

## ETC

### *Aleph*

Joyce Millar

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## MONTREAL

### ALEPH

Yvonne Lammerich & Arlene Stamp, Galerie Optica, Montréal. Du 10 octobre au 12 novembre 1994

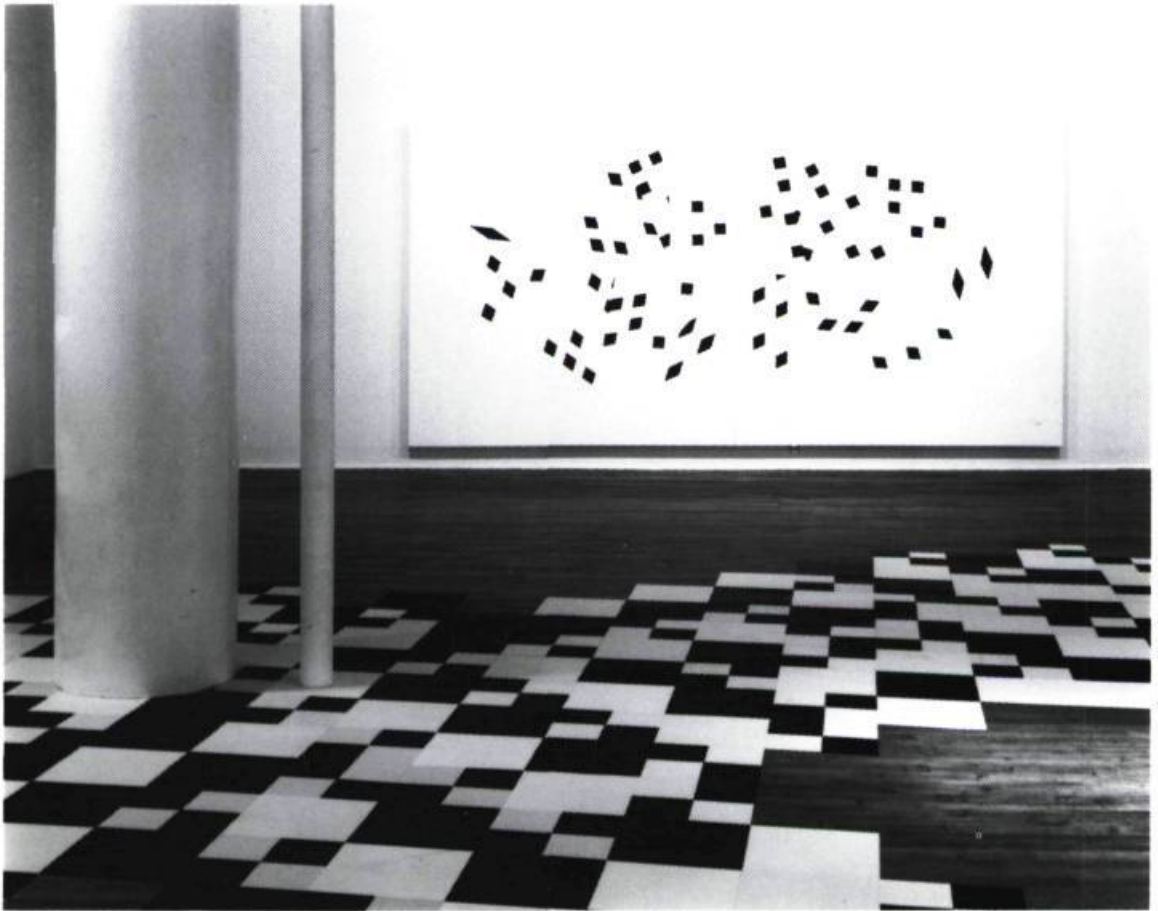


PHOTO : DENIS FARLEY

Yvonne Lammerich, *Aleph*. Acrylique et graphite sur toile; 183 x 366 cm (diptyque). Au sol : Arlene Stamp, *Aleph*. Tuiles de vinyle.

*Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.*

Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

Reality and illusion, repetition and silence, light and shadow, transparency and opacity, order and chaos, art and science, descriptive words that, when paired, reflect a multitude of qualitative oppositions found in the work of Yvonne Lammerich and Arlene Stamp. In their recent exhibition, *Aleph*<sup>2</sup> at Galerie Optica, black and white, opposites yet composites by definition,

becomes the vehicle by which these two artists articulate the phenomena of the object and the potential element of discovery and re-ordering that is possible within the given, "the inner law".

Three works define the space - a floor piece by Arlene Stamp and a glasswork and a painting by Yvonne Lammerich. Each offers variations on Borges' theme of the *Aleph*, an infinite all-encompassing unmediated inclusivity that simultaneously reveals all knowledge. The primary image is one of transformation and reflection. The floor and walls of the architectural space have been appropriated, reconstructed into patterns of black and white that bound and rebound in all directions. It is a collaboration that is so strongly integrated that one is hesitant to deconstruct it, piece by piece. Yet each element, each object is a concrete paradigm that reveals and conceals notions of identity and representation that are reflected in the whole.

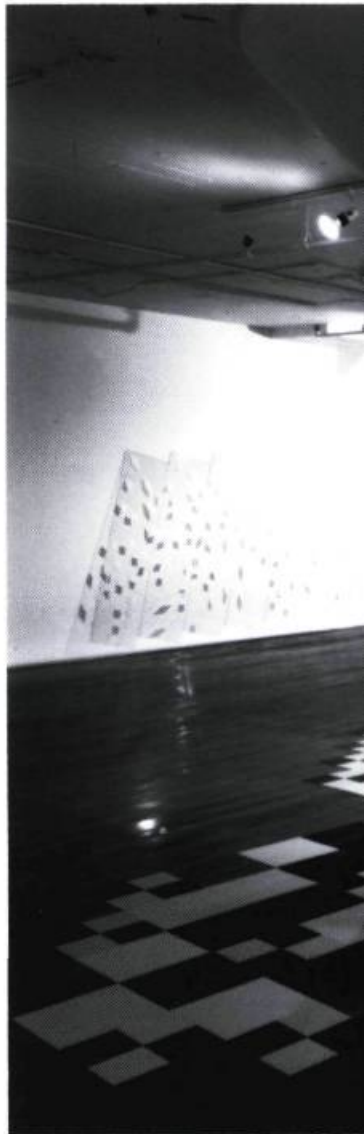
Arlene Stamp has re-contextualized the floor with black and white tiles reminiscent of kitchen/industrial flooring that is common place in the urban environment. The chessboard-like patterning, at first encounter, seems structured and repetitive - black, white, black, white. But as the eye leaps from one square to another, disintegration and displacement set in. The balance is disrupted; the order is destroyed. The illusion of uniformity and structure has been ruptured. In its place, a seemingly chaotic sequence of irregular areas of black and white appear and reappear as the viewer navigates around the periphery - black, white, white, black, white, black. Not only has the pattern been broken and re-allocated, the size of the squares has also been altered.

Stamp's classification is based on a system of fractal patterns that are generated from a single set of tiles or cell (a centre square with four squares adjacent to it). Each cell is, in turn, self-propagated; activated by a string of random numbers from the nonperiodic digits of  $\pi$  that continually alter the placement of the squares, thus redefining the boundaries of each "parent" cell. The result is unpredictable and incomplete, for the rule of generation has been determined not by a rigid ordering system, but in conjunction with a chance element.

The tension created between an abstract system of representation which attempts to span all possibilities and the reality of a programmed structure based on continuity and unity (universal truths), holds a particular fascination for the artist. Long concerned with a conceptual examination of visual systems, Stamp seeks to destroy the semblance of stability and order through a disassociation of concrete references - the black and white tiles. Order becomes disorder. Yet within these permutations, new structures appear. Stamp, by eroding the notion of an *a priori* determination of universal givens, reveals alternate possibilities within each finite context.

Walking over and around the black and white tile patternings, the observer searches to find the initial gestation point(s) and marks the visual axis of transformation seeking to unravel the complexities reflected in this everchanging transaction of identity - black, white, white, black. There is, however, no defined point of reference, no centre to the order/disorder. Craving the ultimate knowledge of creation, and man's compelling desire for absolute revelation of universal truths, one confronts the notion of "The Aleph".

In reality, Stamp has transferred ordinary floor tiles from one context to another, reprogrammed through a quasi-mathematical/scientific process of random numbers to create a new order. Based on a contingency, this self-generating re-grouping of black and white is full of contra-



dictions without resolutions. Not only does the artist's work question what Derrida calls our logocentric tradition based on "a rigid order of an irreversible sequence"<sup>3</sup> but it acknowledges also the futility of defining that order.

Positioned on opposite walls of the gallery - in an almost projection/extension of the illusionary-structured black and white floorpiece - are two works by Yvonne Lammerich; a glasswork and *Aleph* (painting). Both pieces seek to delineate the perception of order/consciousness/identity and representation in the visual field through the use of black and white, opacity and shadow.

In the painting, a grid net, constructed by superimposing two centres (one from outside, one from inside the work), has been transposed onto the white canvas. The surface is punctuated by distinctive black topographical masses of paint whose shape has been determined by the linear markings of the grid. These forms create illusory transparent folds that shift the dynamics of the internal grid axis, forcing the observer to construct new fields of consciousness. Rather than signifiers of limitation, the black and white areas become potential markers that characterize a shifting of self-identity. Although, as in Stamp's floor tiles, the illusion of order has been destroyed, the potential for re-definition remains. Is it, as Foucault claims, "...in the blank spaces of the grid that order manifests itself... waiting in silence"?

The notion of displacement and alteration of identity is further underlined in Lammerich's glasswork in which





Photo: Denis Forley

Vue de l'installation : Arlene Stamp, *Aleph*, tuiles de vinyle au plancher. Au mur, à gauche : Yvonne Lammerich, pièce en verre.

the black and white becomes transparency and shadow. Here eleven glass panels are slanted vertically at an angle adjacent to the wall and set into a diagonal white base that, in fact, repositions the wall onto another plane, dislocating the perceptual corner of the architectural space. The material transparency of the glass has been violated by opaque areas sand-blasted onto the surface and inscribed with white china-marker lines. It is these areas that are, in turn, reflected as obliquely cast shadows from the leaning surface onto the supporting wall. In a syncopating rhythm, the black/shadow markings pulsate in a chaotic configuration that disrupts the predetermined monocular static position obscuring the rigid grid system. The shadows, like the painted black textured punctuation marks in Lammerich's other piece, act as destabilizing elements forcing the observer, through a type of osmotic displacement, to create a shift in the perception of their own spatial location.

The fold, or shifting axis, that was a referential point in the painting, has, in the glass work, been displaced, transmuted into the third-dimension. In its place on the surface, the linear edges of the glass superimpose a structural order of a different nature. The shadow, a dematerialized extension of the glass' assaulted surface, is only a resemblance or memory of existence.

The multiplicity of pattern visible in Yvonne Lammerich's work arises from a centering/decentering, appearance/disappearance self-referential questioning of identity. Yet however illusionary or distorted, black and

white no longer blinds us to reality but provides a correspondence by which perception and identity is confronted. As the artist notes: "It is possible to impose our belief structures on this field of consciousness and thereby shift it."<sup>4</sup> It is through these visual shifts in perception that we create continuity in all direction. By altering the system, transposing the grid, and modifying the powers of perception, Lammerich acknowledges the potentiality of the *Aleph*... "Something that has no absolute, no permanence, other than at the moment of cognition, when it perpetuates its own continuity."<sup>5</sup>

Both Arlene Stamp and Yvonne Lammerich have, in their present work, actively shifted the internal structure of consciousness, through a displacement, transformation and questioning of "the inner law" or universal givens towards new fields of vision, perception and understanding.

JOYCE MILLAR

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York : Vintage Books), XX.
- <sup>2</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph & other stories, 1933-1969* (New York : E.P. Dutton, 1970). In his works, Borges, an Argentine essayist, poet, and author, deals with the theme of analyzing the meaning of man's existence. He is noted for his magic realism, tongue-in-cheek humour, sophistication, and brilliant use of language.
- <sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida. *La carte Postale* (Paris : Flammarion, 1980), 317.
- <sup>4</sup> Yvonne Lammerich, Artist's statement, *Galerie Optica*, 1994.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*