



## Painting without a passport

BY CHRIS KLEIN  
STAFF WRITER

Dutch artist Abraham Luttger has traveled all over the world, but he's terrified of borders.

"My number one fear is that I might wind up in some foreign prison," he says. "Who knows what would become of me?"

But in 1984 Luttger put these fears to work in the painting "Hangman," inspired by a tense border incident. The dark but funny work depicts a twisted military man dappled in medals. Big epaulettes cover the man's broad shoulders, but his head is small and skeletal. The hangman's severe face is less scary than it is stupid; you get the impression that not much is going on beneath the soldier's cap.

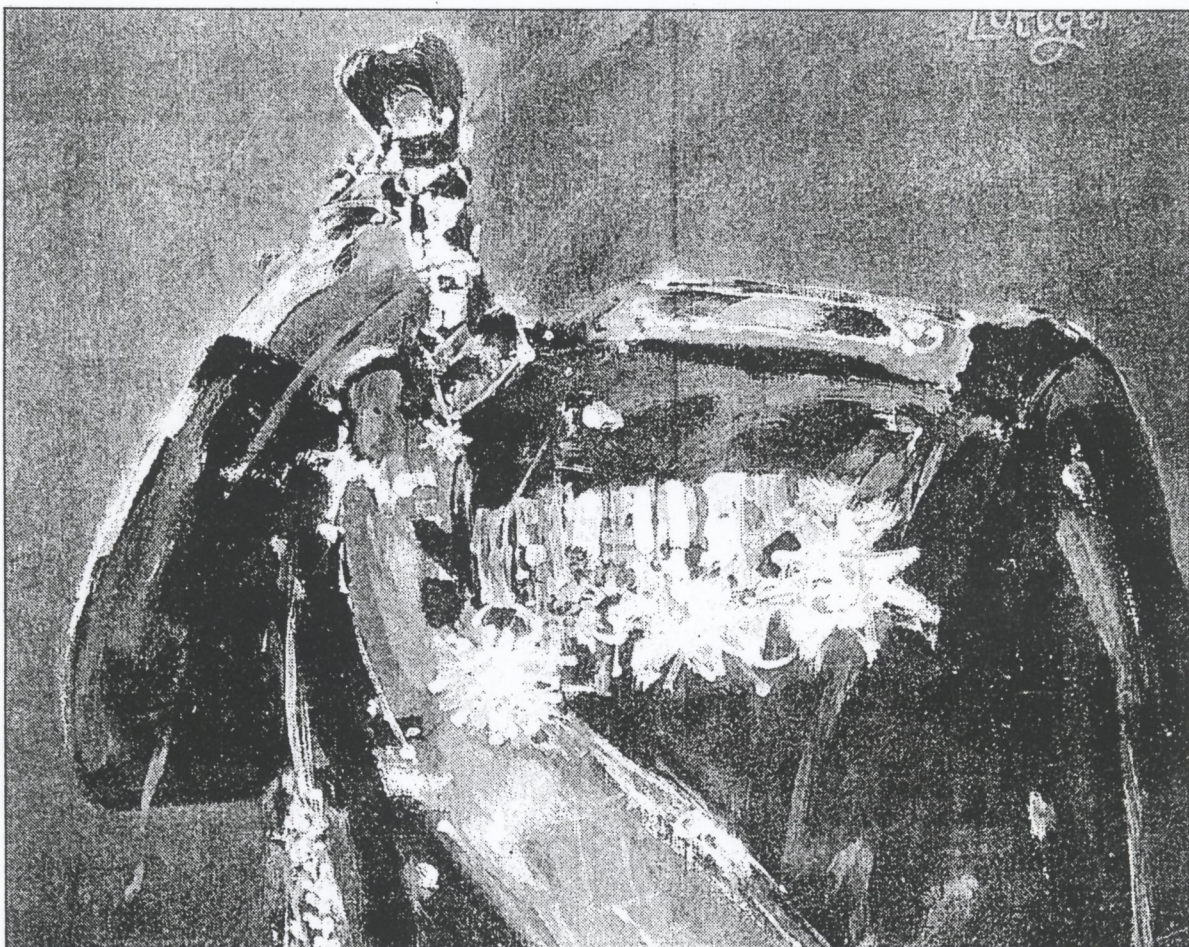
The work is part of an eclectic exhibition of 30 paintings and 30 photographs by Luttger that opened last week at the Central House of Artists.

The real life incident that prompted "Hangman" took place when Luttger, 48, was crossing from East to West Berlin after a dinner party. A guard bedecked with medals detained Luttger for an hour because the moustache the artist wore in his passport photo did not correspond to the facial hair he wore that night. The dour guard lifted his eyes from the photo, focused on Luttger, and then made the artist convince him that he was, in fact, the man pictured in the passport.

Luttger's Moscow exhibition is arranged in chronological order, from the artist's early, more simple period, through his grey mid-'80s stint in Berlin, to the more joyful, colorful works of the present. The retrospective is Luttger's first show in Russia, although his art has been exhibited in museums and galleries all over the world.

"I want to spread the universal consciousness with my art," he says. "My ideal is a borderless world."

But before Luttger became an itinerant artist, he was addicted to his job as a graphic designer at a big Amsterdam advertising firm. After starting his own graphic design studio, Luttger began taking night classes in painting and etching. Still, something was lack-



Abraham Luttger's 1984 painting, "Hangman," was inspired by a tense border incident.

Courtesy Stedelijk Museum

ing in his life. So Luttger hit the road. He went to southern India, Sri Lanka, and Papua-New Guinea, where he took wonderful, impromptu photographs of improbable sights, including "German Guru." In Europe he spent time in Berlin and, later, Spain.

Luttger's most compelling work, though, comes from his years in Berlin in the mid-1980s where he led a nocturnal life and encountered a lot of strange folks. He likens his Berlin existence to a Tom Waits song, where the people of the night are nutty perform-

ers and prostitutes, heavy drinkers and moody insomniacs.

The abstract painting "Superman" — a coiled, angry man filled with specks of color against an inky background — highlights the divisions Luttger felt in the city's night side: The furious galaxy of light within struggling against the heavy blackness outside.

The artist came to Moscow "for the experience" and to have a small part in the new freedom of the place. He has passed most of his time with local artists — he's staying with an accom-

plished Russian opera singer — and seeing the sights.

Luttger will be hanging out in Moscow until early September, when he takes off for Tokyo, where his work will be on display at the Metropolitan Art Museum. The man who is afraid of borders will have to pass through customs once again.

Moscow Central House of Artists, Gallery 23, 10 Krymsky Val. Open daily 11 A.M. to 7 P.M., except Mondays. Until Aug. 30.

## Arts festival for Sakharov

BY JAN SPEDDING

NIZHNY NOVGOROD, Russia — Outwardly, there is nothing abnormal about the small apartment in Nizhny Novgorod where physicist Andrei Sakharov spent seven years in forced exile.

But curators are working to transform the simple, cramped apartment into a museum in time for the First International Sakharov Festival, a week-long festival of music, art and literature that begins on Friday in Nizhny Novgorod.

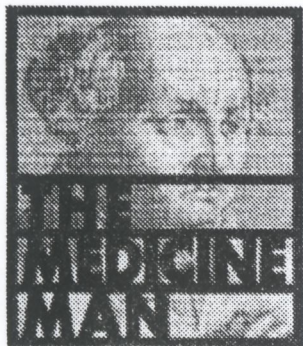
Some 300 artists — from Russia, the Baltics, France, Austria and the United States — are expected to perform.

The living room in Sakharov's old flat is still filled with typically plain Russian furniture. The kettle sits on the stove, as if waiting to be poured for tea. The telephone where Sakharov received Gorbachev's famous "come home, all is forgiven" call on December 16, 1986, is also still in the apartment.

The couple were watched by a policeman, who was posted by the apartment door 24 hours a day. After Sakharov attempted to talk to his neighbors from his balcony, a "screen" was installed to block him off.

Nizhny Novgorod, once known as Gorky, was only opened to visitors last fall. Situated where the huge Oka River joins the mighty Volga, the city is only 50 minutes by air from Moscow, and can also be reached by a pleasant two-day boat trip from Moscow.

The Sakharov festival runs from Aug. 28 to Sept. 6. Tickets can be obtained through the booking-office of the Kremlin Concert Hall.



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