

Bernard Cohen
As In That Moment

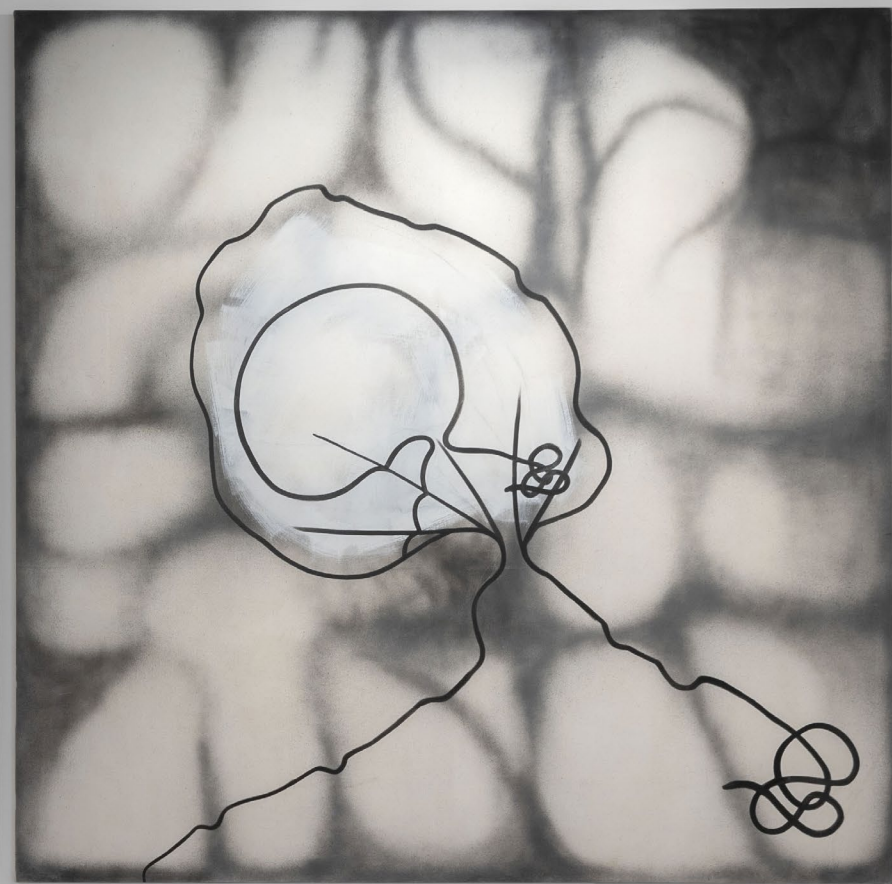
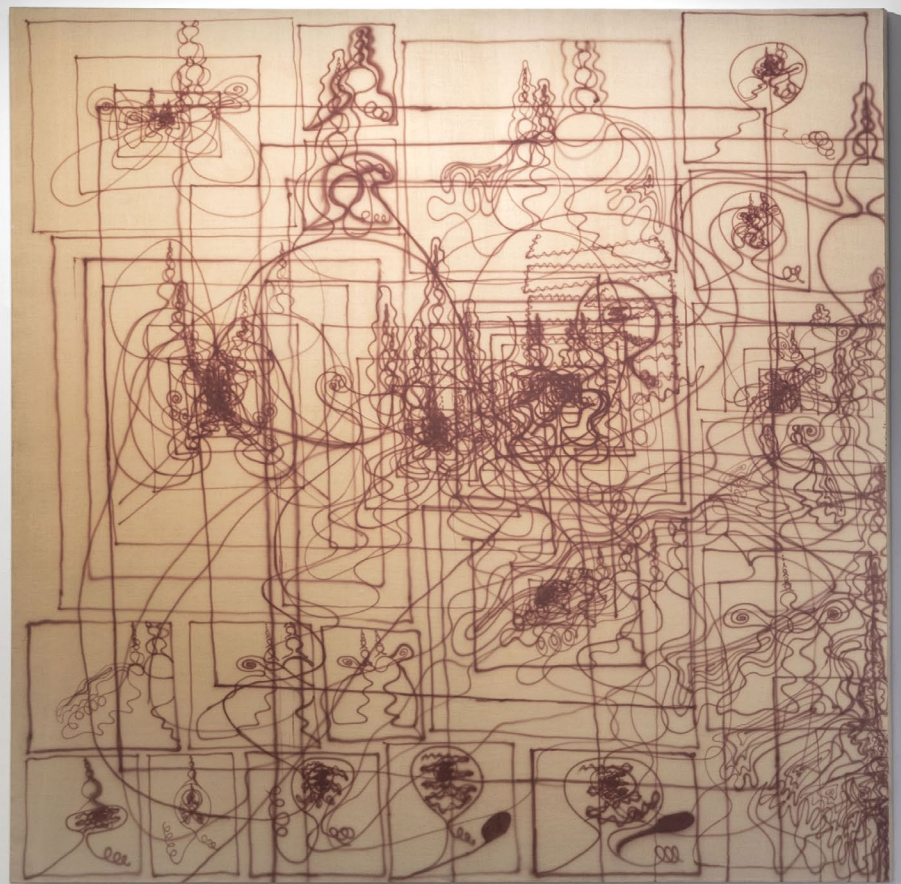
7 October - 30 November 2024

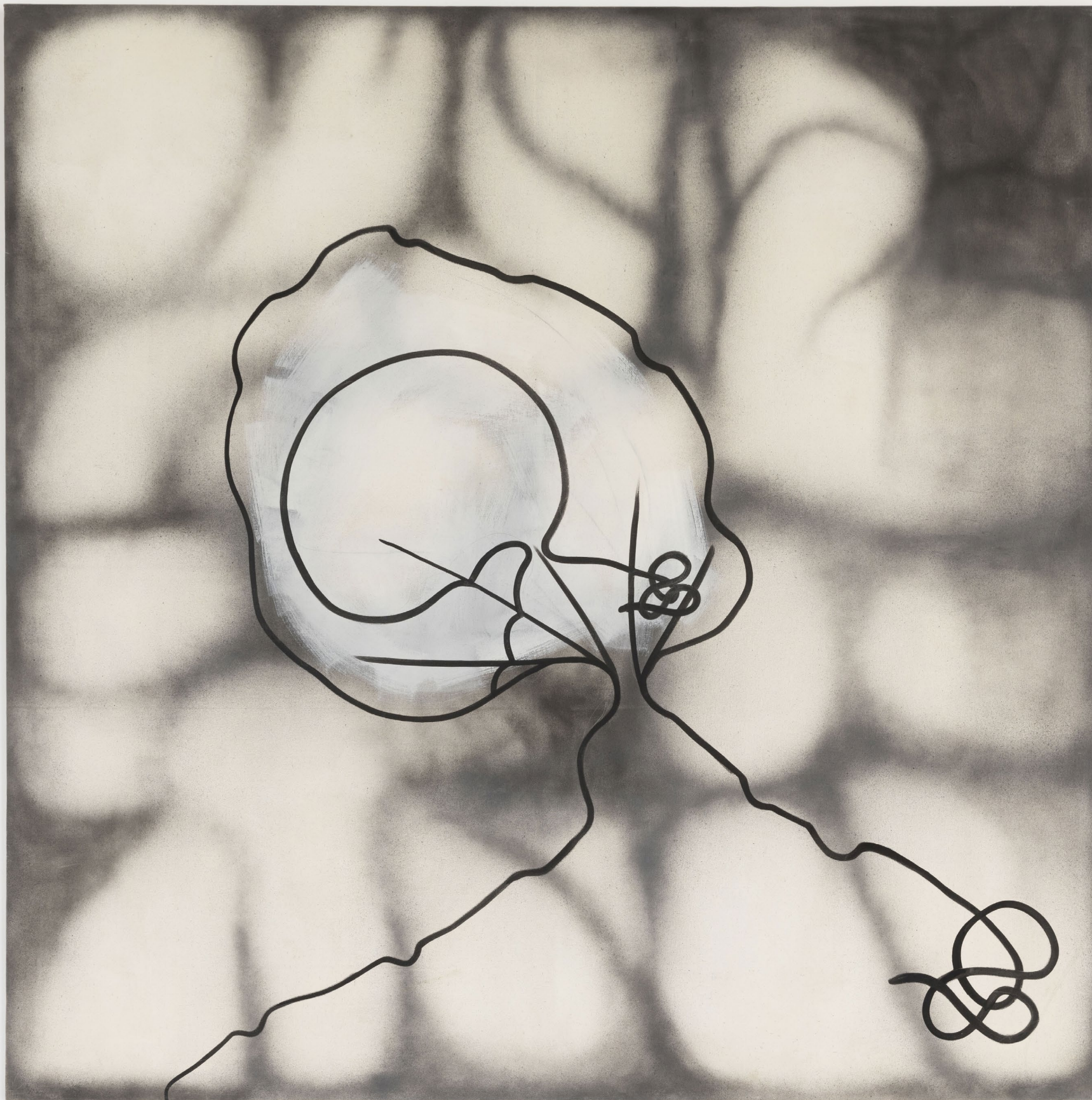
Surveying significant works by Bernard Cohen (b 1933) from the 1960s through the early 2000s, *As In That Moment* celebrates the acclaimed British artist's tensely wrought and unpredictably complex paintings. Throughout his career, the process of moving forward and not revisting earlier works became increasingly important to Cohen, along with presenting “authentic gestures” to the viewer as his paintings grew progressively intricate.



As I moved into the seventies and then on into the eighties and nineties, the 'simple' questions I had posed myself in the sixties were compounding. I began to think about time, in ever-more concrete terms. I wanted to make time as real for myself as my paint, brushes and canvas. Arriving at an overall form for a painting was taking far longer than it had previously... I do not develop theories; I feel that a painting needs something and the feeling nags away at me until I have to do something about it. Will the result of what I do be a better or worse painting than that of what I had been doing? That is never my concern.

- Bernard Cohen, 2009



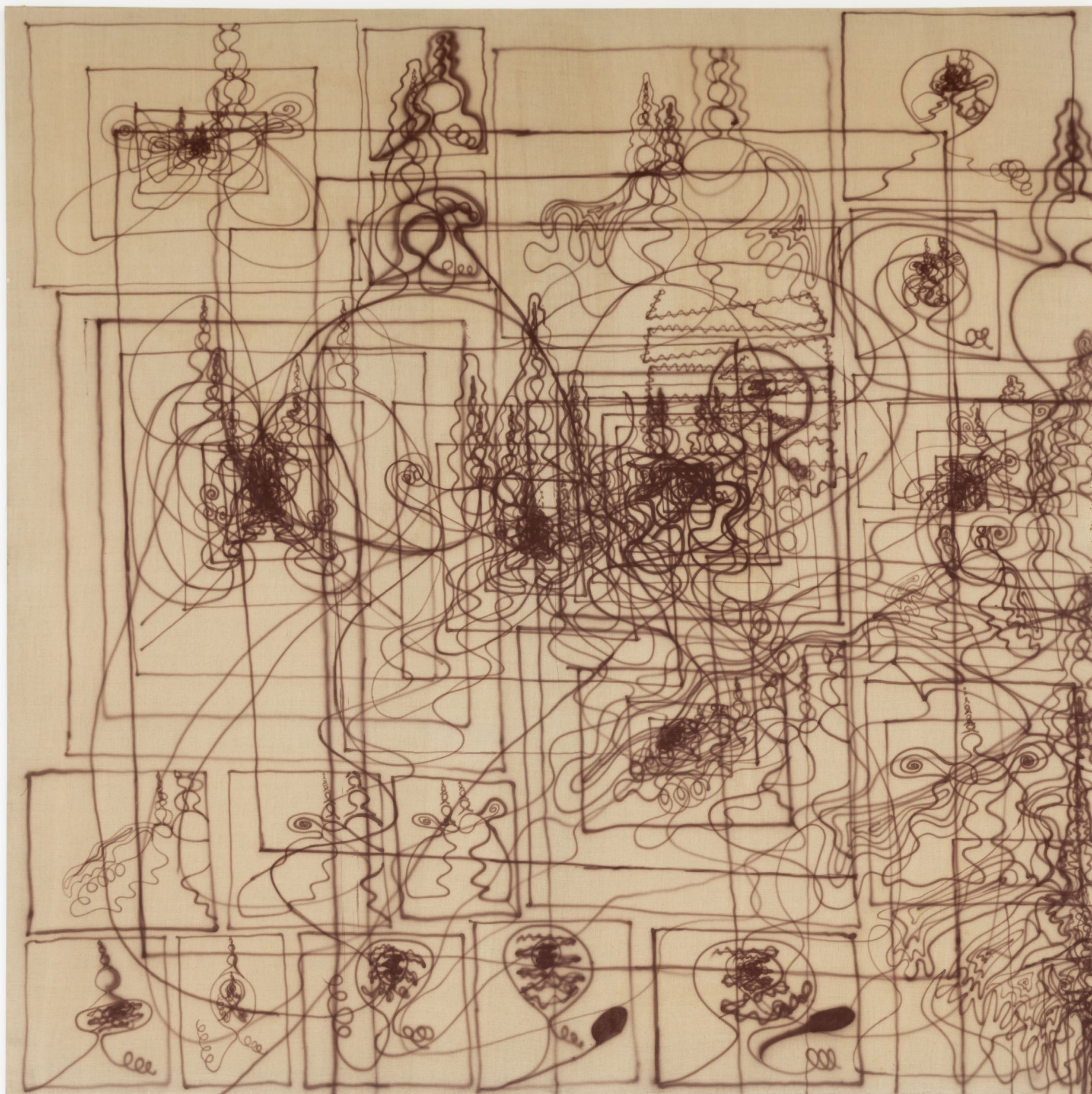


Generation, 1962
Egg tempera and oil on linen
244 x 244 cm

A predominately monochromatic image, *Generation* is formatted with two main components, the shadowy white and black background with a long black wavering line ending in a knot. This large canvas is a significant milestone within Cohen's early practice, as it was the first time he applied paint by spraying, creating an overall divided composition of abstraction. The black-outlined shape, reminiscent of an internal organ, is repeated within, coiling around itself when it encounters the folds of the larger encompassing shape.

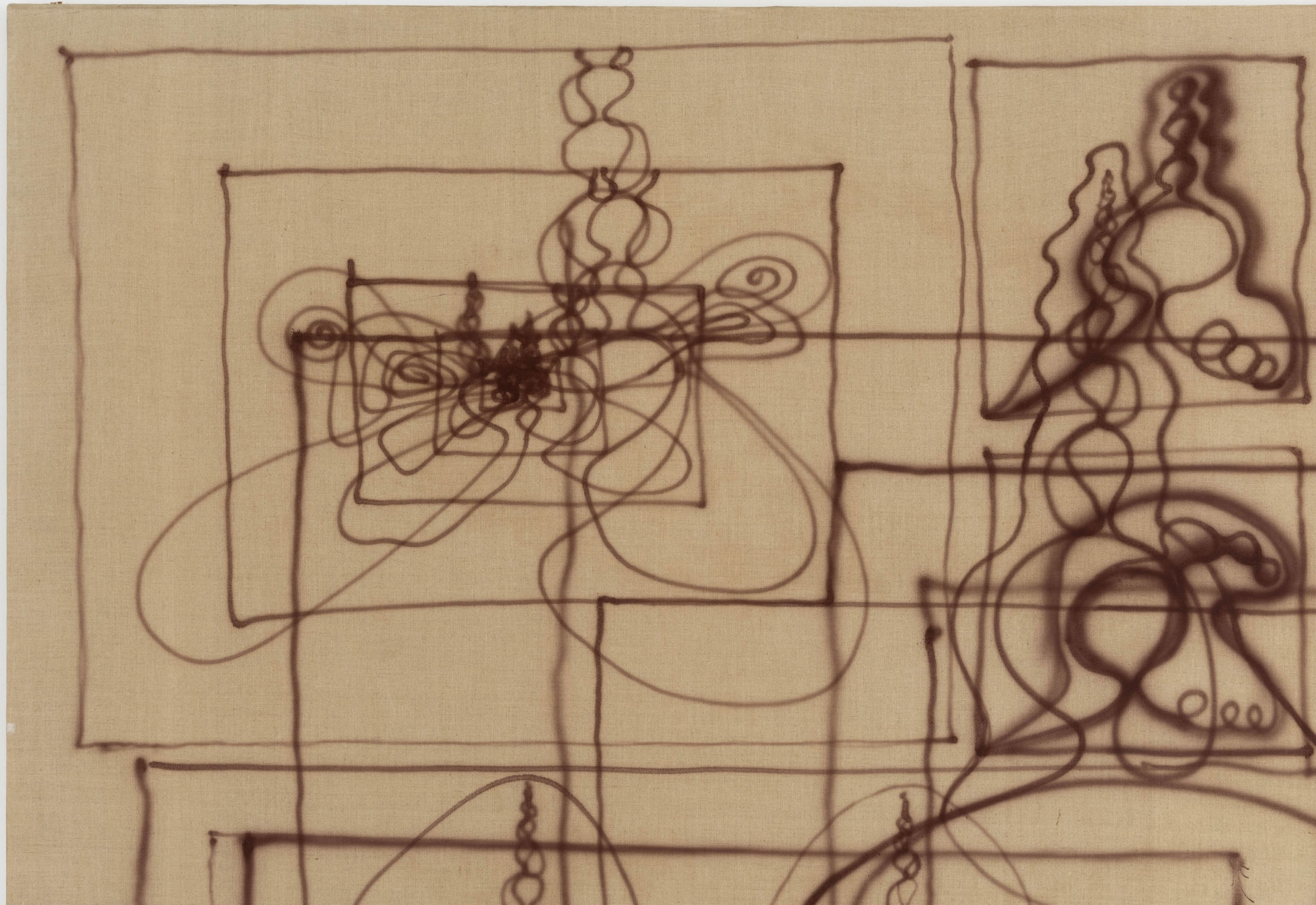
Exhibited in the Arts Council's touring exhibition of Cohen's work commencing at the Hayward Gallery, London, in 1972, *Generation* is an archetype for Cohen's preoccupation with the determining impact of any consequence once taken, and the ripple effect it has on the actions to follow. The black line's trajectory is emblematic of layers of containment and limitation. A muted background creates an ambiguous and asymmetric picture plane, with the reduction of colour to black and white hinting at an association with sonography, the irregular surface both optical and abstract. Its style relies heavily upon the rawness of the material and composition, providing the elements within a substantial freedom, allowing shapes and lines to dominate the painting.

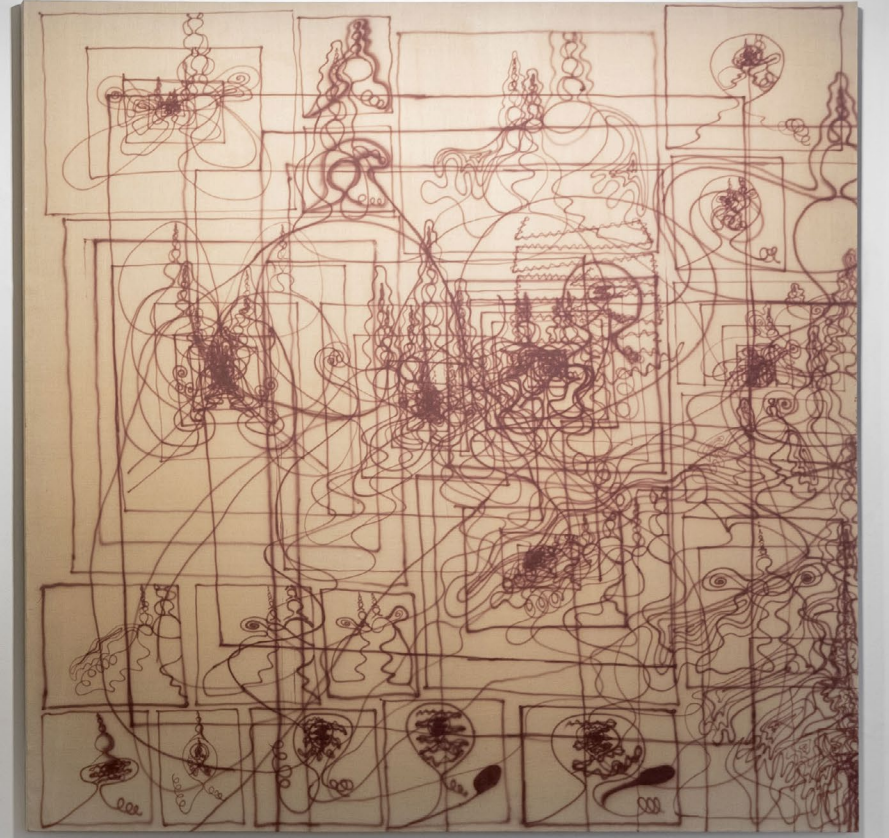


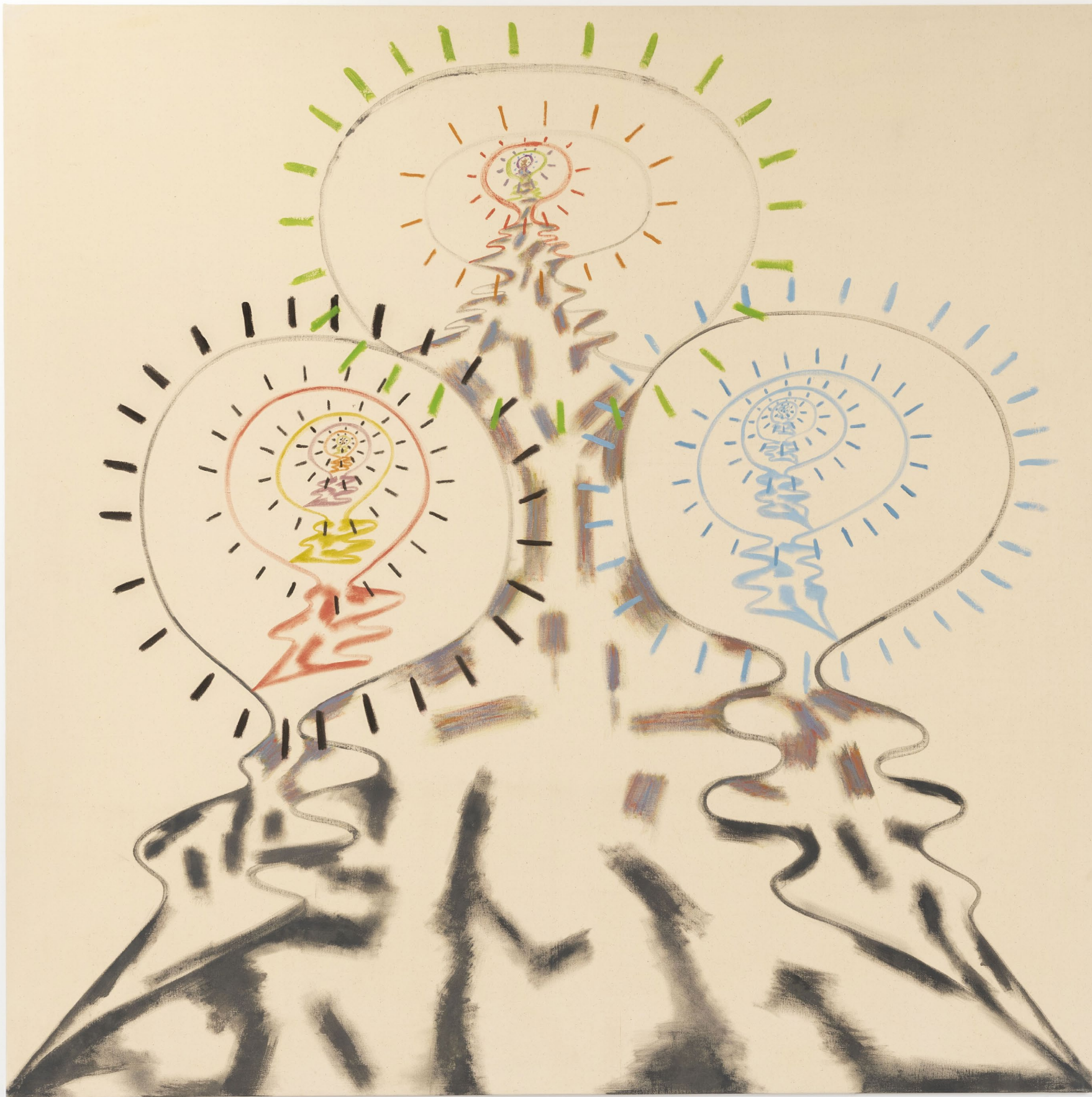


Sprayed Plum on Raw Canvas I, 1963
Egg tempera on canvas
244 x 244 cm

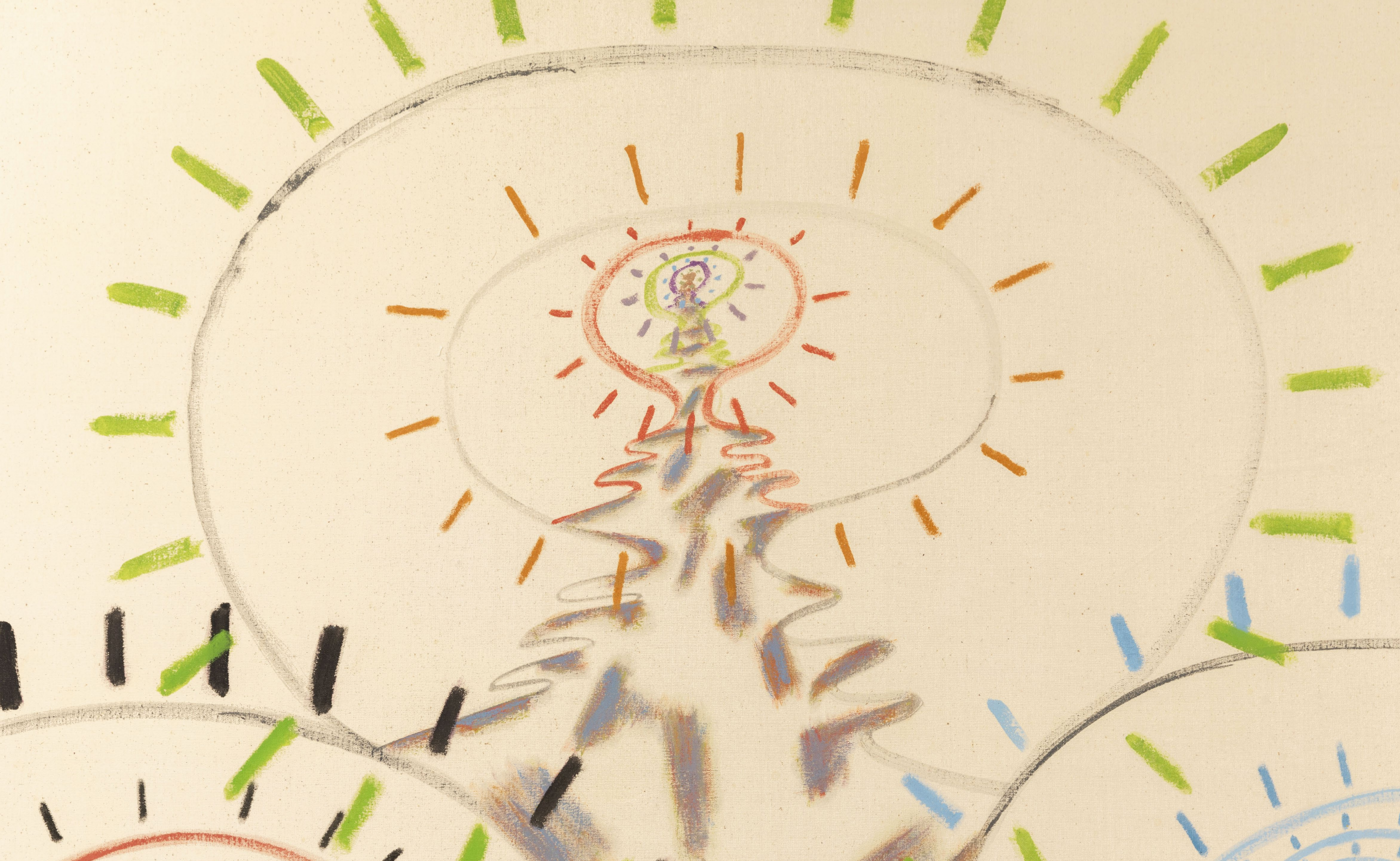
Sprayed Plum on Raw Canvas I (1963) is part of a series of three paintings concerned with the establishment of amalgamating delicate lines with a soft focus, generated by the airbrush, allowing Cohen to stand away from the canvas, not needing to touch its surface. The work explores mirrored images, which were not introduced into the painting from external influences but expanded from the movement of the line. Cohen was interested in creating symbols that should obtain existence and significance not from prior circumstances but by interchanging to construct stories within individual works.







Empire, 1962
Oil on canvas
243.5 x 243.5 cm



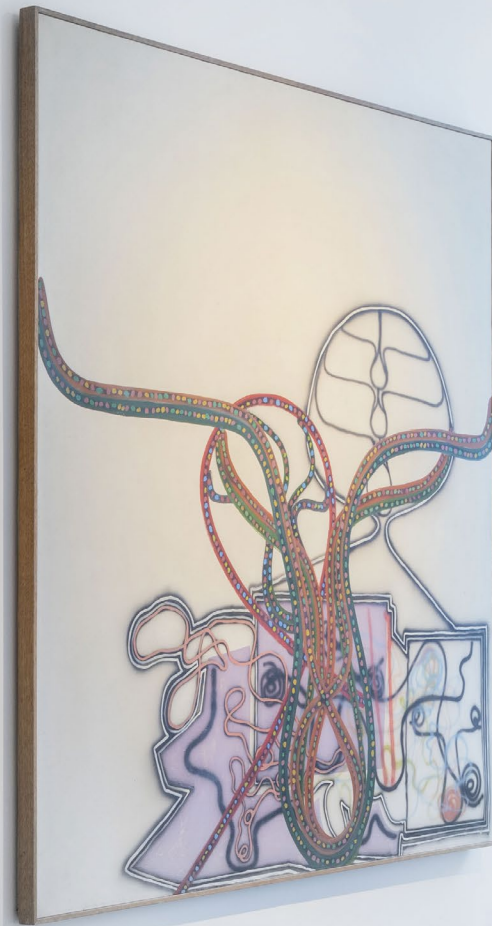


Empire (1962) relies heavily upon a raw field of composition, allowing muted radiant forms to inhibit the image individually and collectively, imbued with their own iconography. Potentially referencing an earlier painting with the same title, named after the classic cinema houses, the geography within the work shows a path of ascendant forms exploring and compounding themselves. During completion of the painting, Cohen reflects that he was interested in the invention of a moment, not wanting to be attached to a specific style, imparting shapes based on visions from a flash in his mind's eye.



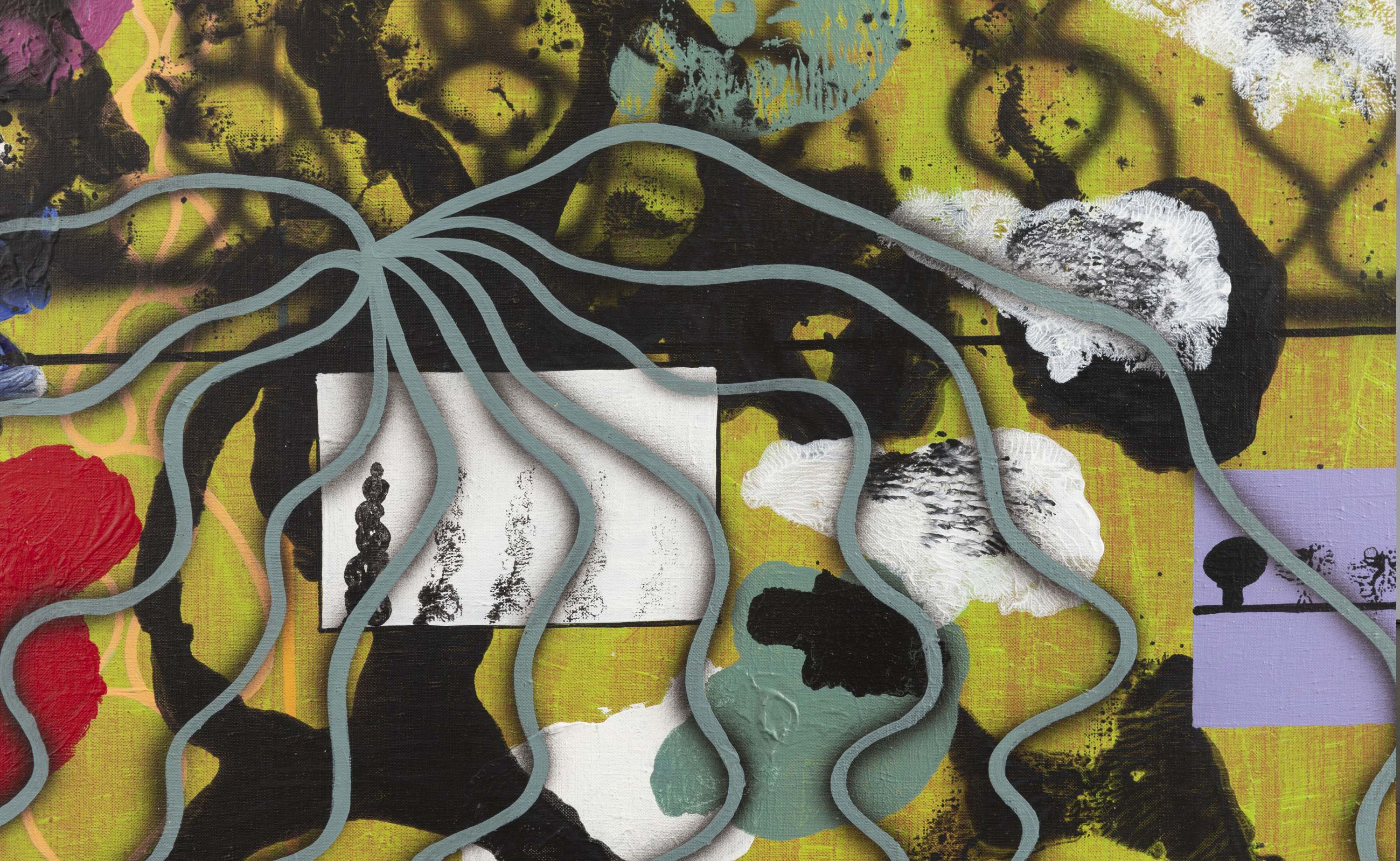
Amaranth, 1964
Oil tempera on canvas
152.4 x 152.4 cm

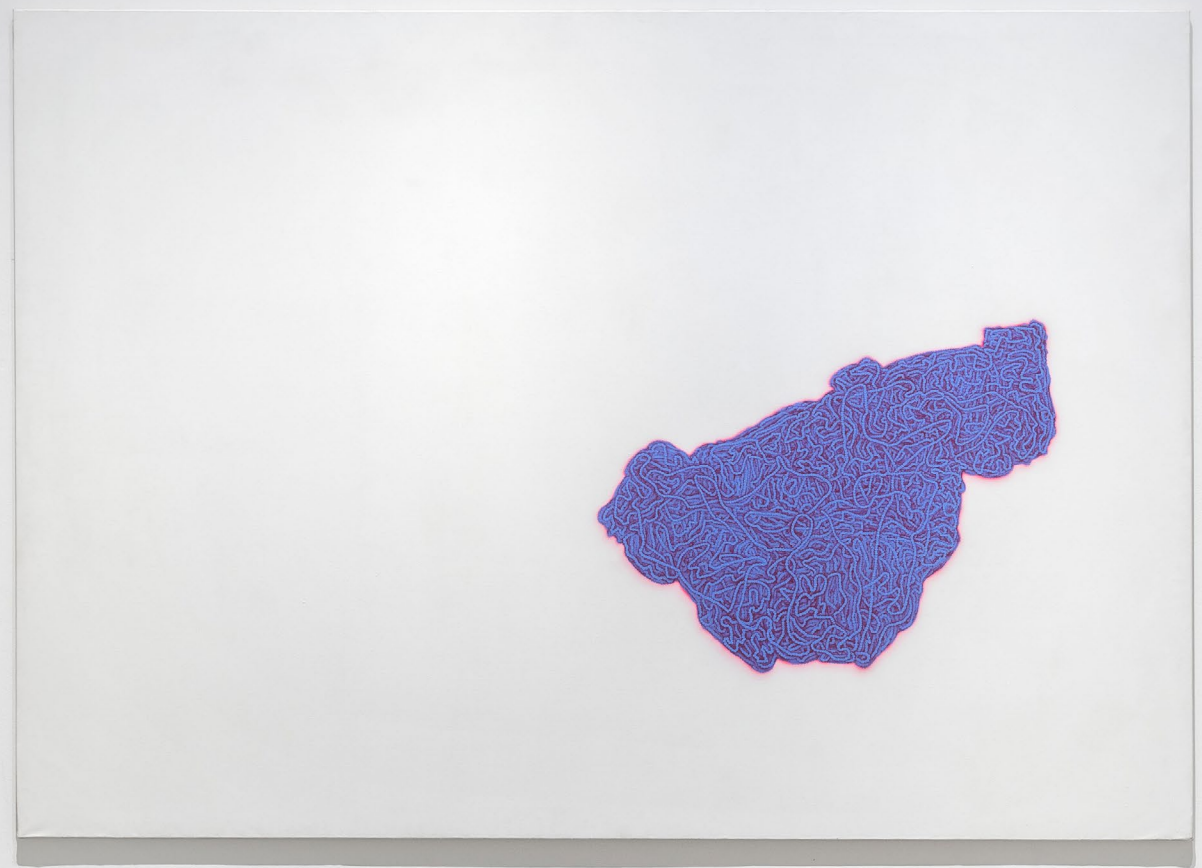
Using line as both a structure and an image, *Amaranth* (1964) is defined by a cursive, organic form spreading across the lower half of the canvas, with tentacles of green, orange and red adorned with precise multicoloured raised dots. Similar to other works of the period, the painted area is fixed to one edge of the canvas; the remote enclosed community, filled with life, exists within a larger light field. The curved linear expositions, incorporated with clustered movements, connect Cohen's work between 1962 and 1966 with Art Nouveau, a great interest of the artist's.



Untitled #3, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
91.44 x 91.44 cm





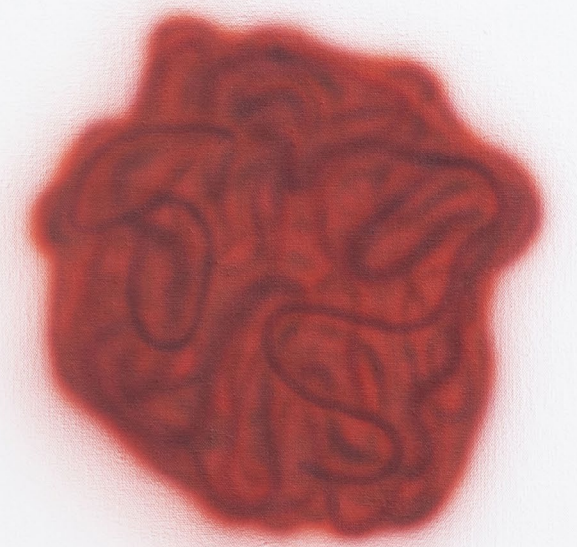


Blue Burrow, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
241 x 342.5 cm



In the later 1960s Cohen strived even further to position his painting within a substantially-concentrated area of the canvas, creating compositions with one point of focus. Placed within an indeterminate environment of predominantly white space are irregularly-shaped condensed nuclei of colour, contrasting the foundation of the picture plane with concise, organic tangles of disparate forms. Cohen continued to produce 'white' paintings until 1970. It was important for him to methodically establish layers of paint to create a surface and succession of events recognisable through a shape's configuration. Within the compressed area, Cohen both manufactures and dismantles a form, disconnecting it from traditional techniques of painting.

Pulse, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
91.5 x 91.5 cm





Territory, 1977-78
Acrylic on linen
137.16 x 167.64 cm

“The first morning I was there I drove out into the desert and I discovered that what was happening on my left side had no logical visual relationship with what was happening on my right-hand side. If you look at Rubens, it’s like the countryside in Europe. The tree goes into the cloud, which goes into a flying bird, which goes into another tree on the other side, which goes into a river, which comes out the bottom of the painting. But in New Mexico there was no connection from one side to the other, in terms of space, light and imagery. If I turned my head, I entered a different world. This experience showed me the kind of space that had existed in my mind.”

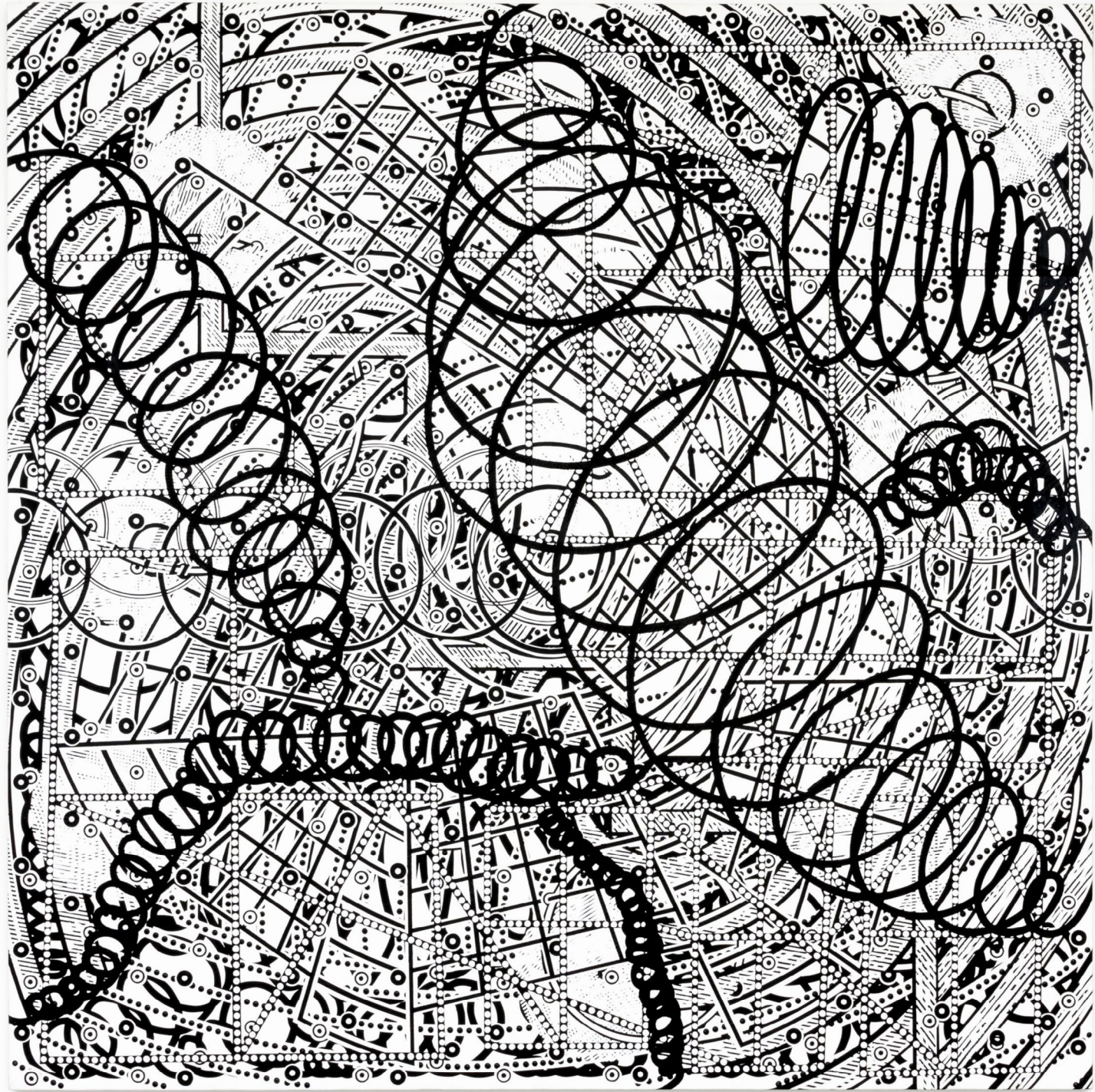
In an interview with James Faure Walker in 1977, Cohen reflects that European painters, such as Duccio, Rembrandt and Vermeer were particularly important influences to him, but stressed that his first trip to New Mexico in 1969 was a milestone experience. From that visit Cohen began “*to work on six or seven at a time*”, telling multiple narratives on one canvas in a kind of collage, embodied by *Territory* (1977), with a canvas interwoven of colour, motifs, movements and markings, collating multiple layers of time and place.



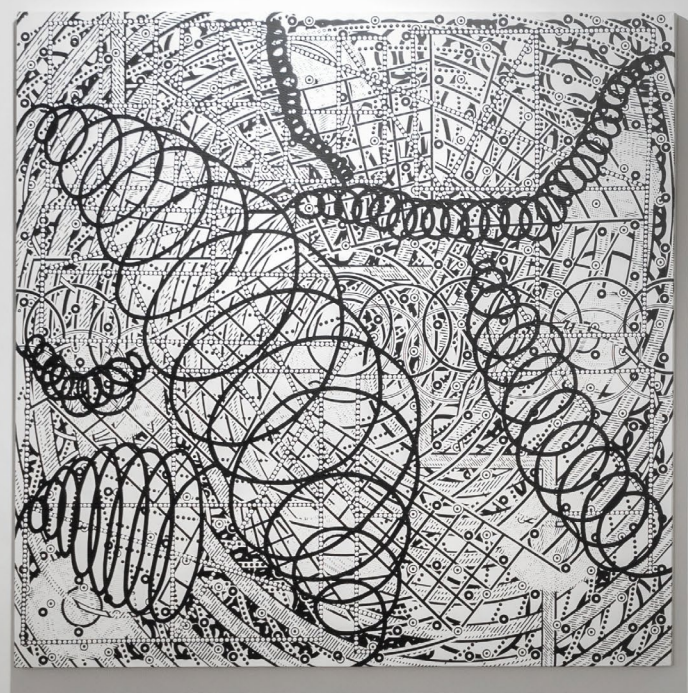


Moving Away, 1992
Acrylic on linen
183 x 183 cm



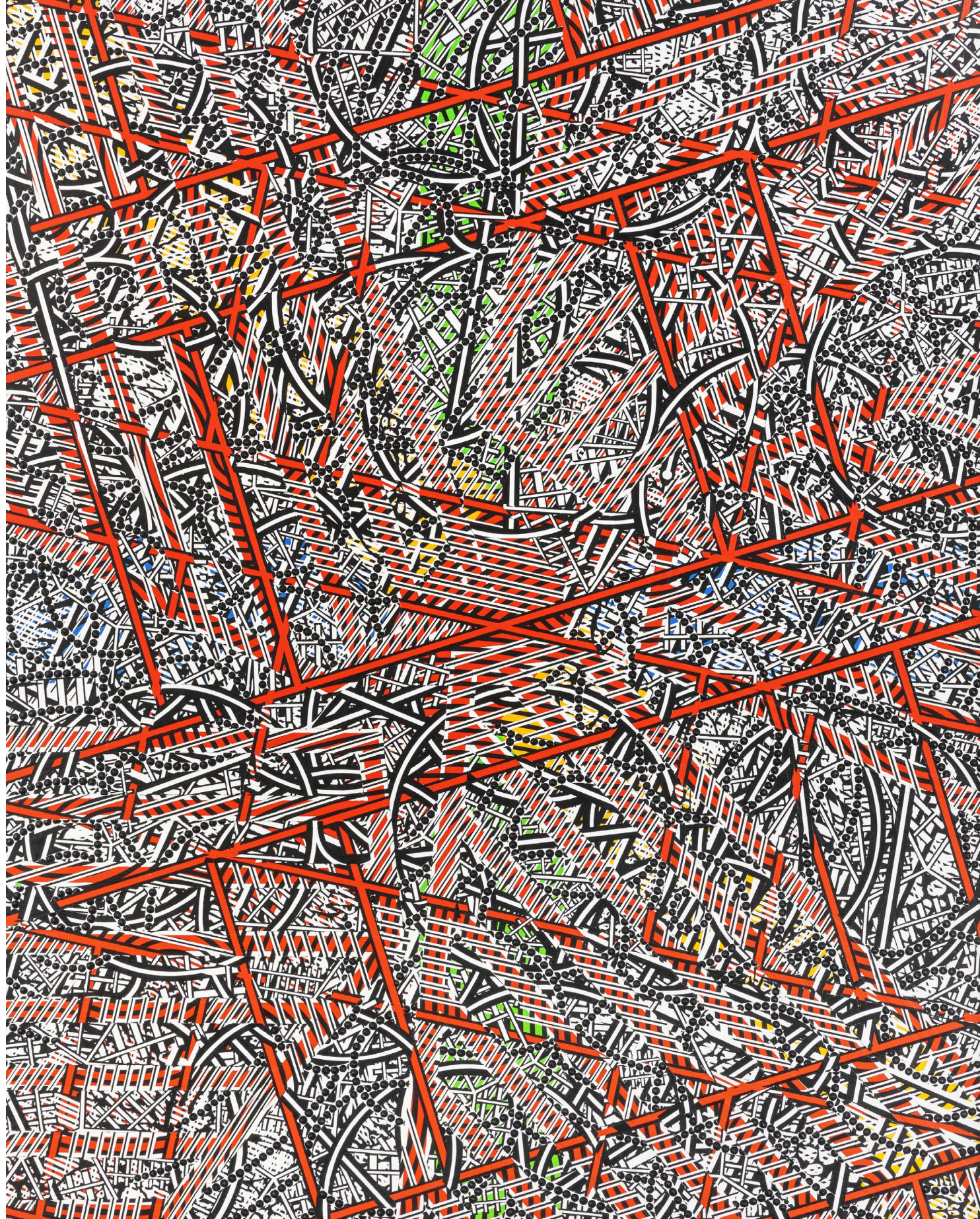


A Very Large Array, 1994
Acrylic on linen
183 x 183 cm



Both *A Very Large Array* (1994) and *Moving Away* (1992) were made during a period when Cohen produced erratically woven maps, representing the disorder of the world, embodying multiple times, entities and places in a system of intricate passages. Reflecting on the movement of people in vehicles including cars and airplanes, the compositions entice the viewer to move as well, with one's vision bolting across the canvas to follow unstoppable lines and pathways

Pictorial II, 2001
Oil on linen
127 x 102 cm

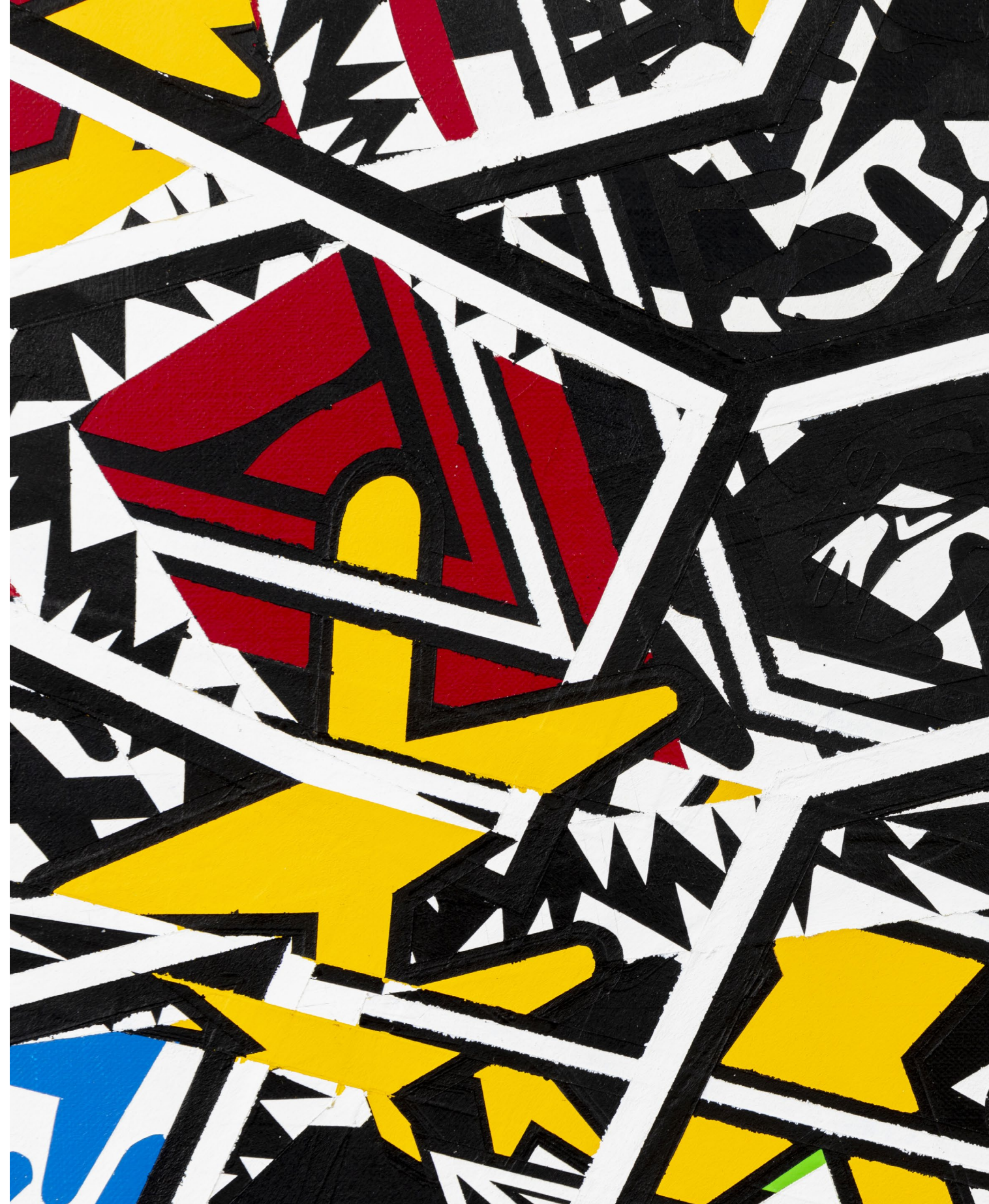






Swarm II, 2004
Acrylic on linen
183 x 244 cm

Swarm II (2004) is a reflection on the past, with Cohen stating, “so much of what I’m about is memories, processing it all, pulling it all together... it’s the view from the bomb aimer’s window of a heavy bomber.” From September 1939 through March 1945, air raid sirens sounded across Cohen’s home city of London more than a thousand times. As with other works from the early 2000s that reflect on events of war and terror, this painting indicates that the war deeply affected Cohen’s psyche, continuously impacting his works. Constructed from rigid cubic shapes, with influences of architectural structures as hundreds of yellow planes intersect and encase the composition, the centre of the painting includes a vortex-like octagon, surrounded by circles as lines emanate to the edges, hinting this is only a fragment of a seemingly-infinite scene.



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