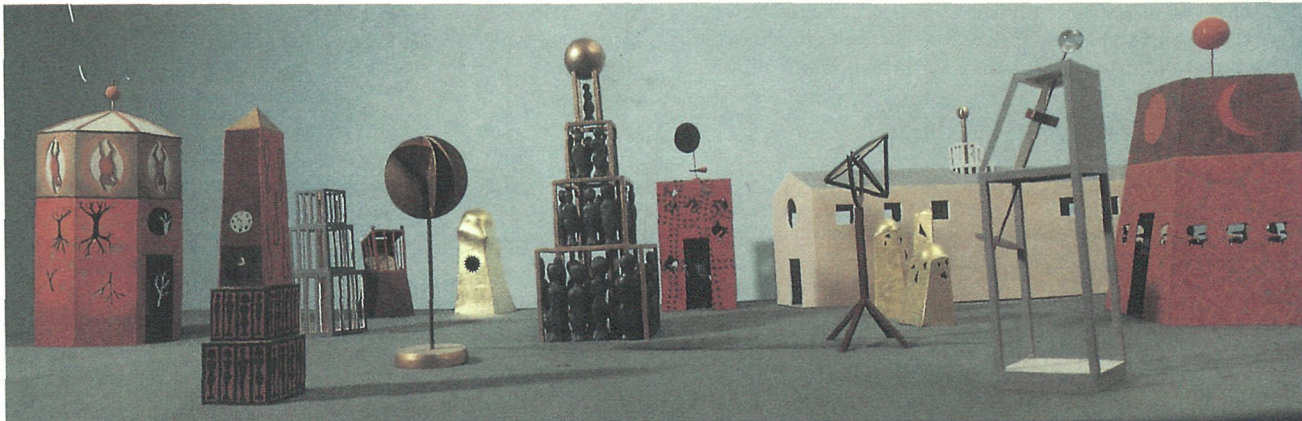


REVIEWS

New perspectives for old dreams Atlantis, a utopia that wants to be true

KARIN OHLENSCHLÄGER



Maqueta de la ciudad de los filósofos Atlantis, realizada por Herbert Kotler. Cortesía: Atlantis GmbH.

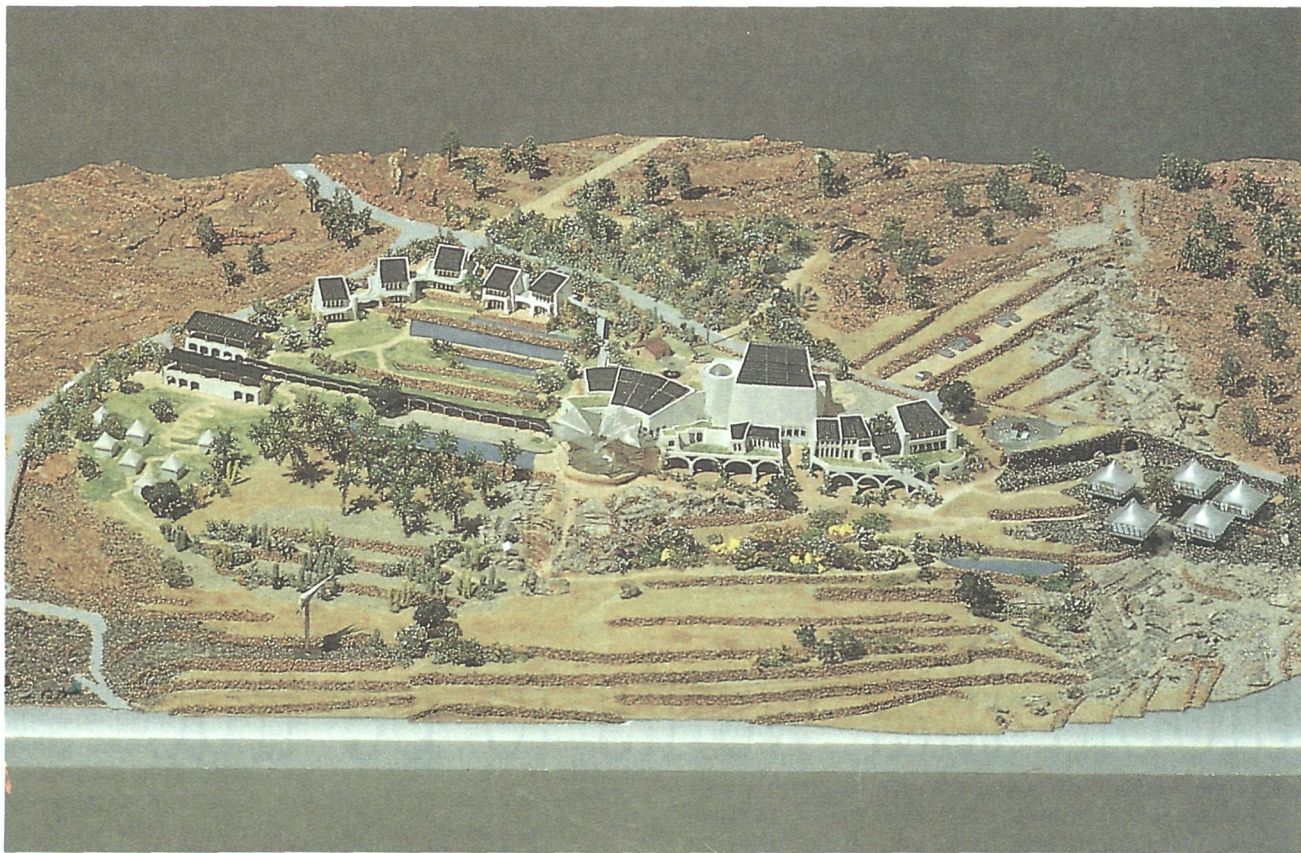
Very few in Spain are aware of the “Atlantis” project. It’s not the mysterious Atlantis that Plato told us about over 2,000 years ago, and which, the Egyptian priests knew of. It’s something else, though for the moment, just as mysterious and debated. It’s Atlantis 2000, a small city that will be opened at the end of this millennium, that is, in less than seven years time, in the “Fortunate isles”, in Canarias. To be more precise, it will be erected at the foot of the Teide, among the volcanic rocks and the banana trees of southwest Tenerife. And this won’t be the name of yet another jerry built tourist complex, in the coastal area of the Island. It aims to be something quite different.

According to its promoters, Atlantis will be the new spiritual and cultural centre for next century’s society. A model city, whose architecture will take up again ancient styles, the grecoroman, trying to restore the qualities of European pre-industrial cities. Leon Krier, its architect, says that it is an effort to provide an alternative and also a criticism of the

inhuman postmodernism of modern architecture. However, it’s worthwhile considering if the solution to urban jungle with intelligent yet sick buildings is precisely such a step backwards, as the Atlantis project proposes.

The model was first presented in 1987, at the Frankfurt Museum of Architecture. The contour of this small city has a clear pyramidal structure. The church is in the centre and around it, on terraces descending, are the exhibition galleries, theatres and music rooms, sport facilities, restaurants and houses. Its promoters claim that the planning of its streets and buildings pretend to stimulate the synthesis of different disciplines that relate to body and mind. However, they intend to focus attention towards instruction and employment rather than leisure.

To be a meeting point for all creative spirits in culture, painters, sculptors, musicians designers, architects or writers. Furthermore. It will be a place for the spiritual “summit talks” between nations. An open house, where international



Maqueta de Atlantis realizada por Frei Otto. Foto: Wolfgang Horny. Cortesía: GmbH.

figures of economy, finance, politics, education, scientific and technological research will be invited to. The intention of the Atlantis team is that experts and those in power may be able to ponder together, in interdisciplinary fashion, possible solutions to environmental, political and social problems.

The arts must therefore play a fundamental catalyst role. To act as a source of stimulus for creative thought, whether it be in the mind of an economist, a doctor, a space, engineer or an urban planner.

To open a formation centre devoted not solely to knowledge, but to being; to search for a new horizon and a transformation of individual and collective consciousness. To forge new ethical and aesthetic values, that may lead to the humanizing of all present society.

At first sight, the Atlantis project seems sheer altruism. It recalls the eternal dream of man's integrity, of the humanizing of the world. But will Atlantis be something more than the shelter of a post capitalist élite? What has happened to similar communities that have aimed at the same goals throughout history? Those oligarchic groups who with a messianic spirit tried to influence the shape of their time. How successful have they been?

Looking for an example in our century at its beginning, a small community of artists and intellectuals was founded at Monte Verita near Ascona, Switzerland. It began as a vegetarian colony, to become later a "school of the art of living". Anarchists and russian exiles of the stature of Bakunin met there, writers like Rilke or Hesse, the Zurich Dadaists or some of the Bauhaus's well-known characters. After the two world wars it was a place of exile, becoming ever more important, until it started to change into a tourist centre and a place of rest for the old.

Though it can't be denied that the ideas and concepts of that community have left their mark during the century, his-

tory, nevertheless, continued on its path, without avoiding the great social, political, economic and environmental problems of modernity.

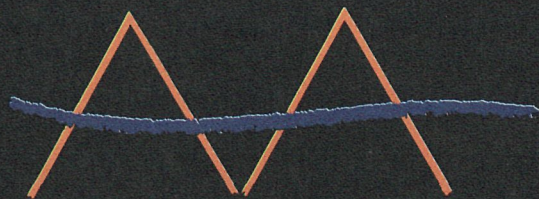
Apocalyptic visions of our world today can lead to thinking about new vital concepts to the change of our conscience and of ethical and aesthetic values. It would be naive to imagine that this would mean easy solutions for problems that society can't even confront presently.

Than the stressed mind and exhausted body of a successful executive may relax in Atlantis, and open up to new ideas and vital concepts is very likely. But that he leaves enlightened, and so brings about positive benefits for modern society, seems as wishful as it is desirable.

Nonetheless, Hans Jürgen Müller, one of the great german gallerists of the 60's and 70's promoter of modern art during the past three decades, is doing the impossible to materialize Atlantis. Initiator of the project, together with his wife Helga, both of them have been scouting the world for the past eight years, looking for financial and moral support at all social levels.

They had their own stand at the IXth Documenta. There they were again presenting the model cities of Leon Krier and Frei Otto. They'll also show works by artists that support Atlantis, like James Brown, Boetti, Kippenberger and Alfred Jarr, among others.

In the context of the Kassel Documenta, the promoters of Atlantis want to initiate and stimulate dialogue with artists, collectors and other professionals of the art world. For, as Bazon Brock, argues convinced, "we must build Atlantis so that all those who want to direct their thought to our extremely problematic future may find the time and the place to do so".



CENTRO ATLANTICO DE ARTE MODERNO