



APRIL & MAY 2010

## Odds and Evens

Alfred Jensen

*Beginning Study for Changes and Communication*



### VISIT THE BMA

and see Alfred  
Jensen's number  
painting in the  
Contemporary Wing.  
Bring your calculator!

Alfred Jensen (American, born Guatemala, 1903-1981). Detail, *Beginning Study for Changes and Communication*. 1978. Oil on canvas. 114 x 96 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchased with exchange funds from Bequest of Saidie A. May, BMA 1989.2 ©The Baltimore Museum of Art

Here's a painting that hits you in the eye with numbers—more than 1,000 of them! They fill the canvas, packed tightly into 16 brightly-colored blocks. Most of the numbers pop right out at you but others are difficult to see as they sink into the color of the background.

Alfred Jensen loved numbers. He thought they were magical and mysterious, and he found great satisfaction in arranging them in logical patterns. Can you figure out the system that he devised for this painting?

- The block in the upper left corner is made of yellow, orange, and red “frames” that surround a central white area. Determine how the four numbers relate to each other, then find a second block that is the next logical step in that pattern. Trace a path from block to block, following the same number pattern, until you reach the end at 64.
- Start over again in the upper right corner. What is different about these numbers? Where does their path lead?
- What else can you discover? In each horizontal row, add the CENTER number of each block. (The top row would be  $2+58+57+1$ .) In each vertical column, do the same. (The leftmost column would be  $2+50+41+25$ .) Are you surprised?

Now add ALL the numbers across each horizontal row (The top row would be  $2+4+6+8+58+60+62$  etc. ...) Then do the same for each vertical column (The leftmost column would be  $2+4+6+8+50+52+54$  etc. ...) What do you find?

- Are the 16 blocks the same size? Are they perfectly aligned? Find a place in the center of the painting where Jensen jerry-rigged his pattern. Why was this necessary?

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Look for more patterns. Which areas have black-on-white numbers? Which have white-on-black? Invent your own logical system for arranging numbers in a pattern or design. Try using a triangle or circle instead of a rectangle. Make your system clear enough so that somebody else can figure it out.

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**



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# Changes and Communication.

