



## Jennifer Ralph on WHAT'S NEXT

## SHATTERING THE BOUNDARIES OF PERCEPTION—An Interview with Artist and Physicist Christian J. Faur

Imagine the scope of an artistic creation that encompasses the finesse of the Old Masters and the raw aesthetic of mathematics. Confused? Try envisioning a seven-year-old-girl, dressed in a simple white nightgown, an apprehensive, yet hungry expression playing gently across her smooth, unsullied cheeks. Now, place that child against an abstract background flooded with mathematical equations and coded technological information. Allow the elements of innocence and knowledge to exist in the same space, circling each other in an eternal battle for dominance. The juxtaposed images communicate the unavoidable loss of innocence inherent with the growth of the human mind. Christian J. Faur, an artist and physicist residing in the Columbus, Ohio, area, draws inspiration from the complicated relationship formed when human perception and empirical knowledge collide. Born in New York in 1968, Faur, a self-taught artist, followed the path forged by the Old Masters, such as Rembrandt and Caravaggio. Through years of experimentation he has emerged with a creative method that fuses centuries old painting techniques, mathematical theory, and post-modern philosophy.

*Do you consider yourself a physicist or an artist first?*

Faur: I consider myself an artist; art has always been an integral part of my life. So, how did I go about getting a degree in physics? I went into the army for three years to earn money for an education. It was an intense experience, but it gave me a chance to see Europe, and that was where I discovered the Old Masters. I traveled as much as possible and saw as many museums as I could. When I returned to the United States, I knew I wanted to paint, but I also needed to sup-



port myself. I ended up pursuing a degree in physics and education. I found, as a visual artist, that although I loved mathematics, it was the most difficult thing for me. I took as many math classes on top of my degree as possible. In 1999, my wife accepted a tenured position at Dennison here in Ohio, and I had a year off, which is when I began to truly incorporate my love of mathematics into my painting.

*How do you incorporate mathematics into your figurative and abstract work?*

Faur: I begin with the mathematical proofs and numerical sequences, priming the canvas with gesso and silk screens. It creates these beautiful white raised letters and numbers like Braille. At that point it is almost too beautiful to paint over, so, of course, the first thing I do is paint over it. I work with the typical Old Masters technique, utilizing under painting and glazes, painting the figure over the raised bits. After I paint, I layer, placing more stencils onto the existing work. Then I paint again with the next color set. I work the abstract and the figurative intermittently until I get a composition that has what I want it to say.

*Are there certain mathematical theories that you like to incorporate into your paintings?*

Faur: Some of the common images you see in my paintings are prime knots and prime number sequences. Like all numbers, all knots are made up of prime knots. I wanted to include that concept of "prime-ness" in my work. I love the idea that there is an infinite set of occurrences in our lives that exists along a continuum. In reality, we are only affected occasionally by prime events that stand out in our memory and shape our existence. Those moments, or "prime numbers" in our continuum, define us. I use prime number sets and prime knots in that way.

*Are you concerned that your usage of mathematical theory will intimidate viewers?*

Faur: I think what intimidates people about any art is the possibility that they do not understand what they are seeing. I realize that mathematics, like art, is an intimidating discipline. A person can see a mathematical theory written on a wall, and like abstract art, they know it has meaning, but they may or may not grasp the theory. It is only recently that the majority of people feel comfortable looking at abstract art and not feeling like they need a seven-year degree to comprehend the meaning. Now, at least, the general population is beginning to appreciate and enjoy the work for what understanding they can bring to it. By blending disciplines and creating a unique visual aesthetic, I am hoping to achieve that sense of accessibility in my own work.

Christian J. Faur, like many mathematicians and artists, spends his creative energy dissecting the maddening beauty of human existence. Through a brilliant fusion of mathematical theory and aesthetics, Faur has managed to transcend the struggle. His work shatters the compartmentalized disciplines of art and math and creates a new vision of the world that we inhabit. ●