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Whitney Museum of American Art

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Architecture By Numbers
at Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria

From March 25 to July 9, 2004, the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria will present *Architecture By Numbers*, an exhibition that investigates architecture and its essential relationship with the numerical. The exhibition includes drawings, digital prints, and three-dimensional work by Preston Scott Cohen, Marsha Cottrell, Michelle Fornabai, Laura Kurgan, and Ben Nicholson. *Architecture By Numbers* has been organized by the Whitney Museum's adjunct curator of architecture, K. Michael Hays.

The five architects in this exhibition seek out numerical information in the architectures of objects, places, or ideas of such singularity that some may see the projects as aberrations or even obsessions. The obsessions include the mystical numbering systems of labyrinths, the digital record of extreme landscapes, complex geometrical transformations or even the landscapes of information that can be derived from punctuation marks.

From the very beginnings of architectural theory as it emerged out of Pythagorean-Platonic philosophies of harmony and proportion, to our own time when, it seems, the entirety of our experience has become digitized, architecture has been understood as a fulcrum between the material world of things and their construction, and the transcendent mathematics of the cosmos itself. Architecture exists in these projects not as a practice of building, but as a frame for thinking about specific artistic or social problems such as authorship and production, the abstract calculations endemic to contemporary space versus the particularity of spatial experience, or sociological representation versus individual expression. Architecture exists in these projects as patterns that map culture's unconscious.

Architecture By Numbers is partially funded by the Architecture Committee, Whitney Museum of American Art.

Ben Nicholson — part architect, part mathematician, part iconologist — explores the numerology of labyrinths and the taxonomy of geometries in obsessively precise drawings and analytic notes. His ultimate goal is to correlate number, geometry, and religion, in particular the three Abrahamic religions that have made such important contributions to architecture's history.

Preston Scott Cohen also begins in geometry, but now geometry turned back on itself, taking itself as its own subject matter. In meticulously drafted constructions, Cohen transmutes architectural figures into perspectives of perspectives, until they finally become nothing more than

traces of projective geometrical processes. The animation on the LCD screen is a demonstration of similar processes performed digitally.

The digital information behind **Marsha Cottrell's** work originates from keyboard characters that have been strewn, layered, repeated, scaled, spliced, and organized into myriad configurations. The typewritten units, altered in stages and subjected to an untraceable series of improvisational actions, are the foundation of a vast and expanding digital library. Cottrell extracts from and adds to this repository of virtual debris as she builds the drawing.

Laura Kurgan uses digital images, acquired by Ikonos and QuickBird satellites. The geographic location of each photograph — latitude and longitude — is expressed as a number corresponding to a unique position on the earth that the satellite's sensors are instructed to record. The heat value of each position is expressed as a number that is in turn assigned a standard color.

Between numerical information and its manipulation, and the materials and techniques of fabrication, lies the idea of pattern as explored by **Michelle Fornabai**. She uses mathematical algorithms to produce a series of bands of material heat-formed into reiterative loops. The resulting screen produces the visual effects of fluctuating interference and pulsating pattern.

Free gallery talks are offered every Wednesday and Friday at 1:00p.m.
The Whitney Museum at Altria is funded by Altria Group, Inc.