

VERA MOLNAR

PERSPECTIVES AND VARIATIONS

FEBRUARY 6 – APRIL 26, 2009



OPENING : Thursday 5th February 2009 – 7pm



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ARTISTS /

EXHIBITION : Vera Molnar

EXHIBITION BIS : Amélie Dubois

ACCESS /



49 NORD 6 EST - Frac Lorraine

1bis rue des Trinitaires, Metz / France

Admission free.

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4-5pm and Sundays from 5-6pm.

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The Fonds régional d'art contemporain de Lorraine, a member of « Platform » network, enjoys financial backing from the Lorraine Regional Council and the Lorraine Region Cultural Affairs Department (DRAC) at the Ministry of Culture and Communication.

Born in 1924 in Hungary, Vera Molnar settled in Paris in the 1950s after having completed her studies at the School of Fine Arts in Budapest. Close to minimalist esthetic through her use of two-color process and to geometrical forms, her work, eminently conceptual due to the interplay of method and questioning, escapes fashions and historical categories. In order to do away with what she calls “mental-cultural ready-mades,” Vera Molnar employs different programmatic games and mathematical principles in order to produce series of work guided by a unifying quest for the invisible. However, like the members of the Oulipo, she never shrinks from playing with and foiling self-imposed constraints.

At Frac Lorraine, she presents two in situ creations, enlargements of smaller historical works. She thus produces wall paintings for the gigantic walls in the exhibit halls. Two principles are at play here: the delegation of production to others and the change of scale. By questioning these fundamental elements of creation (the artist's hand, the size of the work), she reminds us that the idea of the artwork takes precedence over its production which is conditioned by contingent criteria.

Promenade (presque) aléatoire (1998-1999; Frac Lorraine collections), an installation previously unseen in Lorraine, completes this necessarily subjective selection with respect to sixty years of creation.

Echoing this work, Amélie Dubois (born in 1983) presents a visual and sound installation *Le Monde* (2006-2007). Over the period of a year, with the help of a software program, she transcribed the front pages of the daily *Le Monde* into musical scores. Then she gave them to a pianist for free interpretation, with the constraint of daily recording. These music pieces are randomly played in the exhibition space where the scores are visible.

Representing different generations, these two artists are compelled to obey a system, a determined protocol which underscores the process of realization of the work. This freely imposed constraint is not a hindrance; on the contrary, it is an undeniable production of visual and sound poetry.

1- Vera Molnar, *Perspective inversée 2*, 1957-07 / 2009, Metz.
Photo: Rémi Villaggi. © ADAGP, 2009, Paris

Vera Molnar and the overcoming of painting

As we look at Vera Molnar's works, one thing is certain: the artist shrinks from any complacency and considers her medium as an experiential ground to be ceaselessly renewed. Her reliance upon series, variations of forms, colors and rhythms based on a given assignment contributes to this endless exploration.

Vera Molnar's approach perfectly coincides with the artistic vocation of Frac Lorraine which strives to offer artists a place they can appropriate, and to show the public artworks which are open to reflection and to encounter.

For her exhibition at 49 Nord 6 Est, the artist has decided to rethink some of her earlier works in reference to the scale of the exhibition space. The works she proposes are based on the play of constraints freely agreed on by both parties: on the change of dimensions and the delegation of production.

The artist draws inspiration from telephonic paintings of her compatriot Laszlo Moholy-Nagy who, in 1922, ordered 5 paintings over the telephone from a sign painter. This way, Moholy-Nagy demonstrated that the idea of an art object does not need to be a direct result of the artist's hand or skill. He anticipated by several decades the principles of conceptual art. Created at different periods, Molnar's works presented at FRAC Lorraine show at a glance a great diversity of her work and the obsessional character of the use of motifs: the square, the trapezoid, the line. The series of drawings entitled 144 Trapezoids (1975)-which reveals the mechanism of passage from one geometric figure to another-may play the role of a discrete point around which pivot all the exhibited works.

The wall paintings displayed at FRAC Lorraine are the first ever conceived on that scale by that artist. They prove that contemporary creation is not a question of age, but of the artist's approach.

Vera Molnar

A singular approach

Vera Molnar represents one of the most radical tendencies of "minimalism French-style"(1) the foundations of which she had helped establish. Her first works, elaborated on the basis of an elementary formal vocabulary (lines, strokes...) and a two-color process (black and white), rapidly evolved under the influence of Vantongerloo. The writings of this neo-plastician, who sought to define the pictorial surface and the composition of the painting by means of mathematical formulas, reverberated with Vera Molnar's own preoccupations and oriented her work towards rigorous and systematic artistic research related to the scientific method and to the field of scientific experimentation.

Co-founder (notably with François Morellet) of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel(2) which advocated rationalization of painting and proposed to establish the basis for a science of art, Vera Molnar obscures the spiritual and symbolic dimension inherent in Vantongerloo's work in order to focus solely on the relationship between mathematics and art. The work of art is no longer merely a visual experience: "In my work, there is no such thing as a symbolic, metaphysical, or mystical component; there is no message, no message whatsoever, nor a raccoon"(3). This approach, founded on visual experience, finds its extension in the research of her husband, François Molnar, expert in the psychophysiology of sight.

Starting in 1968, Vera Molnar integrates new technologies into her work. The computer becomes a tool in the service of her experiments and the basis of a new method of creation. Her works, digitally realized, are the result of programming and, consequently, of a series of operations.

Images are thus produced according to a system, a predetermined and rigorous method, which foreground the process of realization. Yet the artist does not delegate the creative process entirely: "the computer is just one tool which makes it possible to free painting from the weight of fossilized classical heritage. Its immense combinatory capability facilitates a systematic investigation of the infinite field of possibilities."(4)

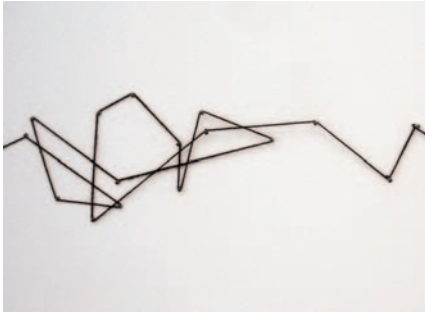
Hélène Guenin

1 - Expression introduced by Serge Lemoine.

2 - The Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) was founded in July 1960 by Vera Molnar, François Morellet, Horacio Garcia Rossi, Julio Le Parc, Francisco Sobrino, Joël Stein, and Jean-Pierre Yverol.

3 - *Vera Molnar: Inventaire 1946-1999*. Ladenburg: Prevsing-Verlag, 1999. p. 47

4 - Jean-Michel Place. "Vera Molnar, Regard sur mes images." in: *Revue d'esthétique* (Paris) no. 7, 1984.



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VERA MOLNAR*Born in 1924 in Budapest, Hungary. Resides and works in Paris.****Promenade (presque) aléatoire, 1998-1999***

Algorithm, black string, nails. Variable dimensions.

Frac Lorraine collection.

Promenade (presque) aléatoire [(Nearly) random walk] is one of the artist's latest experiments. The work is a product of an algorithm created by Vera Molnar and programmed by the mathematician and artist Erwin Steller. The forms generated by that mathematical figure are potentially infinite. A certain number of these forms were printed, then reproduced on the wall of the exhibition space using small nails and a black cotton string. The paper medium has thus been abandoned and replaced with an installation.

The work has, at first glance and thanks to the medium used, a special place in Vera Molnar's work which is based on drawing, printing, and painting. It nicely demonstrates the artist's capacity for experimentation with new materials, for opening new horizons and for ceaseless searching. Above all it demonstrates incredible energy and an astonishing propensity for renewal and for developing new hypotheses.

This particular piece with strings has a precedent in one of the versions of *Homage to Dürer*. In this series, Vera Molnar explores the geometric variations of a path traced by a line which connects the numbers from the magic square found in Dürer's *Melencolia* (1514). At the Stiftung für konkreten Kunst in Reutlingen, Germany, in 1990, Molnar presented some of the figures obtained in the form of a wall border where the black strokes were replaced by cotton string and where little nails marked the location of numbers, now vanished referents.

In the *Promenade (presque) aléatoire* [(Nearly) random walk], lines, repeated in a continuous wall border without beginning or end, play on the perception of space and the surface of the wall. Abstract, rigorous mathematical formulas are embodied in the fragile and tangible materiality of a line which "winds by leaping, sliding, groping, hopping, pushing forward, fleeing [...], starting over and relentlessly continuing on and on"(1).

1- Vera Molnar, *Promenade (presque) aléatoire*, 1998-99. Frac Lorraine collection. (detail)
© ADAGP, Paris, 2009

1 - "Solo d'un trait noir," Vera Molnar, November 6, 1997.

VERA MOLNAR

Born in 1924 in Budapest, Hungary. Resides and works in Paris.

Trapèzes penchés à droite, 1987-88

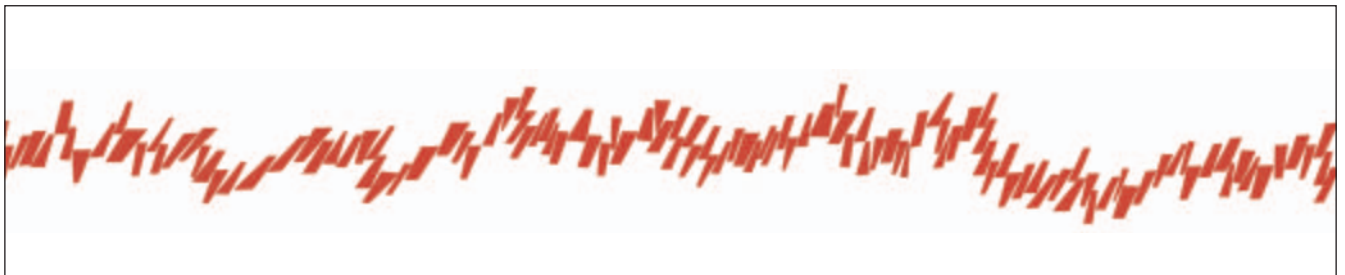
Collage, 25 x 256 cm. Collection of the artist.

Trapèzes penchés à droite, 1987-88 / 2009, Metz

Work in situ, wall adhesive, 4.5 x 30.5 meters.

Frac Lorraine production.

The trapezoid is one of the few recurrent forms to which Vera Molnar returns again and again. Declination of the square, the trapezoid is stretched first this way, then that way, and, like Ariadne's thread, weaves together various productions of the artist. In 1987-88, Vera Molnar made a collage, 25 x 256 cm each, which she entitled *Trapèzes penchés à droite* (*Trapezoids leaning to the right*). Some twenty years later, she returns to the composition and adapts the dimension to three walls of a large hall at Frac Lorraine. In reality, what one sees first is a horizontal line forming a sort of graph: an electrocardiogram which abandoned its rigidity to fluctuate like a wave. What is it composed of? A multitude of trapezoids which barely touch, placed along the vertical axis. As in the game of dominos, each element follows another which, in turn, implies the next. Some might see in these oblique forms an homage to Paul Cezanne's slanted brush stroke, while others might remember the effect generated by this viewer-encompassing landscape, heir to Soto and Monet. However, as much as forms and the notion of the surroundings, we must also emphasize the role of color in a composition of this type. Fascinated by lady bugs, poppy flowers, and sunsets "terribly, sublimely red, as if bathed in blood," Vera Molnar explains humorously that when she was a child she



Preparatory study for the work
Trapèzes penchés à droite, 1987-88 /
2009, Metz. Work in situ.
Frac Lorraine production .
© ADAGP, Paris, 2009



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was called a “redhead,” and contemplating the freckles on her knees undoubtedly constituted her first lesson in non-figurative art. Later on, she stopped identifying with Little Red Riding Hood, then left the Communist Party because, as she said maliciously, “the red in Mao's little red book was not to my taste.” In painting, she learned to love the Etruscan red as much as that of Pompeii, of Russian icons, of Carpaccio and Titian, or that of Tiepolo, Van Dyck, Matisse and Bonnard. She also says that she rejoiced when a friend told her that in Russian the words “beautiful” and “red” are very similar.

She recalls, in extremely poetical and sensual terms, her collection of pieces of paper in different shades of red: “from time to time, in order to throw myself a little party, I spread them out, like a picnic, on the ground, just to look at them”(1). The rigor of abstract and geometric art, presenting an infinite number of possibilities and variations, is thus coupled with the intensity of red which can be defined in terms of esthetic pleasure. However, as the artist said: “A color does not need to be described, a form does not need to be explained, an artistic constellation does not need to be narrated. (...) All literary discourse applied to a work of art can only diverge, water down, and alienate the work's essentially visual effect”(2).

Magali Parmentier

1- Preparatory study for the work
Trapèzes penchés à droite, 1987-88 /
2009, Metz (detail). Work in situ.
Frac Lorraine production .
© ADAGP, Paris, 2009

All citation from: *Vera Molnar. Inventaire 1946-2003*.
Ladensburg: Preysing-Verlag, 2004

1- Vera Molnar, “Voyage au bout du rouge,” p. 52-53.

2- Vera Molnar, quoted in David-Olivier Lartigue, “Les écrits de Vera Molnar”,
p. 21

VERA MOLNAR*Born in 1924 in Budapest, Hungary. Resides and works in Paris.****Perspective inversée 2, 1957-07 (1)***

Painting, 36 x 210 cm. Collection of the artist.

Perspective inversée 2, 1957-07 / 2009, Metz

Wall painting, 4,5 m x 43 m. Production Frac Lorraine.

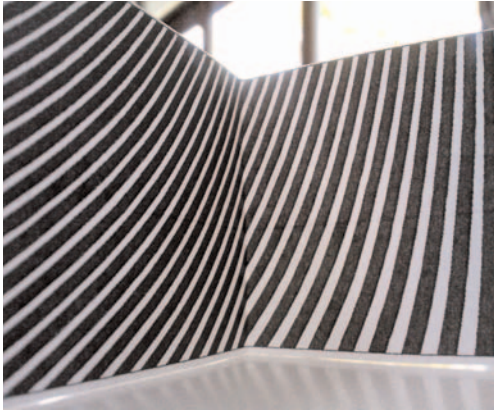
In Vera Molnar's work, motifs and series from different periods resonate together, communicate and prolong each other with fun-loving freedom which defies the years that separate them. The artist keeps a record of all her ideas in notebooks which she consults constantly and which allow her to resume a project or return to a motif, and give it a new direction. She thus makes good use of new data or technical progress: for example her use of computers since 1968, or the subsequent improvements in the capacities of this tool.

A witness to her interest for side roads which enrich the principal flux of the totality of her work, the Inverse perspectives 2 presented at Frac refer to a lost original, a small sketch from 1957, hand-drawn and painted. In 2007, Vera Molnar used a computer to redraw and enlarge it, and transposed it onto canvas; in 2009, she projects it onto the four walls of a Frac Lorraine exhibition hall, with the total surface area of over two hundred square meters. The work exists virtually; its materialization on a page or on the wall, using pencil or paint, is only accidental. However, unlike a conceptual artist, Vera Molnar also pays attention to the visual rendition of her work, and seeks what she calls "the plastic event"(1). "I stand among three 'cons': conceptual artists, constructivists, and computers"(2), she recalls in one of her characteristic incisive formulæ.

Perspective inversée 2 (Inverse perspective 2) presents a conti-



(1)



nuous surface of alternating white and black bands, their rhythm varied by their difference in width; by their inclination, which makes the pictorial surface undulate; by the effect of attraction and repulsion which results from the convergence and divergence of lines. With this motif, Vera Molnar wished to face up against the all-over composition-while staying away from the pretty and the decorative, but also from Op art-and to avoid the trap of the straight line. But she is not quite convinced by that "work of revolt", a "kick against the integral constructivist obedience"(3). And if the band (as a variation on the line) is often present in her work, the "stripe" is rather atypical.

At Frac Lorraine the artist has, however, chosen this motif for her first wall painting on a grand scale. It is, in fact, the first time that the viewer will be immersed in a work of this artist who is more accustomed to thinking of her art in two dimensions. And the result might be incredible: the alternating bands come alive on this surface and free themselves from it by an independent visual effect that can be grasped only through experimentation.

Eléonore Jacquiau Chamska

1 - Among all the images in a series, Vera Molnar keeps those which give her the strongest visual emotion. In the last analysis, it is her eye which selects what is most satisfying and what she calls the "plastic event." See Vincent Baby. "Cette ligne qui d'avance l'oeil, avec intelligence, a reconnue..." in: *Vera Molnar*. Paris: Le Crédac, 1999.
2 - Interview with Jean-Pierre Arnaud: "Artistes hongrois en France, 1900-2000." in: *Présence de l'art contemporain*. Angers, 2002.
3 - Telephone discussion, January 2009.

Biography

Born in 1924 in Hungary, Vera Molnar received an education in classical painting at the School of Fine Arts in Budapest, and graduated with a degree in the History of Art and Aesthetics in 1947. In 1946, she started working in abstract and geometrical painting. She settled in France in 1947 and, between 1960 and 1968, worked using an “imaginary machine.” Because cybernetic instruments were still too costly at the time, she decided to work “as if” she were using a machine: in a systematic fashion. Her research method consisted in writing simple programs and in elaborating series of formal transformations following a set of specific guidelines and adhering to self-imposed constraints. She thus assimilated the methods of scientific experimentation.

Co-founder of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) in 1960, she sought, alongside other artists, including Horacio Garcia-Rossi, Julio Le Parc, and François Morellet, to integrate the viewer, both physically and psychologically, into the work of art using explorations of kinetic art and research in optic experience.

In 1967, she helped found the group Art et Informatique at the Institut d'Esthétique et des Sciences de l'Art in Paris, and in 1968 produced her first works on the computer. This tool became a fast and efficient means to systematically investigate the field of infinite possibilities, but it does not take the place of the artist in the work of creation.

In 1969, she gave a talk on “art and the computer” at the Université expérimentale Paris-VIII Vincennes. In 1971, she worked at the Atelier de Recherches des Techniques Avancées at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and became a member of the Centre de Recherche Expérimentale et Informatique des Arts Visuels (CREIAV) at the Université Paris-I Sorbonne.

Since the 1990s, Molnar's work has been shown at major European exhibitions of non-representational and avant-garde art. In 2005 she received the first “develop digital art award” (ddaa) presented by the Digital Art Museum in Berlin for her lifetime work. In 2006 she became a founding member of the Open Structures Art Society (OSAS) in Budapest.

SELECTED PERSONAL EXHIBITIONS

- 1976 "Transformations," Polytechnic of Central London, London, UK
 1988 "Dialogue between emotion and method" (presentation of V. Molnar's work by Max Bill), "E" Gallery, Zürich, Switzerland
 1994 "Geometry of Pleasure," Gesellschaft für Kunst und Gestaltung, Bonn, Germany
 1998 "Digital sensibility - 1957-1997," Vismara Arte, Milan, Italy
 1999 "Vera Molnar, Extract from 100,000 billion lines," Crédac-Centre d'art contemporain, Ivry-sur-Seine
 2004 "Vera Molnar and Julije Knifer. Lines and Meanders," Fondation pour l'art contemporain, Claudine and Jean-Marc Salomon, Alex, France
 2008 "Foldings, paintings, drawings," März Gallery, Manheim, Germany

SELECTED COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 1960 "Konkrete Kunst," Helmhaus Museum, Zürich, Switzerland
 1983 "Arte Programmata et Cinetica," 1953-1963, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy
 1984 "Electra/83," Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris
 1992 "Chance as principle," Musée de Wilhelm Hack, Ludwigshafen, Germany
 "From Bonnard to Baselitz," Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
 1994 "Europa-Europa," Kunst und Ausstellungshalle, Bonn, Germany
 "Earthly fires," Paul Valéry Year in Sète, Centre régional d'art contemporain, Sète, France
 2000 "Line(s) of Conduct," Espace d'Art Concret, Mouans-Sartoux, France
 "Marli Hoppe Ritter Collection," Kunstverein, Manheim, Germany
 2008 "Paris 1950: Auguste Herbin and his circle," Lahumière Gallery, Paris

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- > *Vera Molnar. Open Structures Art Society.* Budapest, Hungary: Art Gallery Paks, 2008. 73pp.
 > Linde Hollinger, ed. *Vera Molnar: Inventaire 1946-1999.* Ladenburg: Preysing Verlag, 2003. 556pp.
 > *Vera Molnar: Extrait de 100 000 milliards de lignes.* Exhibition catalogue. Crédac, Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry-sur-Seine. Paris, 1999. 40pp.

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AMÉLIE DUBOIS

Born in 1983 in Corbeil-Essonnes, France. Resides and works in Paris.

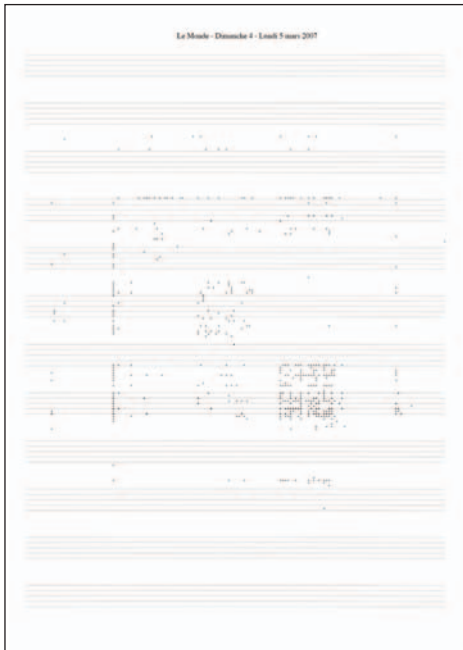
Le Monde, 2006-2007

Installation. 313 partitions. 313 piano interpretations.
Collection of the artist.

The essence of Amélie Dubois's artistic practice lies in the fact that it brings together the use of advanced technologies and everyday objects, while it explores signs, symbols and tools with which we construct ourselves as linguistic beings. The majority of her works are based on computer programs. They are produced following a predetermined and rigorous protocol which foregrounds the process of realization and the duration as an experience of time.

For her piece *Le Monde*, the artist has, every day for a year (July 1st 2006 - June 30 2007), transposed the front page of the newspaper *Le Monde* into a musical score, played daily and freely interpreted by the pianist Caroline Ly. Presented as an installation, the work is composed of twelve installments each containing a month worth of scores and their musical interpretations broadcast at random. Each piece's date of reference is projected on the wall.

Conceived on the basis of ASCII (1) code which allows one to create equivalences between written symbols and numeric values, the program on which this work is based was developed by the artist with the help of Max MSP software. The program transforms the text of the daily front page into a sequence of pixels producing a random drawing, which in turn is transposed into a musical score. The work of Amélie Dubois is thus articulated around the daily constraints and successive operations of displacement: from text to image and from image to sound.



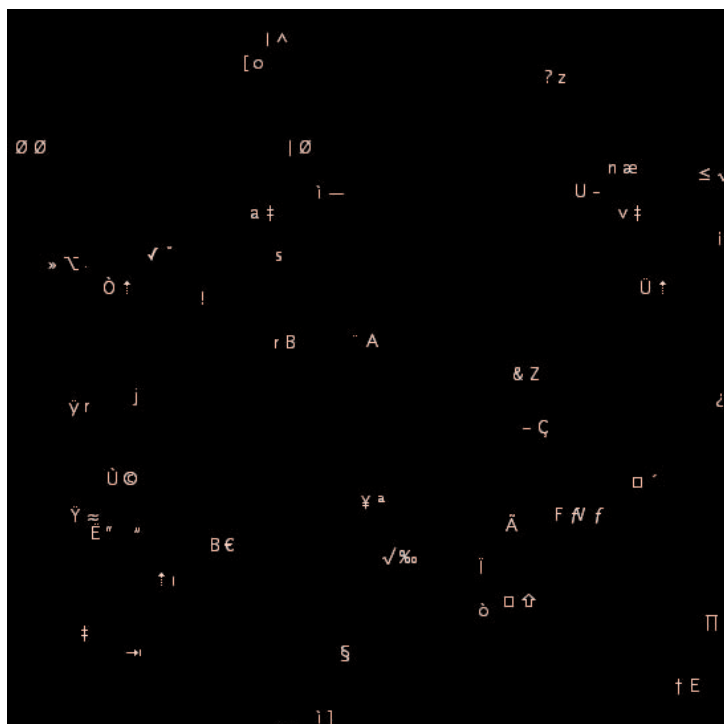
Amélie Dubois, *Le Monde*, 2006-07.
1 - Detail of a daily edition of *Le Monde*
2 - Score, *Le Monde*, 4-5 March 2007

1 - American Standard Code for Information Interchange

AMÉLIE DUBOIS*Born in 1983 in Corbeil-Essonnes, France. Resides and works in Paris.***Poésies, 2007**12 black-and-white photographs. 70 x 70 cm each.
Collection of the artist.

With *Poésies*, the artist offers us a new form of displacement which, this time, goes from image to text. *Poésies* is a personal analysis of the sky in twelve frames, taken on the 15th of every month from the Thiviers observatory. These images have been redrawn and analyzed by a computer program: the coordinates of each star have been encoded into a couple of characters on a computer keyboard. The forms which arise from the mathematical analysis generate letters and symbols which compose a constellation. The text is illegible as a literary work and does not impose any single interpretation on the reader. Quite on the contrary, the characters' layout on the page contributes to the creation of indetermination which endows the image with a variety of suggestions.

While Amélie Dubois works using a systematic method, she claims to have no control over the distortions produced by the transposition of data. It is, according to her, these distortions that distance [the work] from the original sources, infusing them with a poetic and esthetic charge.



1- Amélie Dubois, *Poésies*,
15 novembre 2006, detail.
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