

Tlatelolcona

This is a prototype modeled on the blocks of flats of Mexico City's *Tlatelolco* housing complex. Tlatelolco is striking for the graphic beauty of its original façade designs—now lost under post-1985 buttressing—and for the complex's vast scale. The work *Tlatelolcona* (tr: giant Tlatelolco) communicates the excitement of architect Mario Pani's first vision of a housing solution for Mexico City; the modern architect's dream of order out of chaos. The work highlights the original vision of the complex's architect Mario Pani, before it came to represent the tragedies of the 1968 student massacre and the 1985 earthquake.

Documentation: Installation at New Museum; detail of print element

Terence Gower, 2008

Wall Installation: Digital prints on cardboard, enamel-painted wood shelves, framed digital print

Approximately 70 x 320 x 20 cm overall

Curator: Jorge Munguía, Museo Tamayo

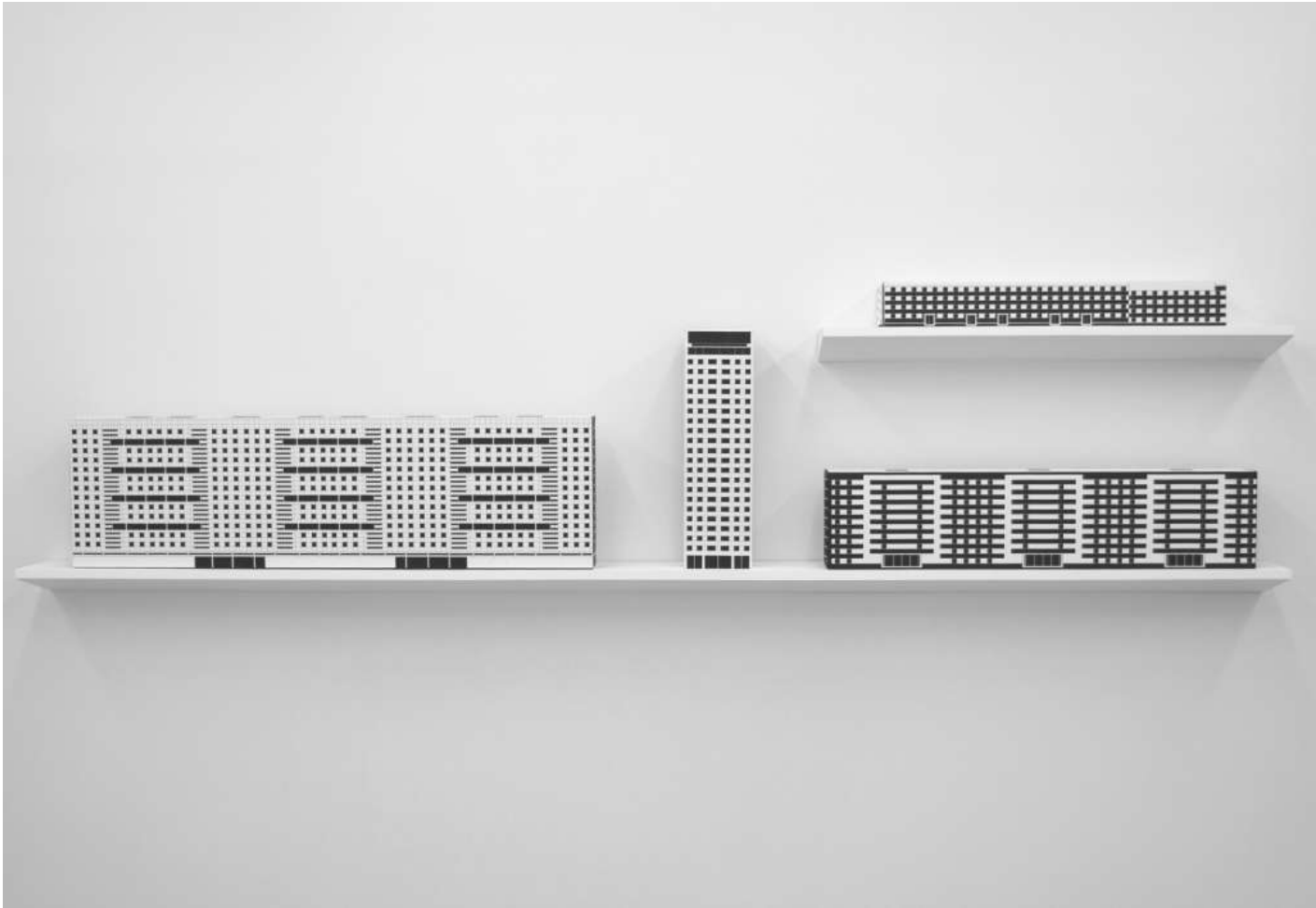
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Tlatelolco

This is the prototype for an art edition I am currently producing with the Mexico City art publisher Panamericana. The units that make up the edition are modeled on the blocks of flats of the Tlatelolco housing complex, and I intend them to be arranged on the floor like a large-scale architectural maquette (see illustration). With this work I offer the viewer the possibility of reconfiguring Tlatelolco or expanding it endlessly in a reenactment of period experiments in universal, modular housing.

The Tlatelolco complex is striking for its scale and for the graphic beauty of its original façade designs. When it was built, Tlatelolco seemed closer to the vast factory-produced public housing complexes of Eastern Europe than the modern Projects of North America. Its unusual scale prompted one European architecture magazine to reject publication of the project with the retort, "We don't publish maquettes." In other words, the editors failed to understand that they were looking at a photograph of a built project and not a model.

As principal architect, Mario Pani was responsible for both the elegant detailing of the panel façades (now lost under post-1985 buttressing) and for the complex's vast scale. Going contrary to contemporary practice, Pani astounded local government by incorporating more units and green-space than requested, for the same investment. The result was a small city of clean, efficient dwellings that immediately—though briefly—became a symbol of benevolent government action. As all Mexicans know, the symbolism of Tlatelolco was quickly reversed by the government-sponsored massacre of 1968, and then by corruption in government construction contracts evidenced by the building collapses in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake.

There are conflicting opinions on the social implications of housing built at this scale. Is Tlatelolco too large to promote any sense of community? Or should it have been made even larger, in keeping with the vast social experiment envisioned by the architect? My art edition Tlatelolco (tr: giant Tlatelolco) communicates the excitement of Mario Pani's first vision of a housing solution for Mexico City; the modern architect's dream of order out of chaos. It communicates the utopian exhilaration of large-scale planning while at the same time it reduces urban planning to something akin to a child's game of building blocks. And finally, the work pays homage to Mario Pani's original façade designs by repackaging his compositions as a fine art edition.

Terence Gower