

ARTS/ENTERTAINMENT

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Forbidden Russian art on display in Bruce Museum

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Associated Press

Peasants smile, dance and drink as they celebrate life on the collective farm in the Soviet Union of the 1930s.

But nearby, the portrayals of Russian life grow darker: Three men who look from behind a fence in the grayish-green world of a labor camp appear to be deranged.

Those are two of the rare paintings on display at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich in the show "Forbidden Art of Postwar Russia," which is running through July 29.

"It's one of the best collections in the

The oil-on-canvas painting "McLenin, 1991" by Aleksandr Kosolapov is among the pieces in a new exhibit at The Bruce Museum in Greenwich.

Contributed photo

world of Russian art," says Aleksander Borosky, curator of the Russian State Museum in St. Petersburg.

The collection includes the works of such artists as Ilya Kabakov, Eric Bulatov and Oleg Tselkov.

The exhibition spans the 1950s through the 1980s and features 80 works of artists who were not allowed to show their paintings, sculptures and photography until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their work challenged an official censorship that demanded that art glorify the political and social ideals of communism.

Some of the artists were jailed for their works; others saw their exhibitions closed within hours. The exhibit was shown for the first time in Russian museums last year and has been shown in a few American cities.

Yuri Traisman, who emigrated here from Russia 30 years ago, said that his artist-father began the collection. He

expanded it over the years by acquiring pieces from dealers around the world.

"It was almost impossible to get them out of Russia because they were censored by the customs," Traisman says.

The show at the Bruce Museum begins with officially sanctioned paintings such as the collective farm scene. Smiling workers and soldiers gaze at Soviet leaders in another painting, which emphasizes the ideals of communism by barely distinguishing the masses from the leaders.

But other paintings are from the Reform School, the first generation of innovators who insisted on an honest portrayal of life's brutalities, and the Radical School, which completely rejected state-approved artistic standards.

One painting from 1987 mocks the bombastic tone of Pravda by juxtaposing clippings from the official commu-

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Art from the heart of experimental Russia

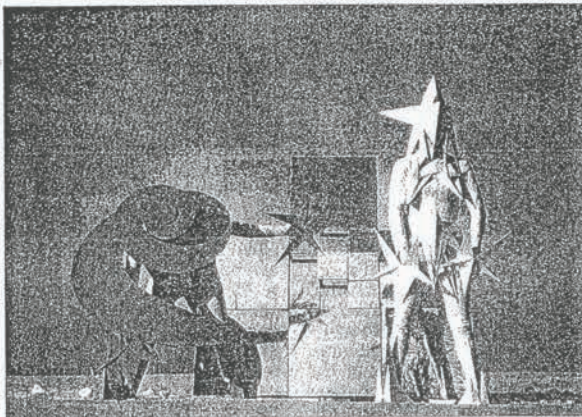
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nist newspaper with an intimate portrait of a young woman in a spare, shadowy room. The implication is that each person's individual experience is as valid a source of truth as the government's official pronouncements.

The symbols of Soviet ideology are mocked further in a painting that turns the hammer and sickle into a dollar sign. Another painting, "McLenin," features Lenin's face on the McDonald's logo.

Many of the paintings are not overtly political but challenged the government by experimenting with new styles, such as abstract forms, or through religious expression. An angel helps a chess player make a good move in one painting, showing the potential for spiritual awakening in even ordinary moments.

Nancy Hall-Duncan, the museum's curator, hopes the exhibit will awaken Ameri-



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"Artefact Series III, 1977-1987," a photograph by Francisco Infante, is among the experimental pieces that were not allowed to be viewed in Russia until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

cans to the rich artistic tradition in Russia that outlived communism.

"It's a way into the culture and the history," Hall-Duncan says. "We as Americans don't

know much about Russian art."

On the Net:

<http://www.brucemuseum.org>