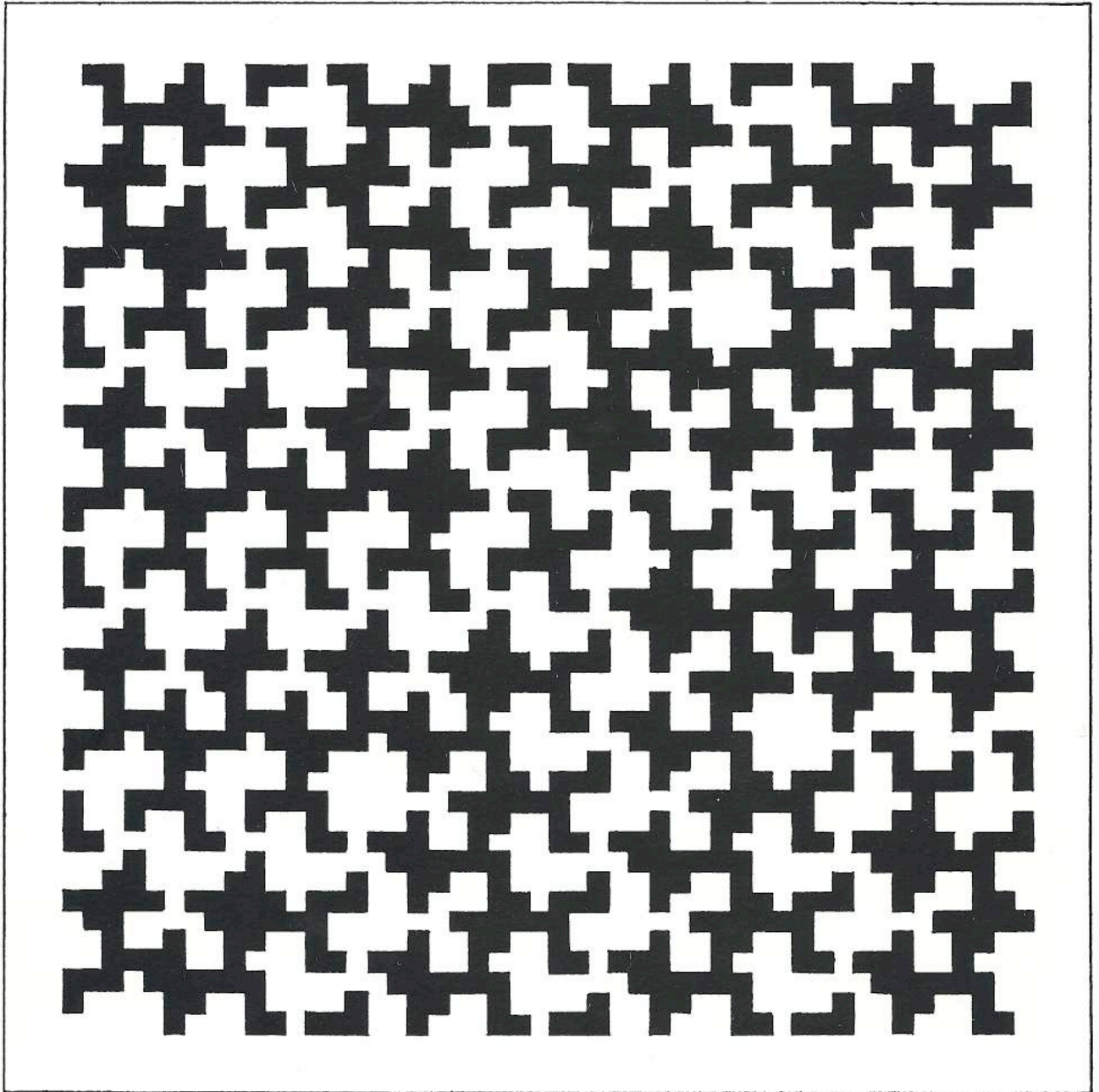


constructivist



f o r u m

Comments for the Constructivist Forum.

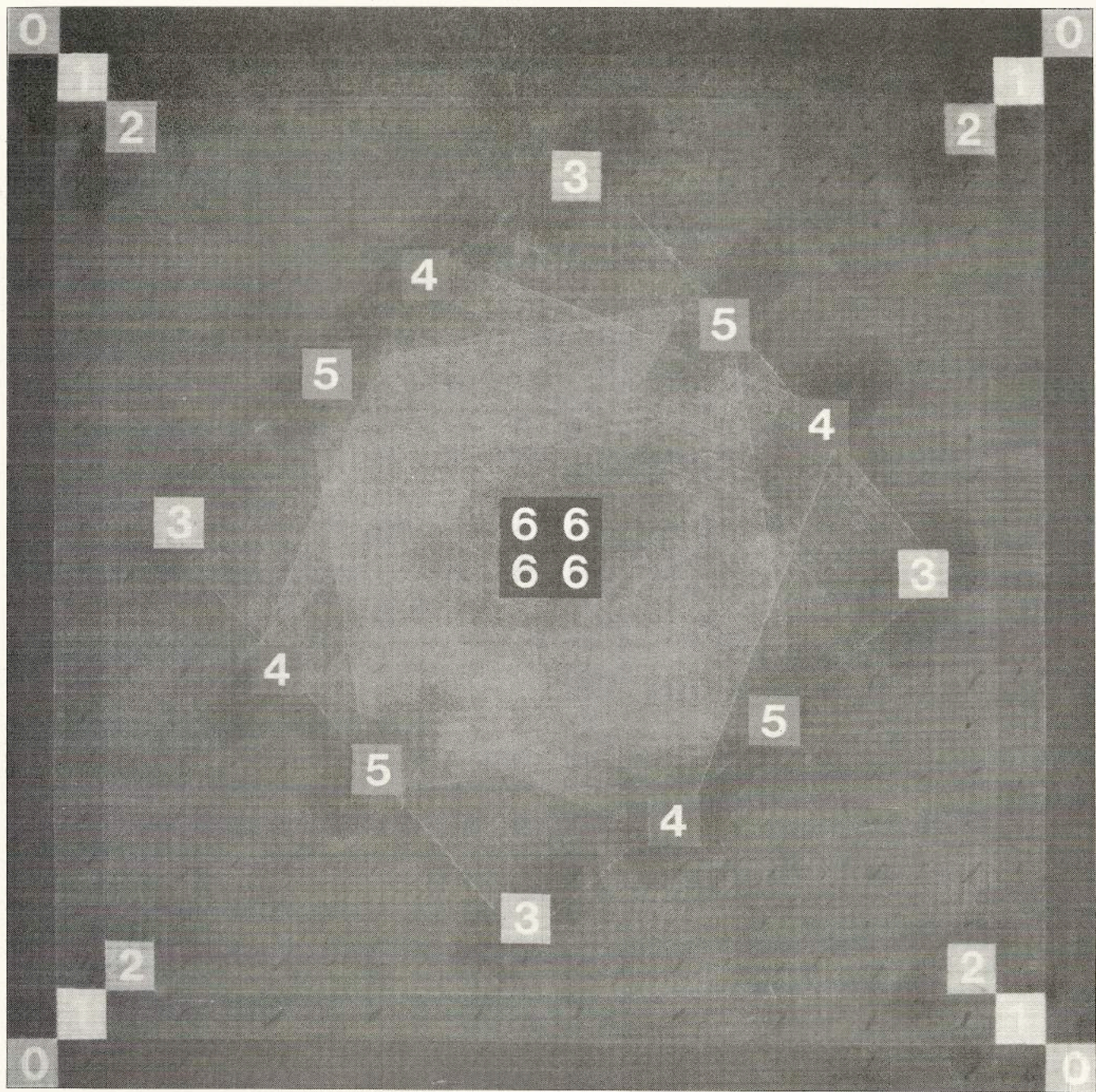
Chris Watts.

During a recent visit to the Rothko Chapel in Houston, I was reminded of the potential for spiritual content in geometric art and how important this was to the artists at the beginning of this century - in particular those who stood at the starting gate of what would eventually lead to Suprematism, Constructivism, Neo-plasticism, Constructionist, Systems Art etc..

The continued involvement with systematic arrangements and the thought processes inherent in such activity is perhaps linked to the spiritual reflection that is to be found in the contemplation of order.

I would like to feel that the spiritual wonder that is present when images founded on rules gel into recognizable symmetries still maintains some validity and interest. In my working process, the question that often comes to mind is "who made this?" Am I in the process of generating substratas that relate to order or am I just a conduit that uncovers or focuses attention on pre-existing deeper layers of recognizable structure?

My work continues to involve three processes, the generation of images according to basic rules, the examination of the results and the amplification of interesting relationships. Numbers are placed into environments according to variables that govern the size of the grid, the number of blank spaces between the digits and the general form of the linear configuration as described by the sequence of numbers and spaces. How are the bits loaded into the grid? In recent years, I have been particularly involved with the use of spiral formations in the generation of images. On viewing the work, the evidence of the spirals is not immediately apparent, rather they lay deep within the sub-structure of the painting. The work illustrated in this article is based on the use of four interlocking spirals; one spiral emanating from each corner of the grid. By keeping all but one variable constant in the work, I have noticed some consistencies with regard to patterning. For example, all images constructed in an even grid dimension, e.g. 24 x 24, generate symmetrical relationships and those evolved in odd grid dimensions, e.g. 23 x 23, result in asymmetrical formations. Also, if the grid dimension is expanded, e.g. 23 x 23, 24 x 24, 25 x 25, 26 x 26, etc., and all other variables remain constant, similiar formations will repeat at various stations along the expansion. It appears that an underlying rhythm, similiar to the Fibonacci sequence, determines the cycle of the pattern although much more work will be required in order to draw finite conclusions on this. In addition to exploring the expansion of the grid size and its effect on the pattern, I have also generated images in which all variables remain constant except the placing of spaces between digits. These range from no space to at least twenty four spaces, e.g.



1 - This figure illustrates the digit '6' along with its corresponding pixel intensity values. The digit is centered on a grid, and the numerical labels (0-6) indicate the intensity of each pixel. The background is dark (0), and the digit is formed by pixels with intensity values ranging from 3 to 6. The labels are placed on a grid that is 10 units wide and 10 units high.

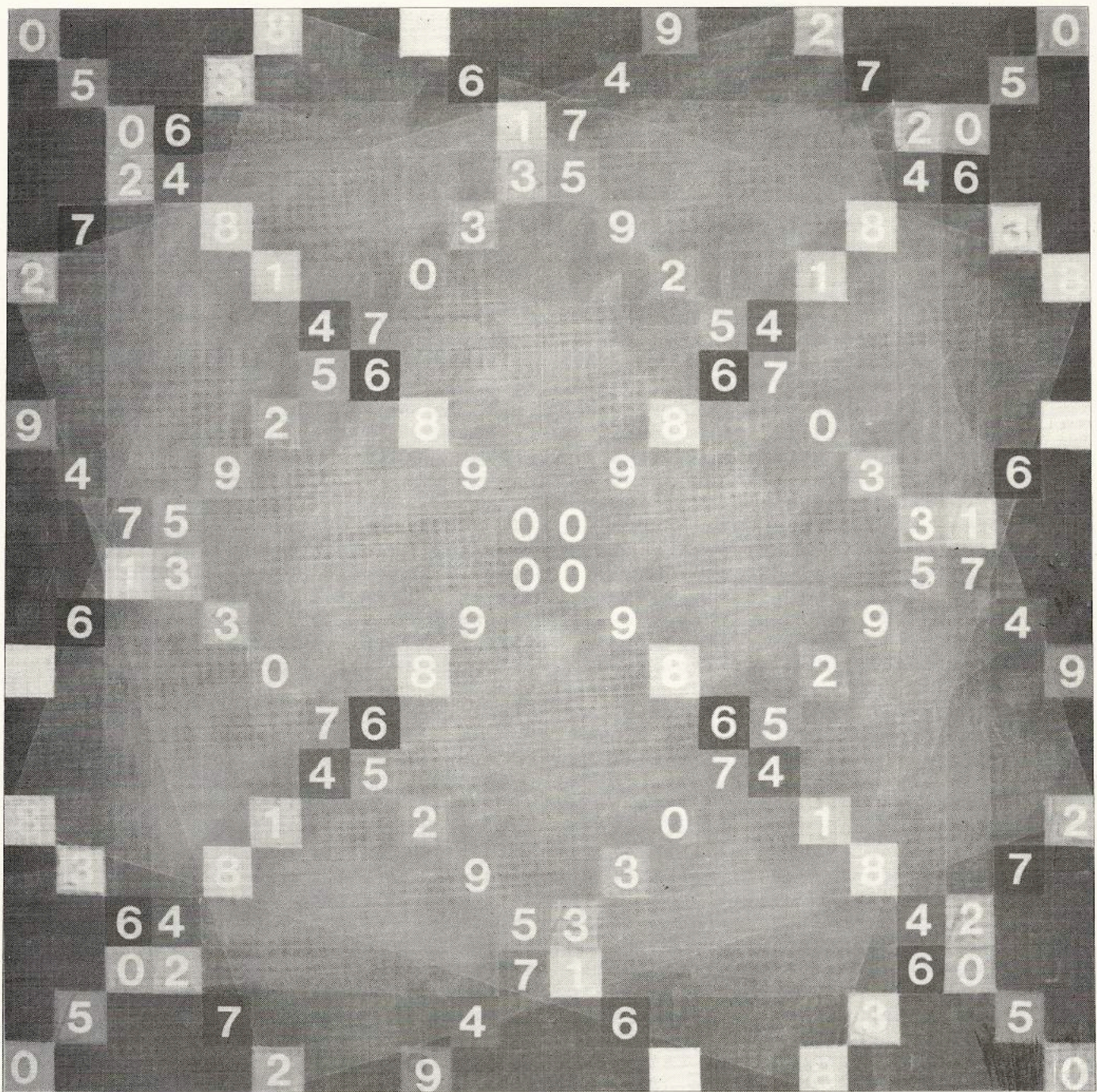
123456789

1 2 3
4 5
6 7 8
9

As with the effect of grid size on formations, the expansion of spaces between the numbers suggests a deeper order which quickly becomes traceable as the expansion between the digits increases; rather like particles moving in space to a centralized energy force.

The inclusion of numbers, within the visual appearance of the work is intended to assist the viewer in the uncovering of the various ordered layers that make up its construction. The sequential nature of the numbers allows the participant to trace linear configurations; also the locational character of a number draws attention to geometrical formations caused by the alignment of marks that have the same meaning. The sequential and locational attributes give the viewer the opportunity to test ideas concerning the process behind the visual configuration. The finished image provides three general areas for consideration; the viewer can attempt to unravel the images constructional history by deciphering the generative system employed, the individual can discover new relationships by testing ideas out on the work and finally the image can stimulate contemplation of what is seen, what is known and perhaps what is unknown, not unlike a map maker. As with a lot of systematically based work, the information and experience is slow to reveal itself.

Colour in many ways effects the attention span that a work of art can generate. Of all the elements in my work colour continues to provide a significant challenge. In some ways I relate colour to the speed of delivery for it can promote contemplation or generate very active response; it speaks to both intuitive dynamics and scientific process. One structural issue that I have tried to resolve is the relationship of colour to number. After spending many years working monochromatically, I researched into the Munsell system in an attempt to relate a ten based colour system to the ten marks 0 through 9. There are probably questions as to whether or not 0 should be given as much weight as the other digits; Ptolemy of course considered it the missing place. In time, I reached a reasonable relationship between the ten marks and ten colours, although considerable questions remained in my mind as to the sequence of the colours. Which colour was first, which one was last and were, in fact, the relationships arbitrary. Reflecting the ideas indicated at the beginning portion of this commentry I eventually looked elsewhere for a solution to the systematic synchronization of numbers and colours.



It is with some apprehension that I discuss the following, in that esoteric bases for developing work within the constructivist root stock is rarely discussed if not avoided. However, having searched through material concerning colour physics and colour theory, having filtered through to the contrasting points of view of Newton and Goethe, it seemed to me that opinion on colour structure and interaction was an open one. Certainly the models on colour contained in Theosophical or Anthroposophical libraries are provocative. Eventually, in addition to incorporating colour interaction as a basis for the general colour usage in my paintings, I also placed the number marks on squares of colour that relate to a system found in numerology; this has some link to Pythagorean ideas. For the time being this unconventional relationship answers the problem of the number and colour linkage. It also places in the work another possibility for the viewer in terms of the notion of systematic art having inherent mystery.

In this commentary, I have tried to shed some light on the construction of my work and thoughts concerning the possibility of a spiritual pulse for images born out of Constructivism. Contained in any healthy system is the possibility of new growth; some artists are involved in testing provocative additions to what has gone before, others work deep within the systems infrastructure defining interior mechanisms, still others delve into the root stock, reminding us of initial directions or sources and many of us engage in aspects of all three. As with all adventures, change is inevitable, it is hard to project where I will be with my work in ten years. While looking to the future I am sensitive to the past and in turn I trust that the past will not inhibit my progress.

I send my best wishes to my friends and colleagues.

1. Four Spirals Intertwined
22 x 22 Nineteen Space
44" x 44" Acrylic on Paper 1988
2. Four Spirals Intertwined
22 x 22 Three Space
44" x 44" Acrylic on Paper 1988
3. Four Spirals Intertwined
24 x 24 Three Space
48" x 48" Acrylic on Paper 1988

