

kamel mennour 

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YONA FRIEDMAN MÉTROPOLE EUROPE ET AUTRES PROJETS

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Kamel Mennour is pleased to present «Métropole Europe et autres projets» Yona Friedman's second solo exhibition at the Gallery.

Each new project by the architect, urbanist and philosopher Yona Friedman is startling in the visionary dimension of its conception. Born in Hungary in 1923, he studied at Budapest's Institute of Technology and in Haifa in Israel, and has lived in Paris since 1957. His completely original approach to architecture and urbanism seems to have originated in his training as an engineer and the highly unusual and experimental context of the birth of a nation. Very early on, he transformed the theory of "self-planning", according to which living space is designed based on the experience of its users, the reverse of post-war functionalism and its massive and uniform edifices. Based on this, he then defined the concept of "mobile architecture" (published in the eponymous manifesto of 1958), where the architect limits his intervention to the design of the essential - static - parts of the building consisting of the foundations and the structure, while the other elements become like furniture, with the user free to arrange them. His theories were close to those of the Situationists and played a part in the emergence of philosophical and economic movements like that of *décroissance*. From the end of the 1960s, Yona Friedman foresaw the impoverishment of industrialised nations and advocated alternative strategies of development inspired by his experiences in certain non-Western countries. "It is the society of the poor world which is inventing an *architecture of survival*", he wrote a 1978 essay of the same title, subtitled *a philosophy of poverty*. Also at stake, according to the piece, is the very survival of architecture in an endlessly moving, unpredictable world. On these two subjects, in the manner of the two faces of Janus, Friedman shows himself to be an incredible inventor of concepts. If some of them follow naturally from self-planning and mobile architecture to define the "spatial city", the "city-continent" or the "urban village", that of "realisable utopia" resonates not only as a manifesto but also as the condition on which the realisation of the preceding ones rests.

So it is that while Yona Friedman is often described as a utopian or theoretical architect - even though he has always been careful to test the technical feasibility of his propositions - it is essentially because their avant-garde character has not allowed him to realise as many projects as he would have liked. Nevertheless, he has undertaken numerous missions for the United Nations, notably for what were then developing countries (South Africa, Asia, India), where he was able to put his theories into practice, as with the Lycée Bergson in Angers, constructed in 1979. The major influence that he exerted over the architecture of the second half of the twentieth century, and today over a number of contemporary artists, reveals not only his foresight and his relevance but equally that he has managed to disseminate his theses as widely as possible. In fact, for Yona Friedman, a profound humanist, this communication is the keystone for fulfilling the utopias. Since we are all would-be "self-planners", in the domestic sphere as well as more widely in society, the architect has striven to adapt and set out his messages in different forms, such as posters, films and publications. His essays, which number almost thirty publications, express his theories in a sober and efficient language, while manuals illustrate them with pictograms. With time, they have become the basic elements of the universally-aimed language invented by Yona Friedman.

Yona Friedman « Métropole Europe et autres projets » is on show at galerie kamel mennour Tuesdays to Saturdays, 9am to 7pm.

For further information, please contact Jessy Mansuy-Leydier, Marie-Sophie Eiché, and Emma-Charlotte Gobry-Laurencin.

This is undoubtedly the aspect from which to appreciate the two series of posters presented by the architect for his second exhibition at galerie kamel mennour. Having declared that "to be architecturally creative is to look beyond" he has chosen to return to two subjects, one economic, the other urbanist, developed in the work *Utopies réalisables* (published in 1975 and again in 2000). The first set takes up his thesis on "social capitalism", which advocates a minimum income for each individual, guaranteed for life, and funded by taxing the transfer of money, making it a version of the Tobin tax - whose formulation by James Tobin in 1972 it either prefigured or was concurrent with. In the second set, Yona Friedman presents his theory of the "city-continent", in contrast to the megalopolis, thus engaging unashamedly with the present, from the *Grand Paris* project to *Metropolis*, the very recently inaugurated French Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale, orchestrated by Dominique Perrault. If the Venetian project suggests that the metropolis can find the means for its expansion in deserted zones, for Friedman, it must, on the contrary, be thought of along the lines of the spatial city of which it is the natural development. Just as the latter was constructed on the principle of suspension, at ten or twenty metres from the ground, the city-continent is made up of a collection of cities connected up by a network of high-speed transport. Between the nodes, the ground remains free for agriculture and the preservation of historical or ecological sites. To counter urban hypertrophy, Friedman proposes a return to the "urban village", where the livelihood of a "critical (limited) group" is based on the logic of proximity, through consuming the products of the city - in a manner practiced in some places today - while moving around freely between the other destinations of the city-continent.

Thus, in this antechamber inhabited by unicorns, those age-old and infinitely serene companions of the visionary architect, these messages in the style of wall paintings are not merely a display of beautiful images. With our complicity and commitment, they could become the musical accompaniment to a future whose outlook is brighter.

Marie-Cécile Burnichon, August 2010