

## BRIGITA OZOLINS

### Strength in numbers

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*Everything around you is mathematics. Everything around you is numbers.*

— Shakuntala Devi

*Numbers are the language of nature.*

— Galileo Galilei

*Strength in Numbers* is an exhibition of new work that celebrates the power, symbolism and visual beauty of numbers. It features Prime numbers, the Fibonacci sequence, Pi, the magical 42, which according to Douglas Adam's *Hitchhikers guide to the Galaxy*, is the answer to the mystery of the universe, as well as mathematical symbols and numbers of cultural significance.

*Strength in Numbers* is a reaction to the chaos of current global events. I turned to numbers because numbers are the basic components of the language used to calculate the way our universe operates. Numbers are the language of nature, said Galileo, and numbers do not lie.

The exhibition consists of twenty-two birch ply panels inlaid with black acrylic and hot pink mirrored Perspex. While black can be associated with darkness and mourning, it also represents elegance, power, strength and mystery. The black inlays are both shiny and matte, reflecting light but at times also seeming to disappear into their dark stained background. The black is juxtaposed with pink, a colour that represents warmth, comfort, peace and femininity. It is also the colour of love. In these works, I have used hot pink, contrasting the seriousness, mystery and depth of black with vibrance, playfulness and boldness.

Strength in numbers is about the co-existence of opposites, the possibility of darkness and a sense of fun coming together. This is particularly evident in the more minimal works which feature zeros, ones, equals and plus signs, and a hashtag. Two works even mimic the basic concepts of a face.

Others feature Fibonacci numbers, where each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers. The sequence is attributed to the medieval Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci and is often described as a magical series associated with harmony and perfection. It is evident in nature, such as the branching of trees, the way leaves are arranged on a stem, and the spiral forms of nautilus shells and galaxies. Fibonacci numbers also reflect the golden ratio or divine proportion, as seen in art and architecture – the Great Pyramid at Giza, the Parthenon and Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. They are also used to create algorithms and predict trends in financial markets.

The number Pi features in a work called Pink Pi – the only completely pink work in the exhibition. Pi is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter and is one of the most widely known mathematical constants. It is used in architecture, engineering and to communicate with satellites. Without Pi we would not be able to predict the weather, track shipping routes, or use Google maps.

Prime numbers appear in two different panels. They are the basic, indivisible components from which all positive integers are formed and are the building blocks of all mathematics. They play a pivotal role in cryptography such as online transactions and remain mysterious because their sequencing is random and unpredictable.

Several panels feature the number 42 which A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy claims is the ultimate answer to life, the universe and everything. Of course, Tasmania is 42 degrees south, so perhaps our island can claim to hold the meaning of all things.

One panel highlights 42 along with a series of other, seemingly random numbers which are notable for their cultural associations:

- 3 symbolises the holy trinity in Christianity but is also significant in Hinduism and other mythologies and folklore (3 little pigs, 3 bears, 3 wishes).
- 4 is considered unlucky in China, Japan and Korea because it sounds similar to the word death in each language.
- 7 is considered lucky in many Western cultures.
- 8 is lucky in Chinese culture because of its similarity to the word for prosperity.
- 12 has many associations, from a dozen, to the number of months in a year, the number of Zodiac astrological signs, and the number of Apostles of Jesus.
- 13, a baker's dozen, is considered unlucky in Western cultures.
- 17 is unlucky in countries of Greek and Latin origins.
- 18 is considered lucky in Jewish numerology and in numerology is linked to energy, focus, willpower, and drive.
- 21 represent resurrection and rebirth in the Bible, and is associated with luck, prosperity and success in numerology.
- 40 is a significant number in the belief system called Tengrism, and also in Turkish folklore. Many other customs, such how many days one must visit someone after a death in the family, include the number forty.
- 42 is the ultimate answer to the mysteries of the universe.
- 86 is used in American popular culture meaning to throw out or get rid of.
- 666 is associated with the Antichrist or evil in the Book of Revelation.
- 108 is sacred in the Dharmic religions.
- 420 or 'weed number' is code for consuming cannabis.
- 786 is sacred in the Muslim Abjad numerology.
- 5040 is claimed by Plato to be the ideal number of citizens for a polis or city, and important because it is easily divisible.

*Strength in Numbers* also includes a number of small panels that simply celebrate the aesthetics of numbers and mathematical symbols. These include zeros and ones, the two beautifully minimal components of binary code. One little panel spells out the word LOVE in hot pink code.

Numbers are powerful. They have complex spiritual and cultural meaning, their sequences underscore the structure of nature and the world around us, and they provide the key to understanding how our universe operates. While there are many mysteries associated with numbers, numbers never lie.