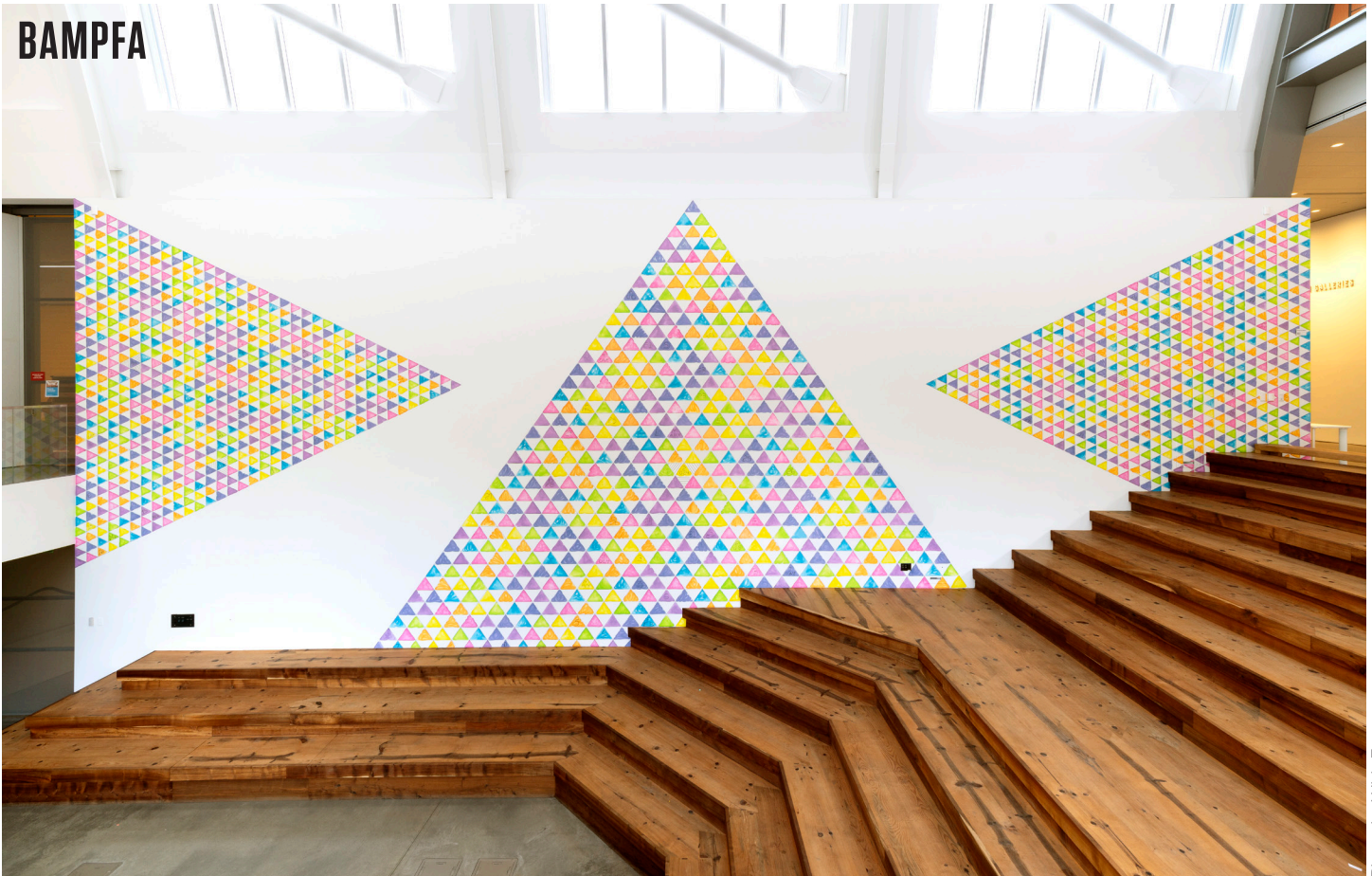


**BAMPFA**



# SCALE SHIFT OF THE SELF

## INTERVIEW WITH XYLOR JANE

**On the occasion of her Art Wall #11, 1/6/21–6/26/26**

**AUGUST 16, 2023–JANUARY 7, 2024**

**Claire Frost:**

I thought it would be good to start at the heart of your practice. You've been engaging with numbers and patterns since your very early work, and I'm curious how you became interested in that as a subject.

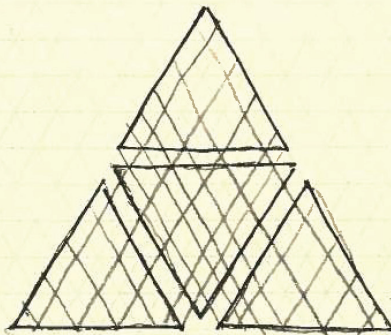
**Xylor Jane:**

My interest in repeating patterns began with the only art book I had as a teen, which was a book of works by the Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher. I was someone who drew and painted a lot just on my own without any real knowledge of the art world or studio practice or any other painters. When I went to the San Francisco Art Institute for painting, I worked in the library. I was getting ready to go on my semester abroad and having a very rough summer, and I found this book in the library called *Sacred Geometry*. I ended up taking it abroad because it was such a soothing book, and it helped me through this troubled summer. I realized that M.C. Escher used crystallography to make his repeating patterns, which is related to Islamic design and division of the circle. I took that trajectory for a while and was deeply engaged with the repeating patterns and understanding classic geometry.

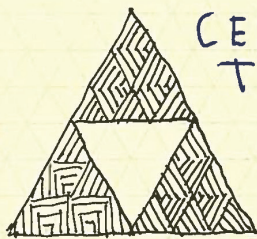
Numbers came in specifically when I started working at the HIV Prevention Project as a logistics coordinator. My boss was super cool, and I really respected her. In my first performance evaluation, she told me my behavior in staff meetings needed improvement, since, apparently, I was rolling my eyes and murmuring under my breath. As a result, I started doing Fibonacci sequencing in my head during meetings to distract myself but to keep my face engaged. I started recording the raw material of the infinite addition within a little notebook. I realized one day looking at my book of these large passages of numbers from weekly staff meetings that those drawings were better than anything else I'd ever made. I started the Fibonacci paintings then, in the late 1990s, and they first showed at Gallery 16 in San Francisco at the very end of 1999 in a show called *Carry the One*.



# A key for the Art Wall



## AHOY CALENDAR #11



CELEBRATING the 5th PALINDROMIC  
TRIANGULAR NUMBER 666

EACH OF the 3 TRIANGLES



holds  
six hundred  
sixty six  
days.

FOLLOW ROYGBIV and

WIND YOUR WAY

THRU TIME

ENDING

ON the TOP VIOLET

06/26/26

~~THURSDAY~~

FRIDAY

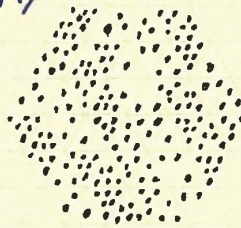
START ON THE  
BLUE 6 -

WEDNESDAY 01/06/21



RED/HOT PINK IS  
ORANGE-SUNDAY  
YELLOW-MONDAY  
GREEN-TUESDAY  
BLUE WEDNESDAY  
INDIGO  
THURS.  
VIOLET  
IS  
FRIDAY

SATURDAY



E = EQUINOX

S = SOLSTICE

NUMBERED TRIANGLES ARE  
FULL MOONS

NEXT UP TWIN PRIME YRS. 2027.2029

Then I got really hooked on prime numbers, triangular numbers, and other groups. I still use Fibonacci. I fell in love with it—it was like I finally had a subject. It felt like a stroke of luck, and I was fortunate enough to get the message.

When I first started using numerics, it was a bit frightening. I felt like I could be swallowed or that it would go on forever. It was this very large thing that I would never really master, but I also found that intriguing.

**CF:**

It seems like there's something sublime and pleasurable in feeling small—something similar to spending time in nature, where it's obvious you're dwarfed by a much larger system.

**XJ:**

Yeah, the scale shift of the self.

**CF:**

Yes! Speaking of scales, you've mentioned that you focus on the addition as opposed to the ratios in the Fibonacci sequence. That interest in accumulation over comparison feels important and aligned with the form of the calendar, which, similarly, is about increasing quantity. How did time enter your engagement with numbers?

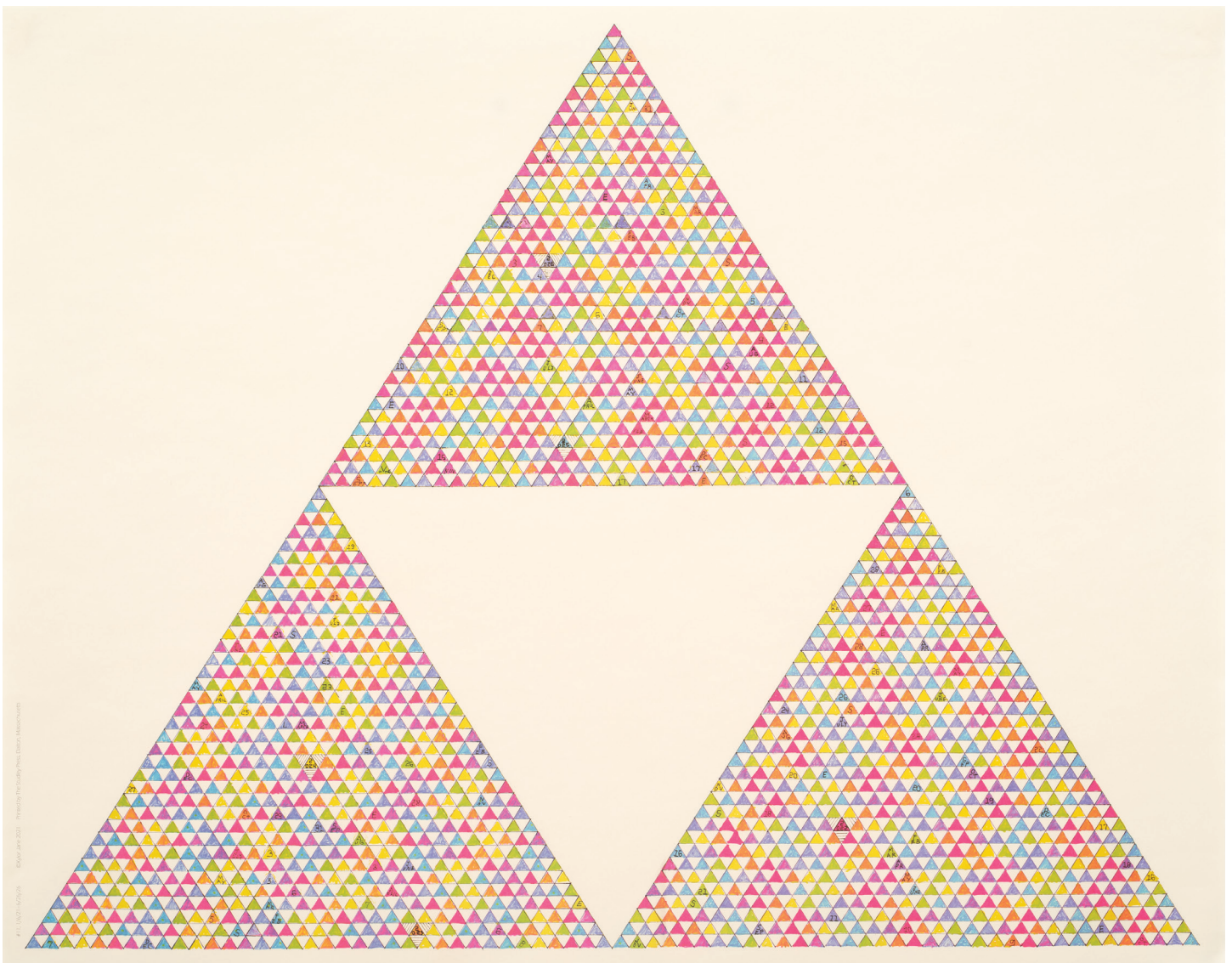
**XJ:**

There's not that much art that I like, but there have been a few things that really moved me, and one was the work of artist On Kawara. Early on I saw his piece *24,698 Days (100 Years Calendar)* (2000) somewhere—a hundred years on a single sheet of paper. It blew my mind. Making calendars also feels



generous to me. It's like this gift to the future, where you're believing in tomorrow—having faith is a good thing.

In San Francisco, there were a lot of great, fun, warm, generous artists and a lot of them were making calendars and giving them away. I started being on the receiving end. Tauba Auerbach still mails out a calendar every year, which is a really beautiful thing to receive.



Xylor Jane: #11 1/6/21-6/26/26, 2021; print. Courtesy of the artist.

The first one I made was in the late 1990s, but one of the first ones that was printed more widely was probably the one for the cover of *Persephone*, which is Andrea Lawlor's zine series *Pocket Myths*. Anytime someone would ask me to submit for a publication, I would just submit a calendar. I like the fact that it's usable, it's a drawing, it's an interpretation of time. It's more than being completely in love with the grid; it's the idea that you can put time on a grid. I don't know why it's such a delight for me, but I don't have to know; I understand just this.

**CF:**

It seems you got into using the Fibonacci sequence because it had this function for you at work, and you talk about enjoying the calendar because it's useful, and it strikes me that there's a balance in your work between things that function and things that are just intrinsically attractive to you—a kind of clarity and organization on one hand versus an unboundedness on the other.

**XJ:**

That's the goal. And how those two things can oddly enough become really great partners.

**CF:**

Yes. So, let's dig into that in terms of the design that you made for the BAMPFA Art Wall. How did you think about the calendar in relation to the physical space at BAMPFA?

**XJ:**

This one's really special to me because it is using triangular numbers and it's more than five years—I love a long one. It's not easy to figure out how to get that much time on a single page without it feeling crushing. Each of those main three triangles hold 666 triangles, which is a palindromic triangular number. I had

this strong, unfortunate evangelical upbringing, so six, six, six is a very loaded number for me, and I really give it a rock when I can. I decided to begin by finding the date that I wanted the last triangle to be. I wanted a palindromic date with three sixes in it, so I selected six, twenty-six, twenty-six— June 26, 2026—to be my end date for the calendar. And I worked my way back through all those 1,998 triangles and weirdly ended up on January 6, 2021, just by chance. Talk about Satan, wow.

**CF:**

It makes you wonder what's going to happen on 6/26/26!

**XJ:**

It does. I was astounded by that.

The days of the week thing is a classic move, since there's seven days in the week and ROYGBIV—the hues in a rainbow—is also seven. I don't think that is necessarily coincidence; I think there's a lot of sevens that are purposeful. I usually start mine on Saturday, using the Jewish tradition. I quickly realized that each of the main triangles starts on a different day, and each point of the triangle is that same day and corresponding color. The very slight shift in arrangement makes each larger triangle have this completely different vibration. The way the colors line up on diagonals creates different patterns.

How that works is its own beauty, which it's doing all itself.

**CF:**

You're creating rules, and then as they unfold, they create something else.

**XJ:**

Yeah, something unimaginable. I couldn't have set out to create that calendar with those patterns and had any success.

**CF:**

It reminds me a lot of one of Sol LeWitt's 1967 essays, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," where he states that "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art." But there are also moments in your work when you exert agency. For example, you could have just left the triangles blank without marking the solstices, equinoxes, and full moons.

**XJ:**

Completely.

**CF:**

Why is it important to include those markings?

**XJ:**

To make it more useful for people and so you could find a specific date on it if you wanted.

And you can see all that time in one place. I think that it can be overwhelming when you make a five-year work. I fold the one I look at in my studio, so I only see one triangle, which is less fatiguing than seeing it all at once.

**CF:**

Do you use it as a calendar?

**XJ:**

Yeah. I'm using it at the studio. Every day that I'm here, I color in with black.



**CF:**

How does it feel having the calendar enlarged to sixty feet wide here at BAMPFA? To represent time on a physically monumental scale as opposed to something human-scaled?

**XJ:**

It feels really good. It's hard for me to imagine anything I make at large scales; I work in such fine detail—I wear magnifying glasses when I paint. After receiving the invitation for the Art Wall, I thought, What is the most loving, generous thing I have for the Bay Area? And I feel like this calendar is it. I have very fond feelings for San Francisco, particularly, but it is also bittersweet. It was such an important time of my life. I was there from age twenty-five to forty-five—a twenty-year run, from 1989 to when I officially moved out of my studio in 2009.

And it's bittersweet because I doubt that I can go and see this piece in-person. Since the San Francisco Art Institute closed, I just feel like I can never go back. That was my soul there. I may have been born in Long Beach, California, but I became myself in San Francisco. I became this human that I am. So, it's very emotional for me.

**CF:**

Well, we're honored to be able to hold this gift for you. I think it will be received that way.

**XJ:**

It's pretty peppy. I think it's pretty upbeat.