

YONA FRIEDMAN
PART 1:
AUTOUR DE LA VILLE
SPATIALE, 1957-1975

6 January - 31 January 2009

"I produce a drawing like an idea; then comes the working model, like a trial visualisation in space, then the photograph and the slide."

In 2007, galerie Kamel Mennour produced Camille Henrot's *Film Spatial* an apparently random amble through Friedman's Parisian apartment, a veritable urban "merzbau", begun in 1968 and constantly evolving. This encounter gave rise to the project of an invitation in two sequences whose aim is to pay homage to an entirely contemporary figure, neither an architect, nor an artist, nor a theorist.

Having spent his childhood in Hungary, Friedman immigrated to Israel in 1946, where he experienced communal living in a kibbutz. Whilst working for a construction company and completing the architectural studies he began in Europe, he realised the advantages of makeshift, mobile housing (*Cylindrical Shelters*), which he tried to perfect a decade later, in collaboration with Jean Prouvé. Both men shared a passion for prefabricated housing and an aesthetic of simplicity, stripped of style.

Moving to Paris permanently in 1957, he wrote and disseminated the *Manifeste pour l'Architecture mobile*, [*Manifesto for mobile architecture*], which was taken up straight away thanks to the support of international architects such as Frei Otto and the Japanese Metabolists (Kenzo Tange, Kiyonori Kikutake), whose ideas were on the same wavelength as his architectural principles of mobility, flexibility, improvisation, and renunciation of construction. Very quickly, Friedman established links throughout the world and founded the *Groupe d'Etude d'Architecture Mobile* [*Mobile Architecture Study Group*], which sought a growing, indeterminate and free architecture. Whence flows the principle of the *Spatial City*, which consists of proposing systems of construction in successive layers that are then set out in the form of photomontages, taken from panoramic views (often post-war postcards) from Paris, Tunisia, Monaco, etc.

In France, it is above all the artistic milieu that is interested in the utopian and experimental dimensions of his works: first and foremost in the person of Pierre Restany, who in 1963 invited him to exhibit at galerie J, preserve of the New Realists, not far from here, then classed him as one of the "idéaires" in his famous red "manifesto" published in Milan in 1968. Jean Dubuffet was also aware of his work, and Gottfried Honneger, the principal defender of Concrete Art in France gave him his full support. As early as 1975, the ARC/Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris retraced his progression over the course of twenty years under the title of *Utopies réalisables* [*Realisable Utopias*]. In the current millennium, yet another artistic generation is turning to him: international figures such as Olafur Eliasson and Pierre Huyghe have expressed a desire to collaborate with him. In 2002, Kassel's Documenta XI paid homage to him, while at the next Venice Biennale, in June 2009, his most recent projects will be shown.

Right from the start, Friedman has sought to widen the relevance of architecture, quite rightly considering its practice to be a non-specialist discipline, at the crossroads of philosophy, ecology, spirituality, mathematics and the sciences, and relating to every area of society. Ever since, he has considered that as an architect, his role is to observe individuals, their emotions and their actions, rather than to construct and impose a model. "I think like a sociologist", he says. He is primarily an instigator, rather than a builder. Fundamentally convinced that the universe, and consequently human nature, is unpredictable and uncontrollable, he shows, in his writings and his working models, that ideal form in architecture is the very absence of planning, of right angles, of standardisation, of logic... An intrinsically capricious nature must be answered by free, erratic, entangled and recycled forms. The notion of authorship therefore becomes redundant and illusory; instead, he encourages an organic, growing and improvised architecture, modelled on the future user, who is ultimately given the title of author and creator, as has already been done, at other times and in other areas, by Duchamp and Beuys.

Yona Friedman «Part 1 :Autour de la ville spatiale, 1957-1975» can be seen at galerie kamel mennour from Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 7pm.

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

In the 1970s, Unesco commissioned Friedman to produce educational handbooks as tools for disseminating his "realisable utopias", which were republished in several volumes by the Centre national de l'estampe et des arts imprimés (Chatou) in 2007 and 2008. These handbooks are also available to download at www.cneai.com, to allow them to be disseminated as widely as possible. The majority of Friedman's writings (texts and drawings combined) are published by l'Éclat :

-Yona Friedman, *L'Architecture de survie, une philosophie de la pauvreté*, 2003

-Yona Friedman & Balkis Berger-Dobermann, *Vous avez un chien, c'est lui qui vous a choisi(e)*, 2004

-Yona Friedman, *L'ordre compliqué et autres fragments*, 2008

In this huge laboratory of models and assemblages that make up his domestic universe, one finds, jumbled up, several typologies of model: the "merzstructures" assembled from pharmaceutical packaging, "les gribouillis" [scrawls] and "les macaronis" [macaroni], made from electric cables, "trains" made from corks held together with needles, "space-chains", which are assemblages of Indian bracelets suspended from the ceiling or balanced on a shelf, "froissés" [crumpled-ups], floating like clouds, then "lamellaires" [lamellae], cash till rolls stapled to each other, and so on. It is only a sample of this laboratory of shapes and gestures that the gallery is showing here, under Friedman's guidance.

Surrounding the hundreds of models are assemblages of polystyrene, either white or covered with pictograms, and above all figurative, polychrome "friezes", reminiscent of Matisse's late paper cut outs. These murals represent mysterious and enchanting figures that would fascinate children – for Friedman the "Utopians" *par excellence*. In reality, these figures, with their human bodies and expressions, are families of unicorns, which express the fifteen fundamental utopia : respect for nature, fraternity, equality, liberty, free speech, the rights of children, education, healthcare for all, sexual freedom, secularism, artistic freedom, guaranteed income, justice, the right to housing, and self-management. The messages of these unicorns surround Friedman and allow him, on a daily basis, to live and share with his visitors his peaceful and "realisable" utopias.

Caroline Cros, January 2009
(Translation : James Curwen)