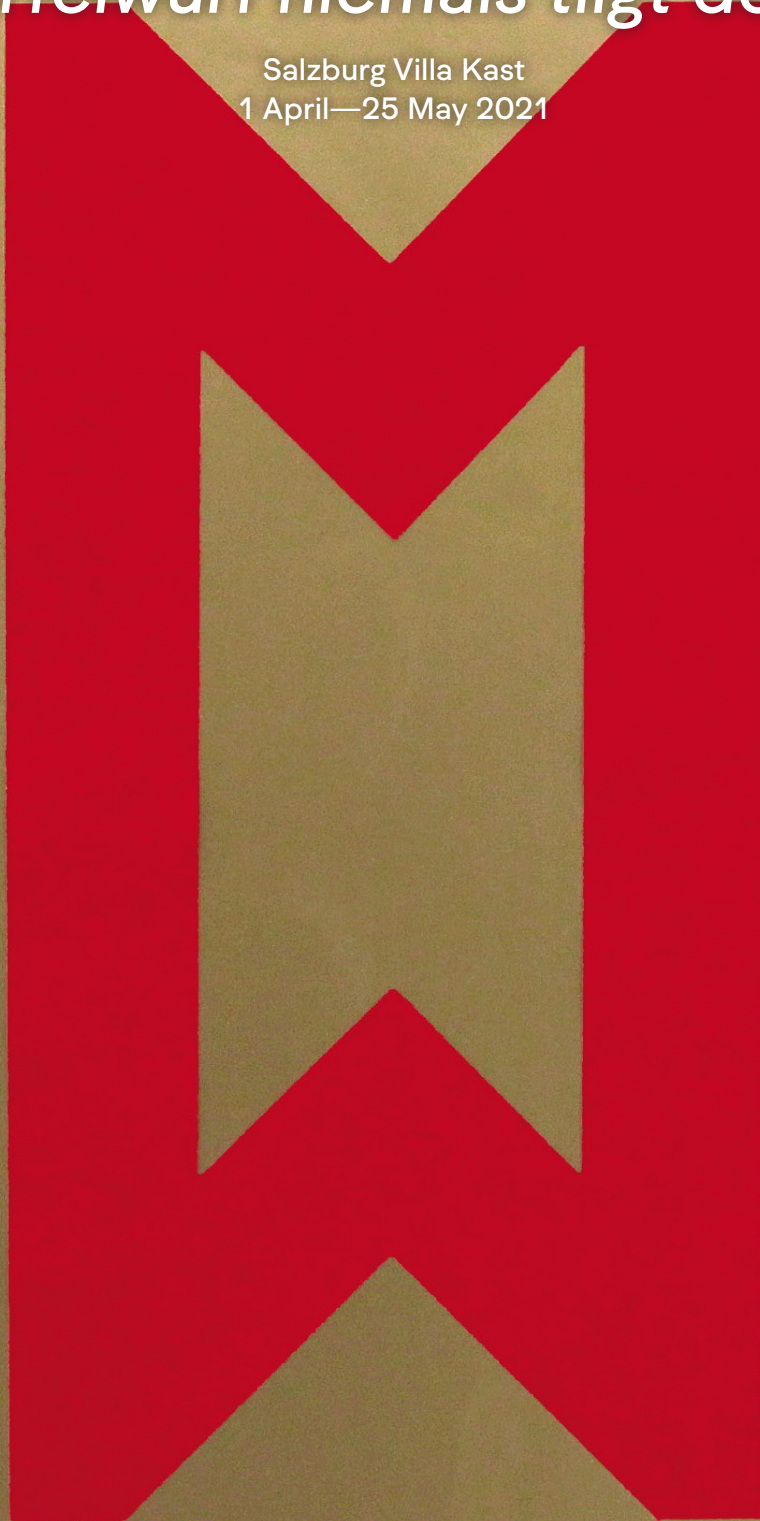


Vera Molnár
Ein Würfelwurf niemals tilgt den Zufall

Salzburg Villa Kast
1 April—25 May 2021



Thaddaeus Ropac
London Paris Salzburg

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Mirabellplatz 2, 5020 Salzburg
ropac.net

I tried to incorporate reason into a romantic approach. Why not do – I said to myself – “whatever”, that is to say, set up a system that would replicate the kind of nihilism of the Romantics in order to get rid of all cultural baggage and at the same time widen the range of possibilities. Use chance as the guiding principle to assemble shapes and colors chosen at random? — Vera Molnár, 1980

Bringing together works dating from 1957 to the early 1970s, this exhibition reconsiders the original path traced by the Hungarian-born and Paris-based artist Vera Molnár in the field of post-war abstraction. Considered today as one of the pioneers of digital art, the 97-year-old artist did not wait to access a computer to already establish a systematic method of creation in 1959. To create her geometric images, she invented a series of exploratory steps and rules that aped a computer’s inputs and outputs, dictating the final, hand-drawn form. Dubbed *machine imaginaire*, her process was as much a tool as it was a concept with which to reprogram traditional visual practices. It was a radical adoption of technology – however much imagined – that would ignite the way for computational art and design in the decades to come. She deliberately programmed a “1% disorder” to allow for a systematically-determined factor of chance to influence her work. Referring to the seminal concrete poem *A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance* (1897) by French symbolist writer Stephane Mallarmé, the title of the exhibition hints at this specificity.

Born in 1924, Vera Molnár studied painting, history of art and aesthetics at the École des Beaux-Arts in Budapest before moving to Paris with her partner François Molnár in 1947. Prompted by a book of Albrecht Dürer’s engravings, she experienced a moment of artistic epiphany. She took inspiration from the famous engraving *Melencolia* (1514), which includes, in the top-right section, a drawing of a magic square. She decided, whilst often working with her husband in her early years, to develop an art-form which would be strictly determined by simple mathematical rules and geometry. This art-form was much like the Bauhaus and Concrete artist Max Bill, who, for example, believed mathematics to be a necessary tool for a clear, transparent, and quantifiable art-form. She met Max Bill and Verena Loewensberg on a trip to Zurich in 1957, and was subsequently invited to participate in the anniversary exhibition *Konkrete Kunst: 50 Jahre Entwicklung* at the Helmhaus in Zurich in 1960. Embracing the principles of Concrete Art to develop her own work, Molnár never limited herself to a single, pre-defined concept of abstraction: *At first, I was a constructivist with great sympathy for the Bauhaus, so I should have liked Kandinsky. But I didn’t like Kandinsky, I liked Klee instead. Another world, another sensitivity.*

In the exhibition, *Carrés Verts* [Green Squares] (1969), a square work made from juxtapositions of green squares shows Klee's significant influence on Molnár's practice. Predating her landmark series *À la recherche de Paul Klee* [Searching for Paul Klee] (1970-71), it references the *Magic Squares* series, a cycle of early work by the German painter. In this series, Klee studies the effects of the rhythmic repetition of identical elements, fractioning the Tunisian landscape into squares, which seem to extend beyond the edges of the painting.

In the same way as Klee, Molnár also seeks to reconsider the relationship between the viewer and the work, which, to a certain extent, becomes an enigma whose guiding principle must be discovered. Movement plays a central role as the viewer's eye is invited to go through the genesis of the work in order to experience its visual qualities – exemplified by the playful geometry of the twelve *Fissions vertes* [Grüne Spaltungen] (1966). An integral part of her earliest experimentations, which she devised through her own programmatic method, is a group of work which shows repetition and variations of the letter "M". Standing for Malevich or Mondrian – two artists who tested the very limits of abstraction – the "M" is also referring to her own name. The variations in position of the letter-signs, give the language an enigmatic density which is reminiscent of concrete poetry. Convinced that there is never a final solution to an aesthetic problem, Vera Molnár has always tested different methods and approaches, by measuring, comparing and transforming the same ingredients. It is the combination of attempts and variations on the same theme which, in their incompleteness and instability, constitute a unique body of work.

Vera Molnár's work has had growing international recognition in recent years. She has had solo-exhibitions at the Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen (2004), the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen (2007, 2012), Musée des Beaux-Arts, Budapest (2010), the Fondation Louis Moret, Martigny (2015), Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2015), and the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen (2018). She has been included in group-shows world-wide, notably in *Degree Zero: Drawing at Midcentury*, MoMA New York (2020). She recently had a solo-exhibition at the Museum of Digital Art, Zurich (2019) and the exhibition *Vera Molnár, Promenades en carré* is currently on view at Museum Ritter, Germany, until April 2021.

She was the winner of the first Develop Digital Art Award (2005), was appointed Chevalier of Arts and Letters (2007), and won the outstanding merit award AWARE in 2018.

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