

BERNARD COHEN

INTERIORS

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14 April - 22 May 2021

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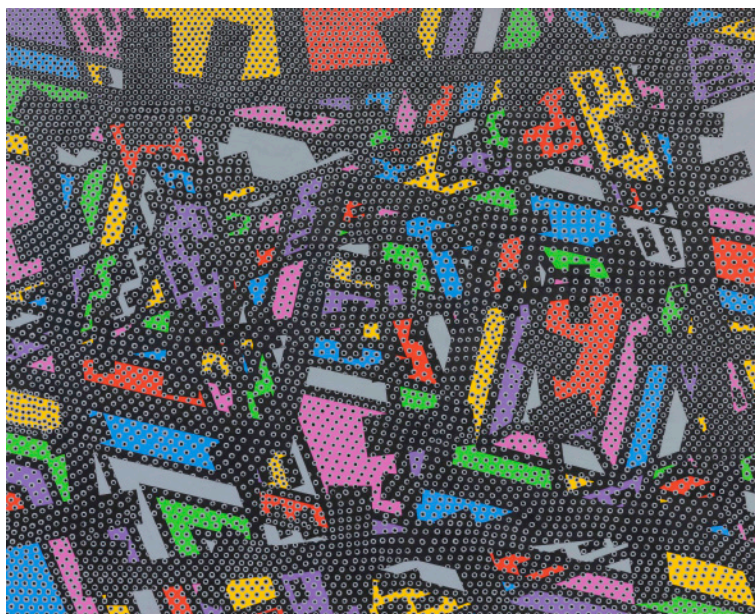
Bernard Cohen is considered one of Britain's most significant painters, whose paintings tell stories about identity and experience. *Interiors* is an exhibition of recent works demonstrating Cohen's sustained enquiry into the complex chaos of everyday existence.

Since the 1950s, Cohen has developed a wide range of inventive techniques and processes of painting, creating labyrinthine compositions of line, shape, pattern and colour. His paintings will often tell many stories at once, using distinctive strategies of layering, superimposing, and condensing multiple images to establish intricate networks and relationships.

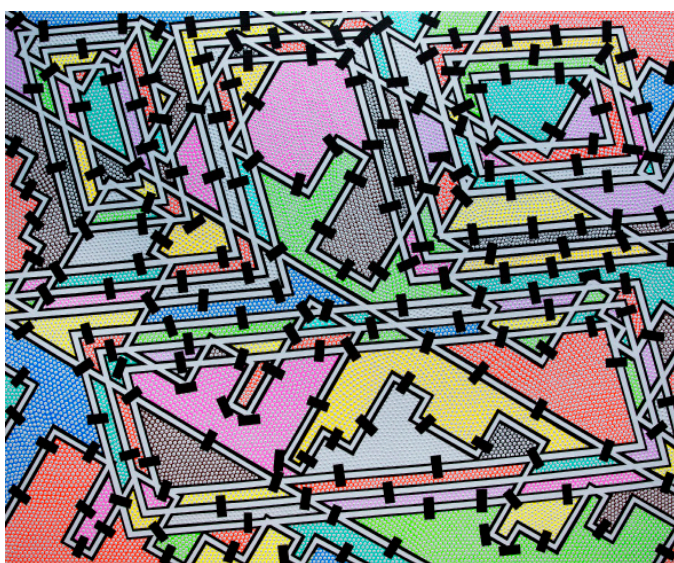
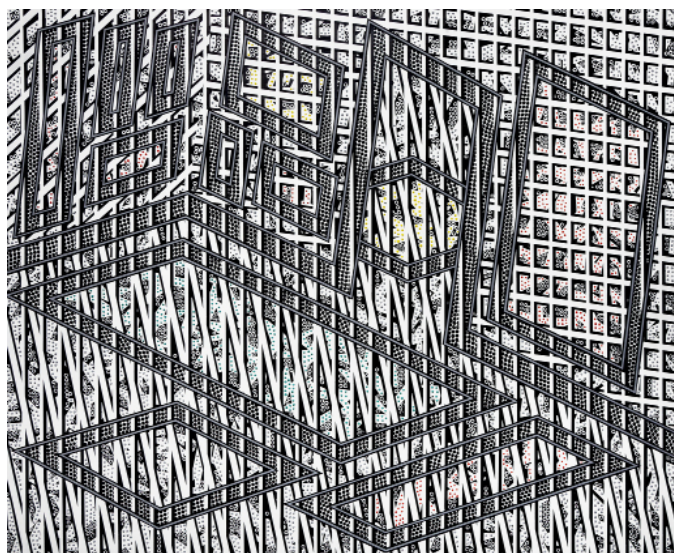
In a Spotlight exhibition at Tate Britain in 2017, Cohen's paintings were described as being, both individually and as a whole, "*a series of diagrams about painting.*" This approach developed during the 1960s, with works that incorporated many small independent paintings within the same canvas. (For example, *Matter of Identity*, 1963, in the Tate collection.) Cohen refers to the inner paintings as "*small objects, that together establish the identity of the whole painting*". In the recent works in this exhibition, recurring individual figurative motifs such as doors, windows, airplanes, paw marks and railway tracks are interlaced to form an accumulative coherence and logic. The motifs are always rooted in personal experience, as Cohen explains: "*There is nothing that appears in my paintings that hasn't been seen by me or experienced by me. I paint things that I've seen, things that are part of the everyday, the ordinary. Among things that I see are random things: the way things overlap or interfere with each other. The random has become a very important part of my painting.*"

Cohen credits the beginning of his interest in interiors as a subject for his work with an encounter with Velázquez's 1656 painting *Las Meninas* and what he describes as "*the extraordinary way in which [Velázquez] made everything in the space I was occupying part of the painting, so that half the painting is of things outside of the canvas.*" Cohen's paintings similarly operate around the complex space of the picture plane, navigating the unseen border that separates, in his own words, "*what is in the spectator's world from what is in the painting*".

The composition of the painting *How to Paint the Milky Way* is underpinned by a cosmos of dots, overlaid by a random configuration of airplane symbols and various cube-like planes and lattices that together make up a domestic scene of a doorway, pictures on the wall and a carpet on the floor. Cohen recalls: "*During a long stay in New Mexico I experienced a daylight that was so bright that it voraciously consumed objects, while at night at 10,000 feet, away from any artificial light, the Milky Way appeared as one overwhelming physical object. I was overwhelmed by the density of what I saw. What is a painting and what fills it? Where is its all-containing identity? I continue to ask myself these questions.*"



Interiors, 2020, acrylic on linen, 120 x 150 cm



Captions clockwise from top left: *How to Paint the Milky Way*, 2014, acrylic on linen, 137 x 168cm; *Clown*, 2019, acrylic on linen, 137 x 168 cm; *Pictorial*, 2017, acrylic on linen, 137 x 168cm.

For more information and images please contact
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ABOUT BERNARD COHEN

Born in London in 1933, Bernard Cohen studied at the Slade School of Fine Art from 1951-1954. In 1988 he was appointed as Slade Professor and Director of the Slade School of Fine Art, University College, London. Cohen came to prominence during the 1960s and has since exhibited widely. His first solo exhibition with Flowers Gallery was in 1998. In 2007 the gallery hosted *Bernard Cohen: Paintings from the Sixties*, focusing on an important period in Cohen's artistic development, followed by *Work of Six Decades* in 2009, which celebrated his career by bringing together a selection of key works and the publication of a comprehensive book. A subsequent survey exhibition titled *About Now: Paintings and Prints 2000-2015* took place at Flowers Gallery in 2015, accompanied by the book *About Now* by Ian McKay. Other important exhibitions include *Artist in Focus*, *Six Paintings from the Tate Gallery Collection*, The Tate Gallery, London in 1995; *Stroll on! Aspects of British Abstract Art in the Sixties*, Mamco, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva in 2006; *Abstraction and the Human Figure* at CAM's British Art Collection, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon in 2010; and a solo retrospective *Spotlight Display* at Tate Britain in 2017-18. Bernard Cohen lives and works in London. Ten of Cohen's paintings are in the Tate collection, and his work is included in numerous public collections worldwide.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Opening Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 11am - 5pm or by appointment.

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