

JOYCE WELLMAN

NUMBER WORKS: *Homage to Women in Mathematics*

March 26 - May 18, 2018



Square Head: 1990; 50X38 in.

“Sweet Whispers”

Joyce Wellman’s *Number Works*

Adrienne L. Childs, PhD.

Joyce Wellman’s body of work, crafted over a four-decade long career, offers a complex visual system of coded messages interlaced with hidden signs, sacred symbols, whispers, and dreams. In *Number Works: Homage to Women in Mathematics*, Joyce Wellman presents paintings and collages created between 1989 and 2018. The works have been fashioned from a variety of materials such as paint, oils, pencil, wood, canvas and paper. She frequently uses corrugated cardboard, a textured material that is imbued with memory for Wellman. Textured memories, vibrant colors, numbers, and shapes animate this extraordinary collection of abstract paintings and mixed media works by Joyce Wellman.

A lover of numbers and the mysteries that they hold, Wellman has dedicated this exhibition of *Number Works* to women in mathematics who have typically been on the periphery of a field dominated by men. Wellman herself taught mathematics early in her career. But her primary inspiration comes through her mother Hattie Wellman—dreamer, mystic, and diviner of numbers—who left a powerful inheritance to her daughter. Joyce recalls that her mother’s process was often born of an eclectic combination of dreams, personal histories, books, and intuition. Hattie’s “figurings” and “decipherings” were a way of life for her and her Brooklyn, New York, family, and they indelibly shaped Joyce’s consciousness. “The playing of numbers represents for me remembrances of a time and place, my mother, the universal character of humans to gamble on hunches, and ultimately a history of women in mathematics,” the artist affirms. Hattie’s numbers notebooks and reveries remain vibrant in Joyce’s practice, and they continue to ebb, flow, and punctuate the artist’s powerful paintings. What began in the Wellman family culture has developed into a lifelong artistic practice in which coded messages are the overarching metaphor for Wellman’s world view.

In *Number Works* paintings and mixed media works map the world through symbols, signs, and abstract forms informed by a constant circulation of inspirations that flow through Wellman’s consciousness. Among them are ideas of deconstruction and reconstruction—the dismantling of structures, symbols, sequences, and ideas, that when reconstituted create new meanings and deeper understandings. Wellman’s artistry is also a result of free styling, letting the work go where it takes her. Her process is guided by intangible forces that she calls “pathways of the spirit” and informed by “sweet whispers, nightmares, and dreams.”



Concentric Musings
2000, 48X48 in.



The Big 5
2005, 60X48 in.

When Wellman began her career as a New York City artist in 1974, her medium of choice was printmaking. Her early prints were a blend of stylized figurations and abstraction. During those years, Wellman created works that were vehicles by which viewers could journey through contemplative space. By the mid-eighties, Wellman had settled in Washington, DC, and her focus turned to painting, drawing, and mixed media. Her work became increasingly abstract and expressive, yet continued to explore the intuitive and contemplative.

Though largely abstract and gestural, the works in this exhibition all feature numbers or numbering systems. Wellman employs random numbers from both the decimal system, 0 to 9, and the binary system, 0s and 1s. The works also feature geometric shapes such as spirals, circles, squares, triangles, and pentagons. Wellman finds philosophical meaning and visual energy in geometry. The work reveals her deep appreciation for the ancient and cross-cultural nature of geometry, and for the universal spirituality embodied in the forms. In medieval European philosophy of mathematics geometry is considered a contemplative practice. In fact, the allegorical personification of geometry was an elegant and refined woman. According to Robert Lawlor's *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice*, a book that Wellman consults regularly, geometry functions as an intuitive, synthesizing, and creative activity, associated with what Lawlor calls the "feminine principle." Wellman's studies of sacred geometry are expressed in her frequent use of the five-sided pentagon. In works such as the *Concentric Musings* (2000) and *The Big 5* (2005), the pentagon symbolizes humankind and cognition and takes on an almost anthropomorphic sensibility.

Meaning is contingent and fugitive in the works of Joyce Wellman. While she is clearly inspired by numbers, memories, intuition, and her own spiritual energy, she also incorporates history, mythology, random news, and fun! Yet many of these ideas and contexts are left unsaid, or "hidden." Wellman recognizes that meaning is derived by the viewer and she even proffers the possibility that the works may assert no meaning at all. Challenging the viewer to discern the "why," Wellman provides the raw materials that are then shaped differently in each individual encounter and continually evolve for both the artists and the viewer.

Number Works: Homage to Women in Mathematics invites us to reflect on the unsung women through the ages who have engaged the world of mathematics. Joyce Wellman's visual coded messages form a universe of their own where meaning is constructed through an intuitive exchange and each work has its own unique *raison d'être*. Fueled by an exuberant use of vibrant color, emotional gestures and intuitive markings, the codes, hues, and shapes we encounter in *Number Works* are never really random, they are the result of refined negotiation between structured mathematical analysis, cultural observation, memory, free styling, and sweet whispers.



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CENTER HOURS:

Monday-Friday, 8:30am-8:00pm; Saturday, 10am-4pm
Sunday, 10am-2pm (Gallery Only/No Office Hours)

DIRECTIONS: From the Capital Beltway or I-295, take the exit for Indian Head Highway South. Follow Indian Head Highway South for approximately 4 miles and turn right onto Fort Washington Road. Travel one traffic light and turn right onto Livingston Road. The Center is on the left at 10701 Livingston Road.



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