

F I L M

'Red Fish in America'

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Independent Soviet Work Surfaces Post-Glasnost

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AMONG the notches lately loosened in the Soviet Union's cultural belt by perestroika have been music and literature, dance, drama and film. The latter has been represented by documentaries and features that, released to the West, have scratched a major itch among cinephiles long devoted to the works of Sergei Eisenstein and other Russian master moviemakers, and sensible of the dearth of product lately re-

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Cinematheque presents part one of "Red Fish in America: New Independent Film and Video From the Soviet Union" at 8 p.m. Thursday at the San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut Street. Part two plays at 8 p.m. Saturday at Eye Gallery, 1151 Mission Street.



Film maker Evgenij Kondratiev: Pastoral in the extreme

leased outside the Iron Curtain.

This week, another cultural milestone will be passed when Cinematheque presents "Red Fish in America," a two-part program of new Soviet independent film and videos.

The program, which takes place Thursday at the San Francisco Art Institute (with film maker brothers Gleb and Igor Aleinikov in person) and Saturday at Eye Gallery in the Mission, arrives on the last leg of a tour that began in New York in April and traveled via Massachusetts, Washington, D.C.; Chicago, Grand Rapids, Mich.; New Orleans, Houston, Helena, Mont., and Los Angeles. It is curated by Marie Cieri of The Arts Company and Moscow film maker Igor Aleinikov. The 16 works to be shown were made between 1985 and 1990, and for most of them, the tour screenings will have been their first such outside the Soviet Union.

"Independent" takes on a special meaning in view of the governmental repression before glasnost.

Until recently, the Soviet government neither sanctioned nor took official note of underground or "parallel" film making, though the tour's catalog declares that such works were being made in Moscow, Leningrad and Riga, at least, since the start of the last decade. The films come under the purview of art and politics, with neither toeing the official line in either subject matter or treatment.

In other words, they have been made and (in clubs or private settings) displayed in a spirit of intellectual and imaginative and artistic inquiry. Courage has been a major factor in pursuing the art forms, as has persistence, in the face of a scarcity of technical equipment that, when available, has carried staggering costs.

With a few notable exceptions then, the "Red Fish" films and videos are long on spirit, sketchy on technique and technical expertise. Quality comes through in general as a matter of heart more than of slick production values. There is a lot of low-threshold technique — scratch animation, superimposition and the like — and a good deal of wandering standards. But that said, the programs are interesting and vital.

English translations will be available for films and videos with extensive sound-track texts in Russian.



Film maker/brothers Gleb and Igor Aleinikov will attend program

Highlights include (from Program One):

"Damn It," 1989, by Ilze Peterson; video, 3 minutes, 45 seconds: To a rock sound track by the band Zig Zag, that sounds like a Baltic melding of the work of American rockers Devo and Talking Heads, a lighthearted but punchy video de-

scries the environmental decay of the city of Riga.

"Game of Ho," 1987, by Boris Yukhananov, video, 30 minutes: Moscow video and theater artist's commentary on the Jewish emigration issue. The style of this one is more *cinéma vérité*, in which impassioned segments of acting

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are intercut with cooler, more distanced sequences.

"Mirages," 1989, by Gleb and Igor Aleinikov, video, 5 minutes: This is one of the more controlled works in the program, in terms of technical finesse and intellectual curiosity. Music is by free-jazz group Three Os and Sajikho Namchilak, an Asian singer who occasionally comes off like Dr. John doing Arab blues. A moody, affective, restrained piece whose technical savoir-faire puts it in contrast to the freshness/naiveté of some of the other works.

TWO untitled video works by Yuris Lesnick, both from 1989-90, the first 5 minutes and the second, 10 minutes: More technical expertise, demonstrating not only a mastery of the medium but also a cooler intellectual investigation. Stop-animation, computerized music, shifting visual and auditory tenses, a crisp sense of command and an engaging imagination.

"Tractors," 1987, by the Aleinikovs, 16 mm, 12½ minutes: Relentless black-and-white scrutiny of tractors at work and play, while the voice-over lays the telling track — an ironic smelting of language and symbols of communism. This is a kind of ideologically droll

conceptual art piece.

(From Program Two):

"Orderly-Werewolves," by Evgenij Yufit, 1985, 16mm, about 3 minutes: A black-humor work, the Moscow film maker's first, that goes for broad and slightly hysterical slapstick, with tortured men crawling, leaping and thrashing in the snow. Heavy-handed, intense.

"Dreams," by Evgenij Kondratiev, 1988, 16mm, 11 minutes: Beautifully photographed, if meander-

andering; sojourn in a rural village in Soviet Central Asia, peopled with healthy peasants and lots of horses, sheep, pigs et al. Pastoral in the extreme.

"Homo Rullis," by Dainis Klava, 1989, video, 5½ minutes: A midnight-movie-type, highly image-processed work, long on hallucinatory overlays and effect-laden sequences. Nonlinear, nonnarrative eye food for the filmically conscious. ■