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XYLOR JANE

By Sarah Schmerler

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Xylor Jane (<https://www.artnews.com/t/xylor-jane/>) gets up absurdly early each morning to begin painting, all the better (she claims) to access the unconscious forces that tend to be accessible at that hour. (The title of her show—her third at **Canada** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/canada/>)—was, in fact, “3:07 a.m.”) That said, her subject matter is highly quantifiable: gridded Arabic numerals, each occupying its own square and strung into long, repetitive sequences. Jane chooses numbers that are meaningful for her, even if their significance may not be clear to us. Their sequencing can be complex-tetradic primes (18180808 . . .) that read the same right side up and upside down, or Fibonacci sequences (0112358 . . .), each number the sum of the previous two—or simple, as in counting from one to 102. We might assume there isn’t much room in such a systematic practice to allow for sincere feeling, but quite the opposite is true. For Jane (who is 47, and lives in Greenfield, Mass.) these numbers carry metaphysical weight, and the devotion with which she renders them is palpable.

Color is Jane’s emotional key, and, not surprisingly, her use of it is both extremely controlled and utterly subjective. Rarely brushed, it is applied in single, unmodulated dots, sometimes as tiny as a millimeter in diameter. The daubs come in geometric clusters, and within those tiny clusters the color breaks down further into discrete rows, like bands in a rainbow or light refracted through a prism. Tracking the colors up close will give you a deep respect for obsessive mark-making—and more than a little eyestrain. From afar they yield pure optical pleasure of the sort that just doesn’t translate in reproduction.

In *Nox Rex #28 (Vacation)*, 2009, the numbers are barely visible dead-on; but stand at an oblique angle, and they shimmer into view like secret runes rendered in opalescent ink. In bright works like *Nox Rex #27 (Morpheus)*, 2012, numbers in a tutti-frutti palette pop out like LED lights in a movie marquee. In others, like *Nox Rex #25 (NYX for MD)*, 2012, a misty tonality takes over, bringing to mind the nocturnes of Whistler.

Jane works according to weather conditions, revisiting one painting, for instance, only on overcast days, and another when it’s sunny out: hence, some works take years to produce. It puts one in mind of other sorts of reckonings—the seasons, life’s passages—an experience of time that just can’t be summarized on spreadsheets. How do you “account” for a life’s work? Jane’s answer is methodical, formal and, ultimately, beautiful. Count slowly across her best works: you’ll arrive at a sum that’s completely human. It’s like discovering the latent optimism that lies, unremarked, in the old adage, “Our days are numbered.”

Photo: Xylor Jane: *Nox Rex #25 (NYX for MD)*, 2012, oil, ink and graphite on panel, 31 by 29 inches; at Canada.

