

GUARDIAN

Xylor Jane

The mystery of Xylor Jane's art might be the mystery of Fibonacci. The structure of pinecones follows the spirals generated by Fibonacci sequences, as do those of pineapples and sunflowers. Also, Jane reminds me, the number of petals on any flower is always a Fibonacci number (5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, and so forth). "What does it all mean?" I ask her. She stares back, her gaze unreadable. I press on. "How do you view it? As the sign of the divine moving in the world?" After a moment she shrugs. "You have to, don't you?" she says softly.

Jane's shared studio is perched above an auto body shop. On the walls hang some of the delicate line drawings, 22 by 30 inches, now showing at Jack Hanley Gallery, very much the space of the moment in San Francisco. In little squares, like a honeycomb, one of three sizes of pencil dots vibrates against a grid background of blue that shimmers the way it might in nature. Jane plans to secrete herself in the gallery's back room for 10 days to make something site-specific. "That's how I like to work," she says. "With the architecture of the space I work in, making my math coexist with the math that's already there."

In "Blue Max," a collaboration with Jeff Kao at the Lab earlier this year, Jane covered one wall — 35 feet across and 10 feet high — with a chessboard map of chalkboard squares, each containing a varying number of chalk marks. The colors were hypnotic: fields of blossoming rose, buttercup yellow, a green brighter than a chalkboard recalled from school days. "Blue Max"'s centerpiece was a square table built low to the ground, and on it lay an impossible number of pastel circles, spelling out what looked like a mathematical message from aliens. That is, until the viewer looked closer, and the circles were revealed to be Necco wafers. Scarily inhuman at first glance, Jane's art can be sweet at the core.

Born in Orange County, Jane trained at the San Francisco Art Institute and earned a degree in painting in 1993. She was drawn to the minimalists of the 1960s, particularly a group of female painters who, in very different ways, resisted the male minimalist claim that painting was dead: modernist Agnes Martin, black band painter Jo Baer, and British op artist Bridget Riley. "And Mel

Bochner and his numbers. And Sol LeWitt and his tricks, and Yayoi Kusama, who just keeps doing it. Hooray for her." Of her peers, Jane admires Michelle Grabner, the Chicago antiauthoritarian painter, and James Siena, the New York "line king" who trained at Cornell University.

But what's the origin of the mystery? "It was strange," Jane says with a smile, "in 1992 I was on a long ocean voyage, a boat trip, for 16 days. We sailed from Virginia to somewhere in Holland, near Rotterdam, and for days and days all you could see was the horizon line. Not a ship, not a bird, only a line. And somehow out of all this absence, something was born, and I got into math as the substance of my work."

Like every other sailor, Jane is heavily tattooed. "Fifty-five of them," she states. A Fibonacci number. She pulls up a leg of her jeans and shows me 25, running from calf to ankle. Her system starts with 0, which some mathematicians scoff at, arguing that in such a series 0 is useless and 1 should be the first. Jane covers her leg and grins. "Well," she says, "you have to start somewhere, don't you?" (Kevin Killian)

