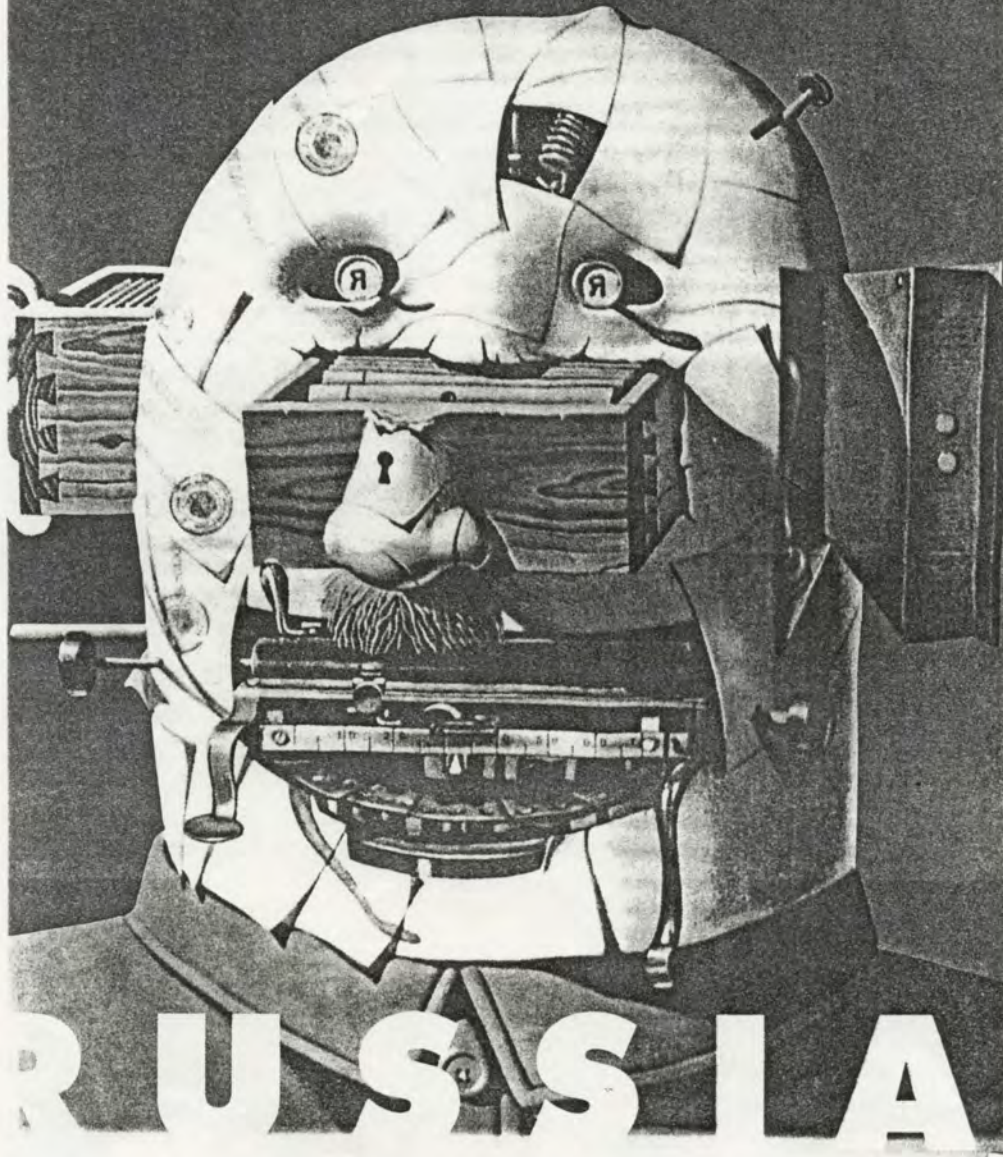


# WADIAN

## CITIZEN DIPLOMACY



# RUSSIA



## [SOVIET ROCK]

BY JOAN AGAJANIAN QUINN

"I'm getting married in April," says Joanna Stingray, "in Leningrad. Do you want to come?" Joanna has made twelve trips to the Soviet Union since 1984. She is completing wedding plans before returning to Russia to marry rock musician Yuri Iryon. Iryon, a writer and singer, had been disillusioned by the music business in L.A. Her sister persuaded her to go to the Soviet Union. Before leaving this country, she was given Boris Grebenshikov's name by a friend. Boris is the leader of Aquarium and is considered the father of Soviet rock 'n' roll. He sings and plays in Russian, even though he is fluent in English. He was influenced by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Plastic Ono Band. After meeting Grebenshikov in a Metro station, Joanna spent the next three and a half days with him, talking about his life, her life, and their songs. Stingray had a crush on him. "He is a very spiritual person, and has become sort of a deity to the people." Aquarium is an unofficial band, as are the bands Kino, Strange Games and Alisa. Official bands are not employed or recognized by the government, and they are allowed to record on the Soviet record label, Melodia. They cannot sell records in government stores, and their music is forbidden play on the radio. Even if they can't receive any money for their performances, they play to large audiences. (Word of mouth gets around.) The Rock Club, where unofficial bands can perform without hassle from the government, is always filled to its 500-person capacity. The government thinks it's better to look the other way. Stingray managed to record and videotape the performances of underground bands. She smuggled the material out of Russia and produced the illegal album "Waves: Four Underground Bands in the U.S.S.R." in the U.S. It was during those days that she met Franco Yuri Kasparyan. She was at a rock festival and Yuri was playing guitar for Kino. There was definitely a language barrier, but that was soon overcome. A couple has been together for almost a year and a half. Yuri lives in a three-story flat in Leningrad with his parents, and Joanna lives here alone in a Benedictine cottage. When asked where they will live after the wedding, Joanna replies, "I want to stay there. It is the band's home, and they realize that their creativity comes from the fact that they are Russians. I am an American and no matter how much I love going there, this is my home." Joanna is trying to get the Soviet government to permit Yuri to travel with her. "My work is really with the Soviet musicians, and I need to go back and forth." The wedding is planned for April 6, and as Joanna describes it, "It's going to be a party. We've invited Soviet officials from Moscow, diplomats from the American Embassy, the Swedish and American Consulates, our families, Russian musicians, friends from all over the world." The Soviet government is slowly cracking open the cultural doors, but Joanna Stingray of the Hills is throwing them wide open.

Joanna Stingray is West Coast editor for Interview magazine.



## [SOVIET ART]

BY JOAN AGAJANIAN QUINN

In the Soviet Union, there is art and there is art. There is art painted by Soviet-employed and sanctioned artists, and there is art painted by the everyday citizen who, in essence, is an unsanctioned rebel. These New Painters are a part of the artistic underground. They are unofficial because they paint very contemporary themes in styles not recognized by the government. They are inspired by their surroundings and do the kind of soul-searching work that comes from within. Therefore, the idea of being under the auspices of the government is unacceptable to the New Painters.

The unofficial artists have a difficult time finding necessary tools and supplies, since these are not readily available to the average citizen. The official artists receive their art supplies through government organizations. They also gain recognition through government-sponsored exhibitions where they are able to sell their work. The opposite is true for the New Painters, who cannot sell their work or display it in a public place. Some of their materials are smuggled in from Western Europe or the United States by friends who know the problems in the Soviet Union. The New Painters thus have a palette of unusual colors and day-glow paint that is quite different from what is available in their country. When supplies run short, they improvise with color and find objects from the streets.

Looking at the work of the New Painters brings to mind the paintings of Francisco Clemente, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, Kenny Scharf, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Willem de Kooning, among others. The artists have a sensibility based on Futurism, a concept drawn by revolutionary poet Mayakovsky. This school believes in the spirit of all the arts coming together, a knowledge of all the disciplines. The painter or musician doesn't stand alone, he combines his talents and is "an artistic person." He is multi-talented, he is schooled in many cultural pursuits, he is creative. Timur Novikov, the leader of the New Painters, is someone who is trying to change things. In 1985, he transformed the top floor of an abandoned building into an underground contemporary museum. He showed painters over a period of several months, launching each exhibit with an opening party. Underground bands played, contemporary dancers performed and writers and poets read their works. The combination of talents drew large crowds to the openings, and thereafter the loft was always filled with curious people.

This surge of public interest brought disapproval from the government, and Novikov was singled out by the Soviet news and labeled as an anti-Soviet citizen. The doors of his contemporary exhibition space were closed.

Someone had to take the stand and Novikov did. Through his courageous stand things began to change. The line between official and unofficial seems to be much fainter these days, thanks to Mikhailov of Gorbachev! The cultural state is being re-instated. The Soviet government recently opened an unofficial museum where non-government-sponsored artists can legally exhibit their work. The Soviets know unofficial art exists and they allow it to exist, in a somewhat controlled situation. This appeases everyone. Much of the work of the New Painters has been smuggled out to the Free World; contemporary Soviet art is the rage in Europe. A contemporary show is planned next year in Los Angeles. Will it become the rage in the U.S.? Let's hope so, for this is one of the best ways for countries to recognize each other.



Victor Teal.

Afrika Bugeen.