

Title: Visual Perspective in Joseph Brodsky's Graphic Art and Poetry
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Abstract:

A major characteristic of Joseph Brodsky's poetic technique is the complication of the narrative agency: whether it should be understood as the poet himself, an invented character, or an omniscient narrator (and, in some cases, a combination of two or all of the above).

This complication of narrative perspective is also reflected in a less renowned (and mostly unpublished yet) body of Brodsky's work: his visual art. Though Brodsky was not a professional drawer or painter, for an amateur he did manage to form a refined artistic style, which allowed him to work his fascination with perspective into his graphic art. The best example of this experimentation is in Brodsky's habit of drawing a certain object or scene several times, each time from a different angle. His many drawings from around a corner or through a doorway—that is, from the perspective of an outsider looking in at a scene—are also of interest here, as are those from a seemingly “omniscient” perspective. Investigating Brodsky's variety of self-portraits can also offer insight into his relationship to the self (and self-as-speaker), especially when compared to poems written at the same time. Brodsky's sophisticated manner of playing with perspective in ways sometimes not true to reality is further reflective of the creative process behind his poetry. Ultimately, by analyzing the variety of visual perspectives present in Brodsky's drawings, readers can gain a better understanding of how the poet's visual thinking influenced his written work.

Presentation will be accompanied by demonstration and discussion of rare archival images from the collections of Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Yale University), Russian National Library, and selected private holdings.