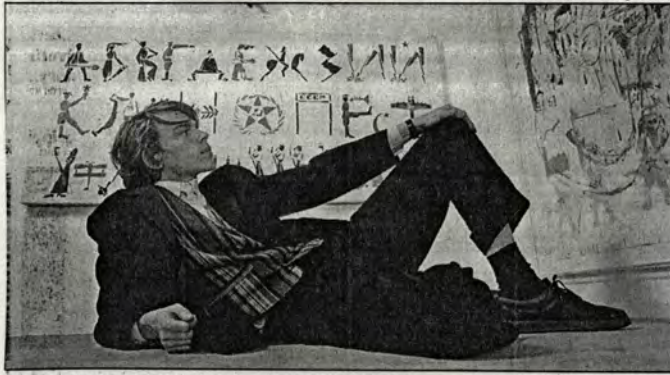


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LACY ATKINS / Los Angeles Times

Soviet artist Sergei (Afrika) Bugaev in front of his paintings on display at the Sawtelle Gallery.

Leningrad Art to Show at Sawtelle Gallery

By ROBYN TAYLOR

New Art From Leningrad," opening Sunday at the Sawtelle Gallery, will give Los Angeles art lovers an opportunity to view about 100 works by 13 of the Soviet Union's most adventurous contemporary artists, and to take a piece of the changing artistic culture home with them.

Rock promoter and singer Joanna Stingray and Red Wave productions will present the sale exhibition at the new gallery, 1653 Sawtelle Blvd., Sunday through April 16. Although some of the pieces are done on conventional canvas and paper, viewers will be

bombarded with a wide range of other artistic mediums, including paintings on shower curtains, plates, wood, rope and clothing. The works are influenced by Western graffiti art, early 20th-Century Russian modern art and the expressionistic work of European and American artists who gained popularity in the late '70s and early '80s. Stingray says she wants to show that avant-garde art thrives in the Soviet Union as well as in the United States.

A few years ago, Soviet artists had to be members of the Soviet Artists Union to be considered painters, Stingray said. "These conventional artists were the only ones that could make money from their art."

Now, however, Soviets realize contemporary art is a respectable art form and one that can make money, she said.

"Up until a year ago these con-

temporary artists all had to have other jobs, like shoveling coal, while their art was considered a hobby and not taken seriously. In effect they were underground."

That has all changed, Stingray said. "Now they are just considered independent. And their painting is now an official job."

The group of artists, all from Leningrad, is called The New Painters. But these young painters, most in their 20s, are also musicians, composers, designers and actors. And the leader of the group, Sergei (Afrika) Bugaev, who is now visiting Los Angeles, is a performance artist who performs with the Leningrad-based group Pop Mechanics.

Pop Mechanics, one of the most controversial performance art groups in the Soviet Union, brings together 40 different types of performers, including rockers, classical musicians and dancers.

"I do all kinds of artistic activities," Bugaev said. "In one part I put two jugs of water into one big one," symbolizing unity between the United States and the Soviet Union, he said.

As part of the group, Bugaev plays drums, eats flowers and dances with animals. "Afrika is everywhere," Stingray said. "He pushes the border furthest and does things before his time."

At least 25 paintings in "New Art From Leningrad" are Bugaev's. One entitled "Poetry" is a long rope with different objects dangling from it.

The New Painters have recently exhibited their work in London, Liverpool, Stockholm, Paris, West

Berlin and New York. And more and more they are now exhibiting their work in Leningrad, Stingray said.

All of the works at the gallery are from Stingray's personal collection, which she has accumulated during numerous trips to the Soviet Union.

The 28-year-old rock singer began bringing the art here in 1984, while smuggling out tapes of four underground bands—her husband Yuri Kasparyan's band, Kino, being one of them. These bands were later to make up "Red Wave: Four Underground Bands From the U.S.S.R.," an LP of Soviet underground rock released by RCA records in 1986.

Unlike the music, however, which was difficult to get out of the country, the paintings were no problem at all, Stingray said.

"Most of the paintings were not even considered art," she said. "The customs officials didn't know what they were."

Some of the paintings were shown last year at the Jerry Solomon Gallery in a benefit for Greenpeace, "but they were not for sale," Stingray said.

Stingray, who makes her home in both Leningrad with her husband and in Los Angeles, has other plans for Red Wave. She recently started a T-shirt company, which produces designs from six of the paintings on shirts. The shirts will be on sale at the exhibition.

In addition, Stingray is planning for the opening of Red Wave Studios, a 16-track recording studio in Leningrad; an eight-city

concert tour of the Soviet Union; book on Soviet rock music entitled "Dreams and Ashes," and the release of her own music produced by the state-owned Soviet recording label, Melodia.

The gallery is open to the public from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday; there is no admission fee.