

SELF- GUIDING BOOKLET

ENGLISH VERSION



GRAND LARGE — HAUTS-DE-FRANCE



**YONA FRIEDMAN —
THE MOBILE
EXHIBITION**

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DUNKIRK / MAUBEUGE / BEAUVAIS AND AMIENS

CNEAI Collection = on deposit at the Frac Grand Large — Hauts-de-France.

Based on an idea by: Sylvie Boulanger, Keren Detton, Lucy Hofbauer

“At the present time we build too much. Earth is over built, earth is over planned, earth is over farmed. This does not mean that we don’t need architects, planners and farmers but we have to change rules.”

Yona Friedman

Life and Work in Movement

The architecture of survival provides food for thought to Yona Friedman on our fundamental needs in an ecosystem subjected to the rarefaction of resources. Born in 1923 in Hungary, he had started studying architecture in Budapest when WWII erupted. As a refugee in Romania, he lived in camps for the displaced before finally settling in Israel where he lived in a kibbutz and returned to architecture.

It was in these conditions that he developed his original approach to habitat based on user experiences. In 1957, he founded the Mobile Architecture Study Group (Groupe d’Étude d’Architecture Mobile - GEAM) and promoted the use of flexible structures made of prefabricated elements. His ideas caught the attention of leading figures including Le Corbusier and Jean Prouvé, who invited him to move to France. From then on, he relentlessly transmitted his ideas throughout the most renowned universities in both Europe and the United States and wrote profusely, publishing over 500 articles and books.

The Mobile Exhibition, Architecture and Life in Common

The title of this exhibition pays tribute to his major work *L'Architecture mobile (Mobile Architecture, 1958)*, in which Friedman develops his Spatial-City ideas. He imagines modular living spaces that evolve in function of needs that change over time. Since “human society cannot be planned”, Friedman recommends just allowing its occupants the freedom of changing their habitat. Raised constructions play in favour of urban agriculture and account for demographic evolutions as well as limited resources. These ideas were embodied in a multitude of models and unique drawings, which reveal a creative process based on savings, recycling and improvisation.

The Power of Images and Symbols

More pragmatic than utopian, Yona Friedman was a man of dialogue and transmission; he developed a universal language using easily recognisable pictograms. His cartoon-like “handbooks” on housing, health, nutrition, urban environments and social structures were widely distributed in the scope of his work for UNESCO in the 1970s. They remain a powerful means to convey his positive humanistic ideas. Through his use of the slide-show and a few simple stick figures, complex logistics and networks can be easily grasped in a dynamic and playful manner, underscoring the difficulties humans face when communicating.

Painted on the floor of the exhibition space are pictograms taken from his *Dictionary* (to be completed by the reader). Friedman chose topics (“communication”, “group”, “improvisation”, etc.) and linked them to image-words. However, when asked how he would illustrate the concept of “freedom”, he responded: “Freedom on its own doesn’t mean anything. It can’t be drawn. One can be free to ... move about... speak... eat or work. I can draw that.”

The Mobile Exhibition invites each of us to repossess the meaning behind words, to place them together and in relation to each other. Yona Friedman also created an imaginary dreamlike universe from which his drawing *La Licorne (The Unicorn)* emerged. A poetic way of sharing his dreams, he drew inspiration from African, Indian and Native American tales and symbols as well as from his own personal mythologies.

Dedicated to the artist, architect and urban planner Yona Friedman (1923-2020). A year after his passing, this exhibition draws from the extensive collection of works stored at the CNEAI = Frac Grand Large — Hauts-de-France in Dunkirk.

Exhibition produced by the CNEAI =, Frac Grand Large — Hauts-de-France, Idem + Arts, Quadrilatère and Frac Picardie. With support from the Denise and Yona Friedman endowment fund and RAJA patronage.

Follow the exhibition to *Pictograms* in the Belvédère (5th floor) and to *The Unicorn* in Halle AP2 (ground floor).

FLOOR DRAWING IN HALLE AP2: THE UNICORN

The Unicorn is a monumental work of art designed by the urban planner, architect and artist Yona Friedman.

Alongside his numerous works from the 1960s, touching on urban planning as well as a novel form of language, Friedman also set about constructing new myths using cut-up coloured paper. Initially designed to decorate his Parisian apartment, this paper world took over his successive living quarters and ended in the production of one of his major works.

Inspired by the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights* and traditional African tales as well as Indian painting, the myth conjured up by Yona Friedman depicts an enchanting vision of the world, fostered by his theories on how to live better on our planet.

The unicorn is a recurring figure in this imaginary world. Present in many European, Oriental and Asian myths, this legendary animal embodies two of the most important values for Friedman: freedom and happiness.

Unicorns become the artist's alter-ego in the 1990s, steadily multiplying in number, reaching their height in the monumental work titled *Licorne Eiffel (Eiffel Unicorn)* produced on the island of Vassivière in 2009 and which has the same dimensions as the Eiffel tower. The version presented in Halle AP2 has been adapted to the gigantic dimensions of this symbol of Dunkirk heritage.

Spray-painted on the floor, the drawing is, due to its size, best viewed from above.



**YONA FRIEDMAN'S
PICTOGRAMS**

FLOOR DRAWING IN THE BELVÉDÈRE (5TH): PICTOGRAMS

*“When I say a word, I don’t know what the other person understands.
When I show an image, we understand the same thing.”*

These words by Yona Friedman perfectly sum up one of his feature productions: the invention of a new form of language. In 1974, Friedman started the project of his life, the creation and publication of a new type of writing using pictograms. His end goal was to create a universal communication system.

This new glossary was continually enhanced and published in the form of manuals, a type of dictionary that, in the scope of Friedman’s work as an information officer, was distributed by UNESCO in the 1970s. Reminiscent of hieroglyphs from ancient Egyptian or Pre-Columbian civilisations, the corpus created by Friedman is based on drawings and representations of concrete actions. Each concept thus takes immediate shape in a form that anyone can easily recognise, far from the abstraction of current language forms, of which Friedman was particularly wary. His pictograms constitute a true melting pot in which art and communication fuse together. Each idea becomes an artistic expression in its own right; its grand simplicity allows each and everyone to claim it as their own.

Through this utopian ideal of language, Friedman sought above all to renew connections and create a new form of exchange. The ultimate goal for him was to attain what he saw as a fundamental right: the right to understand, which he would have liked added to the list of universal human rights.