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ALEXANDER BRODSKY – PLAY WITH ARCHITECTURE

ALEXANDER BRODSKY – GRA W ARCHITEKTURĘ

A b s t r a c t

Drawing serves as a basic tool for recording and immortalizing the original visions of an architect. The architecture so presented is free from any restraints and may express fantasies and dreams of all sorts. Such acts can be referred to as playing with architecture. But is it only playing with architecture or does the imaginary, visionary paper architecture carry deeper meanings? The article presents selected motifs form Alexander Brodsky's works.

Keywords: architecture, drawing, vision

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Rysunek stanowi podstawowe narzędzie służące do zapisywania i uwieczniania indywidualnych wizji architekta. Architektura zaprezentowana w takiej formie jest wolna od ograniczeń, może zawierać wszelkie fantazje i marzenia. Działania takie możemy nazwać *zabawą architektury.* Ale czy to tylko *zabawa architekturą,* czy też ta często wyimaginowana, wizjonerska papierowa architektura ma głębsze treści? W artykule zaprezentowano wybrane wątki z twórczości Aleksandra Brodskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, rysunek, wizja

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1. Introduction

Alongside material architecture, there exists architecture that may never be built but remains in the form of a drawing [5]. This is defined as *paper architecture.* Architects with original ideas often focus on the vision of their own artwork. Drawing as a basic means of expressing the architect's imagination is a tool for recording and immortalizing the architect's original visions and a means of freeing the imagination. [7, p. 205–209]. Architecture so presented is free from any restraints and may express fantasies and dreams of all sorts and everything that would be impossible to realize for various reasons. It can be called playing with architecture. But is it just playing with architecture or does the imaginary, visionary paper architecture carry deeper meanings? The drawings often inspire further actions. They are also appreciated for their artistic value.

2. Drawings by Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin

Among modern artists who take an interest in imaginary architecture presented in graphic form is Alexander Brodsky, one of the best known Russian architects and artists. In 1978, he graduated from Moscow Architecture Institute and in the late 1970s and in the 1980s went on to create *paper architecture* which brought him fame and recognition.

In 1978–1993 he worked with Ilya Utkin. Their etchings from that period were signed BR:UT. At that time, etching was a technique very often used in the Soviet Union for illustrating books, especially literature. Brodsky and Utkin used the etching technique to picture reality together with its interpretation. For the average viewer, architecture presented by means of etchings is usually monumental, ancient architecture [1, 3], as in the etchings by G. B. Piranesi (1720–1778) which show suggestive visions of ancient Rome's architecture. By using etching, Brodsky and Utkin may provoke the viewer to thoroughly analyse their works and notice their historical determinants. In 1982, their print was awarded the first prize in a competition for a Crystal Palace. The authors presented an axonometric projection of a structure, its section, elevations and a male figure standing in the rain on the terrace, his umbrella lying beside him. The depth of architectural narration is apparent in this artwork [4, p. 19–43]. *Their Crystal Palace appeared not like 1851's encomium of progress but as a mirage beyond the edge of town, a Potemkin's culisse, which even if it visited at the end of a trudge through the rain, remained an enigma. Yet BR:UT's ambivalent satires were cast at capitalism as well as communism* [4, p. 26]. When a Japanese glass company announced a competition for a Glass Tower in 1984, the artists presented it as a ruin, shards scattered on the ground. What metaphor was hidden in the picture? B. Hatton's interpretation seems right: *Was it an allegory of a modernist Babel, fallen to a polyglot and pygmy present? Or directed at those utopias of the 1920s, when glass had stood for the transparency of reason, before Zamyatin's novel we had contrarily shown transparency as the surveillant condition for a tyrannic conformism?* [1, p. 26]. The artists presented a satirical interpretation of a glass tower in their Glass Tower II which shows stairs ascending to a room inside a glass cylinder where visitors are magnified to giants. Inside there is a caricature of a man looming over the crowds of people in the streets below. *Like a monstrous machine for Andy Warhol's prediction that soon*

"everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes", the plate announced like an advertisement that at the moment a man enters the room 'his old dream comes true'. A little man will fill by himself the gigantic tower [4, s. 26].

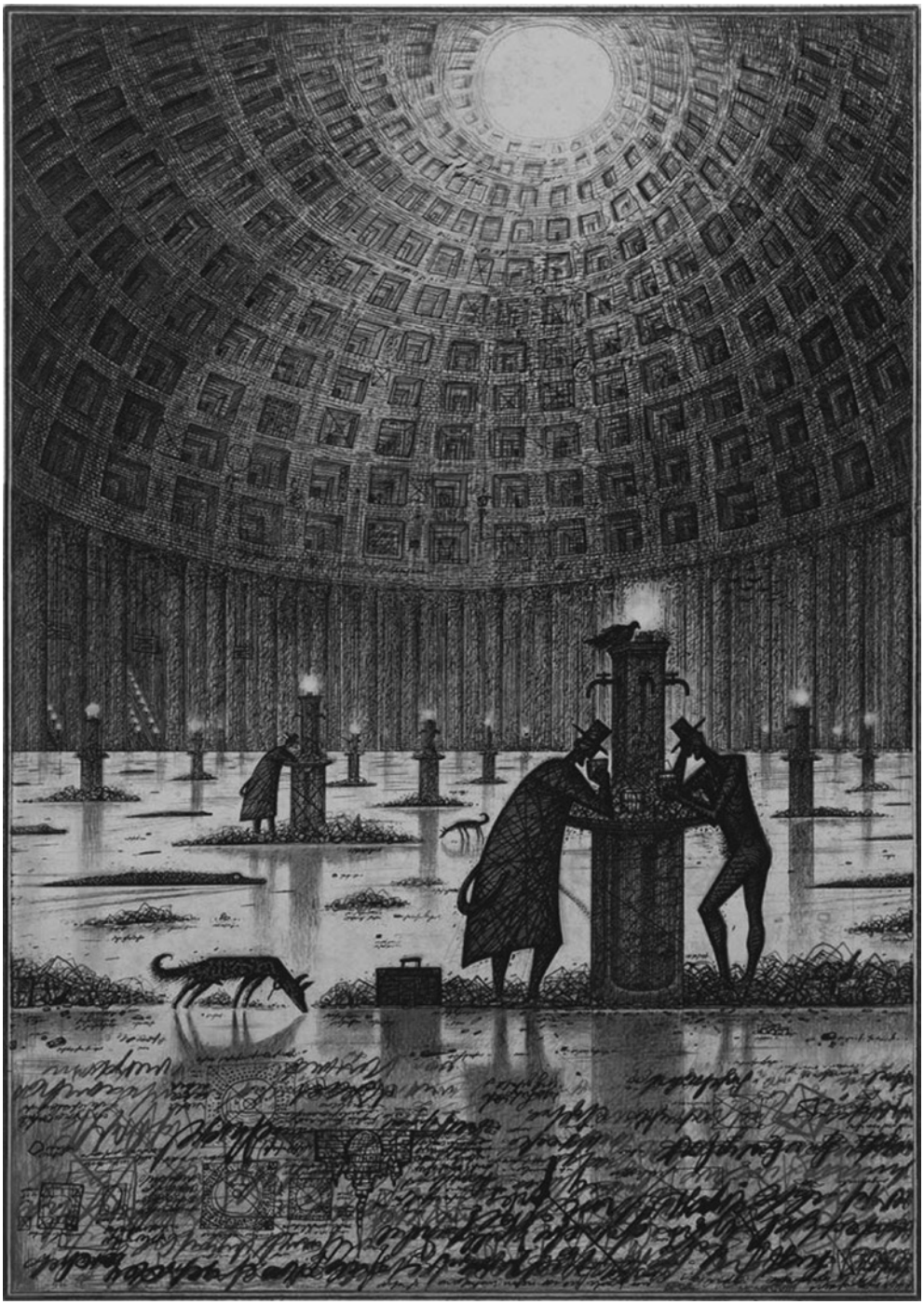
This is what Brian Hatton said about the works of Brodsky and Utkin: *when I wrote about the Paper Architects in the Soviet Union in 1988, I named them 'Voices from the Courtyard' (...) for their most haunting images were of awesome interiors and atria. (...) ...a house with an atrium is like a reserved man wholly plunged into the endless space of his inner world...* [4, s. 28].

3. Museum of Architectural Drawing. An exhibition of Alexander Brodsky's works

In March 2015, an exhibition of Alexander Brodsky's works took place in the Museum of Architectural Drawing of the Tchoban Foundation in Berlin. The exhibition presented works from different periods and made using diverse techniques and means of expression. The architect uses pencil, etching, clay relief and ink on bitumen roofing paper. At this point, it is worth mentioning that when Alexander Brodsky studied at the Moscow Architecture Institute the predominant technique taught to students there was the art of the wash. Dry Chinese ink was diluted in water and the solution was applied to paper layer by layer until an appropriate tone was achieved. At that time, it was the basic graphic technique for presenting architectural designs.

Alexander Brodsky's drawings are rich in personal memories of the past, archetypes, memorized images of old architecture with its atmosphere. That is why the architecture presented in his works contrasts sharply with the utilitarianism of the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. Brodsky points out that the new architecture very often destroys the former atmosphere of the city. He consciously chooses his techniques to suit the presented theme. While analysing his works, Daria Paramonova notes that *the etchings are of landscapes, spatial situations, buildings of complex structures, horizons, ruins that rise up, imaginary vehicles and sculptures of non-existent animals. As a whole, it appears a great fiction with little relation to reality. And yet the description was exact, the precise outline of this dilapidated Soviet industrial landscape is created where the drawn surface and the sky meet each other. Seen through the eyes of the artist, the etching and its immanent pathos is understood as becoming a means of transforming the banal. (...) It is difficult to shake off the nagging feeling that the landscapes and objects in Brodsky's work are not imagined but that we have actually encountered them at some point.* [6, p. 12].

Brodsky's architectural and artistic built projects are also interesting [2]. Most of them were realized after the year 2000. They include: the Nude Palace in Pittsburgh, which is a sort of scaffolding that surrounds a pyramid of rubble of the city's demolished historical buildings (1999); 95º Restaurant Klyazminskoye Reservoir Resort, 2001, an ice pavilion on the Klyazminskoye reservoir which was made of ice cubes formed by spraying steel mesh mounted on wooden frames with water (2002); the interior of the Apshu restaurant & club in Moscow (2002); Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies on the Klyazminskoye Reservoir is constructed out of a collection of old window frames from the Butikov factory on Ostozhenka street in Moscow (2003); a house for a multi-generation family



Ill. 1. Alexander Brodsky, *Place of overall prosperity* (1998) – silkscreen (1010 x 760 mm) [1, p. 71]

in Tarusa (2006); The Rotunda, a small oval building in the fields in Nikola-Lenivets, Kaluga region, Russia(2009); pavilion in the Tuilerie Gardens, part of the Russian Counterpoint exhibition in the Louvre and a bus stop in Krumbach – Austria (2014). It ought to be pointed out that these are not typical architectural realizations. They resemble constructed artistic visions, full of ingenuity and charm. After all, Brodsky is author of a number of constructed installations such as Your Prison or Çistern in the Collector Gallery in Moscow (2011). His works could be described as *playing with architecture* but his projects convey the author's message which he had earlier presented as *paper architecture.* He often uses recycled materials such as window frames, glass, or plastic containers. He is appreciated for including traditional elements of Soviet architecture into modern structures. His architecture could be characterized as modern and traditional at the same time. Above all, it is original.

4. Conclusion

No restraints on drawing, full freedom of expression, unlimited ideas which can be put down on paper to please both their creator and admirers of the ideas and concepts. This kind of architecture, pejoratively referred to as *paper* architecture, conveys subjective emotions and visions. In a sense it is a play with architecture, contempt for reality, departure from pragmatism, a fantasy rich in dreams and desires. Brodsky's statement about the new architecture centres on a very personal interpretation of the vanishing atmosphere of the city as the essence of spatial and formal experience. His works show an image of reality but conveyed in a magical way. This *play with architecture* is an inspiration for his constructed architectural realizations. Alexander Brodsky demonstrates that it is possible to combine modern structures with traditionalism while respecting the identity and atmosphere of a location. His works aim at creating the space where people will feel good and the objects defining the space are made of materials that suit the proposed functions

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