

of mortality, these mind-scapes— isolation and its attendant arousal of mortal anxieties—are familiar to artists. In the first sentence of James Baldwin's 1962 essay, "The Creative Process," he notes that "the primary distinction of the artist is that he must actively cultivate that state which most men, necessarily, must avoid; the state of being alone."<sup>5</sup> Artists command this "vast forest"<sup>6</sup> of isolation, the intensity of which has been compounded by the pandemic, and for Tuttle, by infection itself. This perhaps explains why here, abstraction ultimately functions as an intimate, philosophical grappling with an elusive, epistemological truth.

1. Julius S. Held, "Commentary," *Art Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Summer 1987), p. 127. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/776890?refreqid=excelsior%3Aaace751e402edeaf9a5113b84ca13f22&seq=1>.

2. Ibid.

3. David Rosand, "Style and the Aging Artist," *Art Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Summer 1987), p. 92. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/776885?origin=crossref&seq=1>.

4. David Rosand, "Art View: The Challenge of Titian's 'Senile Sublime,'" *The New York Times*, October 8, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/28/arts/art-view-the-challenge-of-titian-s-senile-sublime.html>.

5. James Baldwin, "The Creative Process," *Creative America*, Ridge Press, 1962: <https://openspaceofdemocracy.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/baldwin-creative-process.pdf>.

6. Ibid.

## Xylor Jane at Parrasch Heijnen

February 5  
–March 26, 2021



For Xylor Jane, numbers are both a conceptual frame and a formal device. The objective universality of numbers and mathematics (two plus two will

always equal four) guides the structure of many of her tightly composed abstractions in *Back Rub / Foot Rub*, her recent show at Parrasch Heijnen. But because the conceptual bases and organizing principles of the paintings are not always accessible to the viewer, the works take on an otherworldly, bewitching power. The labor involved in Jane's physical, meditative act of painting is apparent. A sense of magical healing—what poet and writer Eileen Myles has called "medicine"<sup>1</sup>—is embedded in the enigmatic patterns.

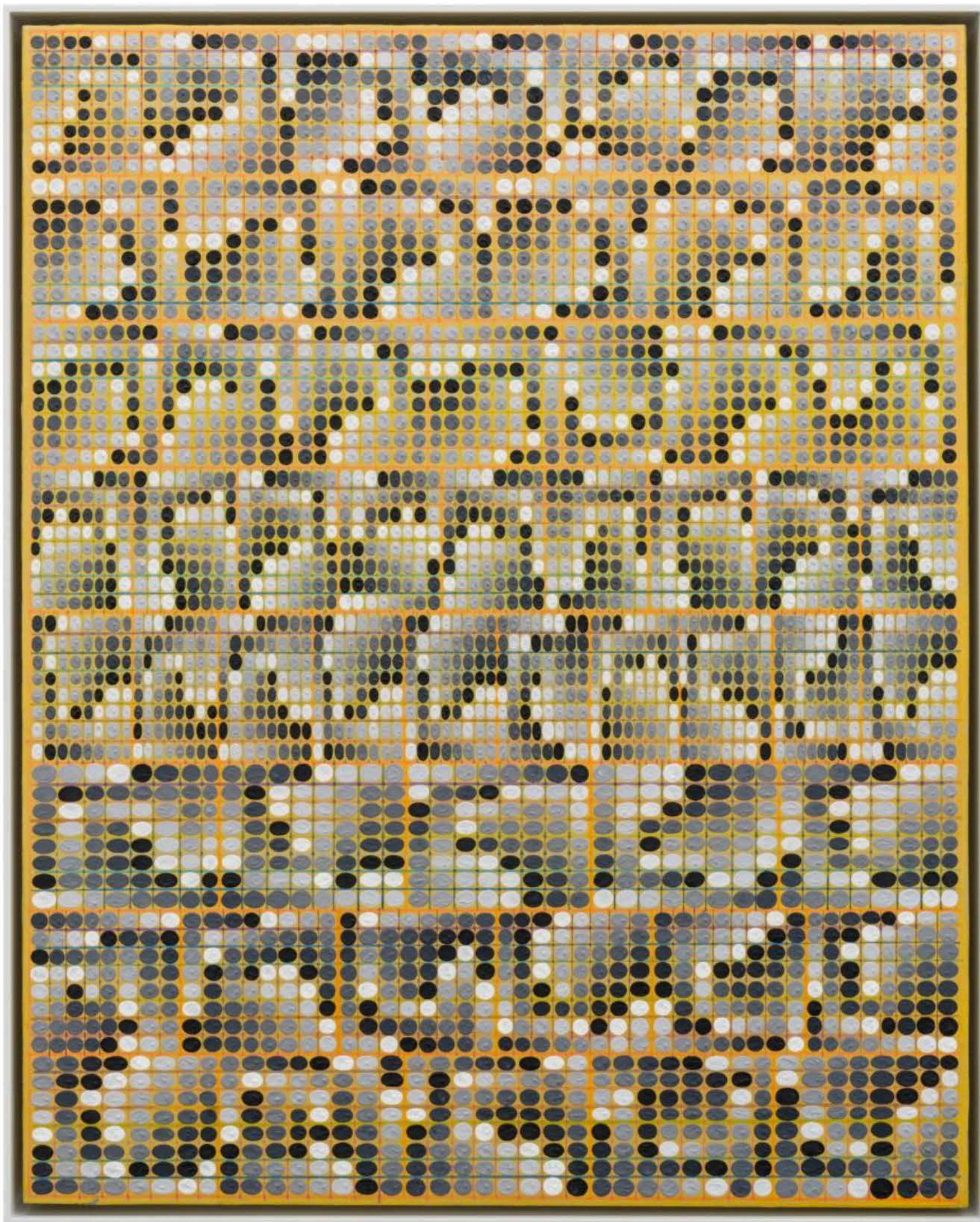
Jane begins each painting with a system that she sets in motion and then lets it run its course (through endless hours of meditative paint application). While the results of each work may camouflage its origin, some kind of order is always apparent. *Dissent (26 Nesting Prime Palindromes)* (all works 2020) is a wood panel painted black and divided into 26 rows. Each row features a string of numbers, beginning with a single "2", that grows into an inverted pyramid as rows of numerals are symmetrically added. Every row acts as a palindrome, meaning it reads the same backward and forward. Mirrored across a central axis, the "2" remains the constant center point in each row. The numbers are not painted but shaped from negative space and outlined by small white, raised dots—a pointillist technique Jane often employs—approximating the look of digital numerals. The precision of this mechanical technique separates the painting from the artist's hand, but also brings attention to the painstaking labor that goes into this work (Jane wears special magnifying glasses similar

to a jeweler's loupe while she paints). According to the press release, while painting this work, Jane saw a resemblance between the stark white and black shape that emerges from the stacked numbers and the collar worn by the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg—from a seemingly random string of numbers a familiar and charged portrait appears.

Other paintings have similarly personal connections, though they may not be apparent to the viewer gazing at the beguiling final forms. *Walking to Your House (Counting by Threes)* is an almost-square canvas covered in shades of pink dots. Green, blue, and yellow dot-matrix-like numerals are laid out in neat columns. On their own, their referent is a mystery, but given the title, they read like the record of an action, the mundane but meaningful act of travelling to the nearby home of a friend or lover. The work takes on an air of longing within our era of isolation.

*Moon Dragon* is a delicate grid of black, white, and gray dots on an orange-brown background, the grayscale shades each tied to different letters. The work takes its title from the names of the artist's cats (Jane used gradations in hue to covertly spell out names like Apple and Crouton). Here, too, personal connection is shrouded beneath a mathematical order that allows the painting—untethered from its inspiration—to take on a life of its own, resembling a crude digital printout or early modernist design exercise. Jane's work shares a visual affinity with other artists who use seriality to produce graphic, entrancing works, like Channa Horwitz, though,





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Xylor Jane, *Moon Dragon* (2020).  
Ink and oil on panel, 20.5 x 16.75 inches.  
Image courtesy of the artist  
and Parrasch Heijnen.



with their bright primary and secondary colors, and structures connected to musical scores, Horwitz's works have a clear inner logic that Jane's canvases fully evade. While Horwitz's works offer harmonious clarity, Jane's veer instead toward a lurid complexity, the differing results illustrating the breadth of potential within apparently rigid structures.

In *6th Order Magic Square for Apocalypse*, Jane maps a numerical grid on top of a pastel background of angular, prismatic shapes. When added up, the numbers in each row, column, and diagonal of Jane's magic square are equal, similar to a sudoku puzzle. It's enchanting to think that a magical solution to annihilation could be found in a special combination of numbers, colors, and forms, like an alchemical elixir. This type of occult power can be felt in the dour colors of *Third Spell for POTUS*, which features a dark background of rectangles out of which the number "46" emerges, as if casting a spell for progressive political action aimed at the current president.

In her serially structured paintings, Xylor Jane produces physical objects that span the personal and universal, the logical and the magical. Far from being detached from real life, the works are very much of this world, with personal references translated into form through painstaking, meditative labor. As viewers, it's easy to lose ourselves in their atomized dots, inexplicable strings of numbers, and unusual color juxtapositions. Attempts to piece together the magic threads remain elusive, despite the works' foundational logic. In a world that often seems to be hurtling

toward collapse, Jane's handmade order provides a sense of tranquil logic. Hers is not a repressive order—a tamping down of creative energy—but an open-ended structure, suggesting limitless possibilities, blueprints for a new and expansive world.

1. Eileen Myles, "Eleven Favorites," *The Paris Review*, Fall 2015, 181. <https://www.theparisreview.org/art-photography/6411/eleven-favorites-eileen-myles>.

## (L.A. in N.Y.) Thomas Fougeirol / Tony Marsh at albertz benda

January 7–  
February 13, 2021

☞ The pandemic-induced restrictions of the past year have forced a prolonged intellectual and creative hibernation for many makers. For others, though, the chain of undifferentiated months has been liberating rather than debilitating, freeing them to expand beyond entrenched borders of work and thought. Ceramic sculptor Tony Marsh belongs to the latter category, and his new tabletop vessels presented at albertz benda (installed in a two-person show with the process-driven paintings of Thomas Fougeirol) demonstrate vividly what, for him, lockdown seems to have unlocked. In his nascent series, *Spill and Catch* (all works 2020), Marsh relaxes his grip on order and symmetry, suspending his glazed surfaces in liquid looseness and indulging in uncharacteristically luscious, exuberant color.

Marsh is no stranger to chance and improvisation, but these new works diverge, and by including representative pieces from two other established, ongoing series, the show made it clear just what they diverge from. His *Crucibles* (all 2020) adhere to a single, basic template: weighty, straight-sided cylinders barnacled with globular chunks of clay, glazed and reglazed, baked and re-baked, to a crusty finish. Each work in this decade-long investigation fuses the metaphorical and literal meanings of its title; each pocked and cratered vessel has repeatedly endured the trial of extreme heat. The molten gold-and-orange surface of one *Crucible* appears to still exude heat. The others suggest magma cooled to a crisp charcoal black. Marsh uses similar straight-sided forms for his *Moonjars* (two from 2018 and one from 2020), but the protrusions take the form of small, more regularly spaced shelves that line the outside wall of two of the pots, and the interior of the third. Each small platform supports a mineral or mineral-like specimen—stone, crystal, frosted glass, a craggy or faceted hunk of clay. Far from the simple poetry of their traditional Korean namesakes—white porcelain spheres embodying purity and luminosity—these *Moonjars* manifest a compulsion toward accretion and collection. Each proffers material evidence toward a sort of imagined archive, a tabletop cabinet of geological curiosities, an ingathering of marvels.

Fougeirol's paintings on wood panels (all 2019) resonate with the rugged topographies of earth and moon invoked by Marsh's