

## Text: Tlatelolcona

Terence Gower

The units which make up *Tlatelolcona* 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 facades (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. This was followed by the collapse of several buildings in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, due to substandard construction and corruption in the building trades.

There are conflicting opinions on the social implications of housing built on 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 scale proposed by the architect? My art edition *Tlatelolcona* (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.