagnation', were artless and ill-conceived, revised over and over by bureaucrats, then constructed with poor materials by unskilled labourers. After a disheartening start, Brodsky and Utkin supported themselves by doing joint sculpture projects, designing interiors and book illustrations, and winning international architectural design competitions.

Alexander Brodsky & Ilya Utkin, detail from *Twelfth Street Pedestrian Bridge, City of Tacoma* 1991. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc., New York, NY.

It is with a considerable sense of moment that we present **Palazzo Nero**, featuring 40 etchings and two major on-site sculptural and architectural constructions by renowned Moscow architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin.

The exhibition continues an aspect of the programme of the Wellington City Art Gallery that aims to probe contemporary developments in architectural theory and practice. This programme highlights the situation of architecture within a wider cultural framework. It explores interactions between architecture and non-utilitarian artforms such as painting, sculpture and film, and examines the relationship of architecture to the dominant social and political forces of our time.

In Russia during the 20th century radical shifts in political ideology have corresponded with equally radical changes in architecture and urban planning. Now during a period of social and political upheaval that has led to the demise of the Soviet Union, Brodsky and Utkin propose an architecture that recalls and merges many disparate historical periods in architecture. Their work draws on the history of the visual arts, theatre, film and literature. Perhaps the most significant aspect of their work though, is the many questions it begs concerning the relationship of architecture to power.

Gregory Burke
Exhibition Curator

PAPER ARCHITECTS

Paper Architects work with ideas on paper as an alternative to conventional architecture. Architecture, with its power as a tool of public propaganda, has always had a prominent place in the hierarchy of Russian culture. It has therefore also been strongly controlled and independent architects readily marginalised.

Paper Architects was in the 1930s a derogatory label for the unrealistic, utopian ideas of avant-garde Constructivists still producing radical work. In the mid '70s, amidst the mass-produced utilitarian environment of the Brezhnev era, a new group took the name again in a more positive fashion. Paper Architecture was reborn as a condemnation of urban chaos, a force against the greyness of the environment. It chose the flight into freedom, fantasy, play and protest that working only on paper could allow. The group of about 14 Paper Architects started smuggling their designs out of Russia with the help of an Aeroflot pilot on the Tokyo route, and won many prizes at international competitions. They worked harder and had more at stake than their Western counterparts, who had 'real' work designing buildings.

Paper Architects treated drawing as their real work, planning and designing collaboratively on imaginative, fantastic conceptual designs. Brodsky and Utkin won a string of major awards and became particularly famous in Tokyo. Among the founders and best known of the Paper Architects group, Brodsky and Utkin concentrate now on more individual projects, installations and exhibitions in both Russia and abroad.

ETCHING

Since the early 1980s Brodsky and Utkin have worked extensively with etching, co-operating on the ideas and execution of the drawings. Etching has a timeless quality which they exaggerate by scoring and pock-marking the print surfaces to suggest extreme ageing. The medium has dualisms appropriate to themes in their work. The hard scraping of the needle and acid biting into metal are contradicted by the softness of the paper they print onto. The metal place reflects like glass, itself a material and motif featured in their imagery, while the mirror-image reversals of plate etching evoke the magical in their art. The finely detailed etchings recall fairytale illustrations; the over-worked, cross-hatched lines the sombre interiors of Piranesi, while the dark sepia colours evoke a moody Dickensian romanticism.

STORYTELLING IN ARCHITECTURE

"For those who know how to look, the life of the city is unpredictable, a constantly changing, mysterious spectacle . . ."

Text of Stageless Theatre 1986/90

A key concept of Paper Architecture is that the language of architecture can be used to tell a story. Text is ever-present in Brodsky and Utkin's etchings, recalling labels on architectural drawings and the captions for storybook illustrations. Their preoccupation with literature replaces the traditional faith of architects in science and technology. Narrative and symbol replace the earlier manifesto and icon of the avant-garde. Brodsky and Utkin propose the city as a site for narratives, a stage set where performance, carnival or spectacle might readily take place. They believe in architecture's human values, that it does more than provide physical shelter, but includes psychological and social dimensions as well. They have a concern with the quality of life, and long for a time when cities were more liveable than their alienating, barbarous, sick and dying modern versions.

The Atrium Restaurant, Moscow, designed in collaboration with E. Monakhov.
Photo: Igor Palmin

VISIONARY ARTISTS

Brodsky and Utkin have a visionary project larger than sheer nostalgia. They wish to renew links with the past and literature, replacing those more recently formed with technology and the modern. Their works are like mirages — signs from a dream, parables from literature, cinema and the imagination. It is a post-industrial and cynically post-utopian vision; while yearning for a largely pre-modern world, it reveals a dark uncertainty about a helpless, empty future. Among all things old, they revere past architecture the most. The recurring metaphor of the bridge in their work signals a link between past, present and future, suggesting a visionary dreaming rooted in the collective memory.

REALISATIONS

It was rare for Brodsky and Utkin to work on real buildings in their decade of designing for competitions. Since then they have executed two interiors. One is The Atrium, a co-operative cafe in the centre of Moscow, now famous locally and internationally. It is in the bottom floor of a huge high-rise on Leninsky Prospect — an enormous, windy, inhuman street.

From the outside The Atrium looks like a simple '60s house. But inside it is astonishing, a distorted piece of Italian classicism, or some strange country. All the elaborate, idiosyncratic intricacies from Brodsky and Utkin's etchings are realised in three dimensions — gargoyles, capitals, columns half-way to the ceiling, animate figures — quoting slyly from various periods of art history.

The architects sculpted it out of stucco themselves because no Russian builder could realise their fantastic ideas. "We worked like horses for four, five months, twelve hours every day without rest, and almost got grazy . . . Architecture cannot be entirely mass-produced. Something has to be made by hand . . ."

Sources for these notes:

- "Paper Tsars" Andrew Solomon, *Harper's & Queen* February 1990.
- "Paper Classics", Michael R. Benson *Interview* December 1988 Vol. XVIII No 12.
- "Notes from the Underground" Constantin Boym, *Id*, May/June 1989.



PUBLIC PROGRAMMES

Palazzo Nero

A special exhibition commissioned for the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

An illustrated colour catalogue accompanies the exhibition. It features documentation of **Palazzo Nero** and the architecture of Brodsky and Utkin. It includes a review of their etchings and three-dimensional constructions for Dutch and American museums. Essays are contributed by leading Russian critic Alexander Rappaport, Dr Paul Walker of Victoria University's School of Architecture, and Wellington City Art Gallery Managing Curator Gregory Burke.

FORUM In the Metropolis

March 7 and 8. Admission free.

A forum focusing on the roles adopted by the arts, architecture, urban design and planning in relation to the metropolis. The theme is drawn in part from Brodsky and Utkin's work which reflects the isolation and alienation of the individual in the contemporary city and the need to reassert a sense of identity.

- **Heritage and Continuity** — Saturday 10am
- **The Artist in the City** — Saturday 2pm
- **The Architecture of the City** — Sunday 10am
- **The Public Realm** — Sunday 2pm
- Concluding session, outdoor sculpture unveiling and social function — Sunday 5pm

Artists, architects, writers and critics and commentators from New Zealand and overseas will attend. Organised by the Wellington City Art Gallery and The Wellington Architectural Centre, the Forum is free, and open to the public — come to any or all sessions. For further information and registration please contact Mary-Louise Browne or Barbara Blake at the Gallery, 473-2625.

OUTDOOR PROJECT

In the first week of the International Festival of the Arts Brodsky and Utkin are creating a sculpture in the Wellington Civic Square, assisted by 50 architecture students from Victoria University. The sculpture will be launched at the close of the Forum on 8 March.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT PROGRAMME

Open Late, 6–8pm

An exciting programme of free lectures, screenings, performance, readings and presentations with an international flavour. Highlights relevant to **Palazzo Nero** include:

- March 4 — a special presentation by Brodsky and Utkin.
- April 1 — Masha Denisova, recent arrival from Moscow, lectures on dissident 20th century Russian writers.
- April 8 — **Akira**, a state of the art animated film to rival *Bladerunner*. Set in Tokyo in 2019, it was directed by Katsuhiro Otomo and made in 1990.
- April 22 — Mark Burry (Lecturer in Architecture, Victoria University) specialist on Gaudi's unfinished cathedral in Barcelona, discusses artist/architects moving between the fantastic and the real.
- April 29 — Dr Paul Walker (Lecturer in Architecture, Victoria University), on bridging the divide between building and theory.

GUIDED TOURS

Gallery Guides offer informal tours on Thursdays: 12.30pm, Saturdays and Sundays: 1.30pm, or other times by arrangement.

AUDIO-VISUAL PROGRAMME

The classic film **The Metropolis** (1927), by German expressionist film-maker Fritz Lang will be available to view on video at the Gallery. Other related material will also be available.

SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

Exhibition tours

Education staff will take students through the exhibition and offer activities designed to stimulate student interest and develop their confidence and understanding of the exhibition. In consultation with Jane Murphy, Schools Curator for **Palazzo Nero**, tours can be designed to cater for specific needs.

Education kit

This contains information about the artists, their project at the Gallery, and useful background material. The kit covers specific subject areas: art (particularly printmaking, sculpture and architecture); art history; English; drama; history and social studies. It includes pre- and post-Gallery visit activities, designed to make the visit to the exhibition more worthwhile.

The Print Studio

Special workshops in etching for senior students are being conducted by printmaker Basia Smolniki. They include Saturday morning classes and a weekend workshop for architecture students. Contact Kristin Peren, Co-ordinator of The Print Studio, at the Gallery for more information.

ARTWORKS: Children's art workshops

ARTWORKS is a co-operative of practising artists with extensive teaching experience, who are conducting practical workshops devised around special themes in **Palazzo Nero**.

For information and bookings contact Education staff at the Gallery on 473-2625: Jane Murphy, Kristin Peren, Janet Bayly.

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ASSISTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME, VISUAL ARTS, QEII ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND, FLETCHER DEVELOPMENT & CONSTRUCTION LTD, AND SAATCHI & SAATCHI