



HARRY COHEN: PAINTING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

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WATTS ART PUBLICATIONS

H A R R Y

C O H E N

PAINTING FROM

THE OUTSIDE IN

Patricia Watts

Harry Cohen: Painting from the Outside In

with catalogue essay by Patricia Watts

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DEDICATED TO MARJORIE ANN COHEN (1929–2014)

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Artwork photography by George Rosenfeld of Sylvan Video; Front cover: Harry Cohen. *Untitled (Nude)*. 2009. Acrylic and collage on paper, 28 x 22 inches.



Harry Cohen, *The Banquet*, 1965, 40 x 85 inches.

HARRY COHEN: PAINTING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

Always fascinated with the surface of paintings, Harry Cohen applies his paint with a visceral sensuality. As he builds shapes and forms with color, unscripted and improvisational, he merges the abstract with the representational. Cohen's *joie de vivre* makes for expressive paintings that are full of energy and life, and his choices of colors are always instinctive. With childlike joy, he has painted for over fifty years, producing hundreds of paintings full of affirmation, like the artist himself.

Having grown up in Boston's South End in the 1930s, Cohen found his way into the art world from the outside in. He was one of five kids, the son of first-generation Romanian and Russian Jews. His father worked in the garment trade, and his mother, who became very sick while Cohen was in high school, died in her mid-forties during the Great Depression. The artist finished high school—the only child in his family to graduate—as the Second World War was starting. He worked for a year in the shipyards, then served in the army.

Cohen's maternal grandfather, David Gott, was an immigrant Austrian designer of men's suits. The artist was influenced as a child by watching Gott make his

pencil drawings. And as adults, Cohen and his brothers, four of them, could all draw. However, Harry Cohen was the only one of his siblings who would go on to become a lifelong artist. After the war, between 1945 and 1950, Cohen attended the Museum School, Boston, on the GI Bill. There, his primary teacher was painter Karl Zerbe, a German-born American refugee who arrived in Boston in 1937. Until 1955, Zerbe headed the Department of Painting, and his form and technique became the foundation of Boston Expressionism. Other teachers included Jack Levine and Hyman Bloom, later known as the Bad

Boys from Boston,¹ and fellow students were David Aronson, Bernard Chaet, Jack Kramer, and Lois Tarlow, among others.

The Boston Expressionist movement embraced a distinctive blend of visionary painting, dark humor, religious mysticism, and social commentary. Its historical roots can be traced to European Symbolism and German Expressionism. "Largely through Zerbe's example, the towering modernist figures to be reckoned with in Boston were Max Beckmann and Bauhaus artist Oskar Kokoschka."² European artists Chaim Soutine and Beckmann greatly inspired this group of painters, and Beckmann often critiqued students at the school when giving lectures, even though he did not speak much English. Cohen loved Beckmann's philosophical bent and was greatly disappointed when he left to teach at Washington University in Saint Louis in 1948.



Oskar Kokoschka. *Cardinal Dalla Costa*. 1948. Oil on canvas, 38 ⁵/₈ x 28 ¹/₄ inches. The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.

Zerbe continuously urged Cohen to "tighten up" his paintings. He criticized his painting style for being "too loose," and also said, "You have to learn to compromise." These were harsh words for the young artist. What Cohen really wanted to hear was "Paint what you want to paint," "Stick to your guns," and "Be a big artist!" One of the highlights for Cohen was the summer of 1949, when he went to Tanglewood, where Kokoschka held a summer painting session sponsored by the Museum School. Cohen reported, "Oskar would come by every third

or fourth day to peek, asking innocent questions. . . . He also told me to find a rich girl who would allow me to paint every day."³ Though Cohen never succeeded in finding that girl, Kokoschka has remained an important influence. Cohen felt that his style of painting was more like Kokoschka's, and he also taught Cohen that art wasn't just the application of the medium itself, it comprised the entire context of life.

There were prestigious teachers and gifted students at the school, and he was grateful to learn from and be associated with them. Yet he lived in "the coldwater flats in the cheap Roxbury and South End neighborhoods, where the chill was unbearable, with no heat, seeking out warmth at the Waldorf cafeteria, drinking coffee for a dime."⁴ Unlike Levine and Bloom, who were wealthy and whose parents could afford private painting lessons at a young age, Cohen had not enjoyed such advantages, and he felt the distance between them. Yet Cohen said that Bloom would greet him on the streets with a nod, which he felt was Bloom's way of acknowledging his work. And, what a nod it was—it rendered all of Cohen's obstacles and poverty unimportant.

By 1950, at the age of twenty-six, with his mother no longer alive and his father remarried, he was ready to leave the past behind. He married Beatrice Ajemian, a fellow painter from Franklin, Massachusetts, and they moved to California in 1951, landing first in



Karl Nolde. *Two Owls*. 1957. Oil on board, 13 x 15 1/2 inches.

Fresno, where Cohen painted for long periods in the summertime. They then moved to Pacoima, north of Hollywood, and moved again, to Topanga Canyon, in 1954–55. In Topanga, Cohen met Karl Kanol, who later called himself Karl Nolde, a Lyrical Expressionist trained at the Art Academy in Leipzig and twenty-nine years Cohen's senior. Soon after they met, Nolde moved to Guanajuato, Mexico, although their friendship continued to grow despite the distance.

Cohen moved again, this time to San Diego, where he stayed for a couple of years. This move, however, was on his own. After five years of marriage, Cohen and his wife split up. Not only did he leave his marriage, he also left behind five years of landscape paintings incorporating horses, fruit trees, and unique rocks found in Topanga Canyon; all of these paintings remain missing to this day. He does, however, still have several small paintings on



Harry Cohen. *Untitled (Figure Study)*. 1972.
Acrylic on canvas, 55 x 36 inches.

paper, including streetscapes and abstracted scenes of a butcher house, which he made during one last trip to Boston with Ajemian in the 1950s.

In 1957 Cohen decided to move to the Bay Area to join the artistic community of Sausalito. There he had a studio on a barge for a period of time, and he later had a small studio in Mill Valley where he made his paintings, mostly waterfront landscapes. To support himself he worked as a waiter at the Alta Mira

Hotel and later worked at Sams's, on the waterfront in Tiburon. During this time he painted a large oil painting of a banquet table that was over six feet wide. Inspired by Soutine's portraits of the early 1900s, he also painted chefs and waiters. Within a year, he met his soon-to-be lifelong love of fifty-six years, Marge, who was from San Antonio, Texas. They married in 1959, and he became the step-father to two young girls, Ronnie and Melva. After the wedding they purchased a small dilapidated structure on an acre of land in Lagunitas, in the San Geronimo Valley. Cohen and his wife made the house livable, and he also built an octagonal studio, where he was able to paint on multiple walls at one time.

At this time, the golden age of Abstract Expressionism was coming to a close, and anti-formalist movements were gaining traction. The Beat movement was burgeoning, and avant-garde artists were delving into the metaphysical, reaching back to Surrealism for inspiration. The Bay Area Figurative Movement, which began in the early 1950s, was also evolving. A second generation of nonobjective painters favored working with the figure; they included Nathan Oliveira and Frank Lobdell. Cohen was already thirty-six, and he had almost twenty years of painting behind him. Through the 1960s he painted both abstract and figurative works. However, despite the prevalence of these established art movements in the Bay Area, he continued to paint in his loose expressionist style.

Throughout Cohen's career, he has always gone through periods of painting nudes, inspired by his lifelong interest in Cubism, especially in Picasso. As inspirations, he also credits Rembrandt and the Renaissance masters, whom he admired while living in Boston, as well as Goya. In 1972, while on a yearlong stay with his wife in Guanajuato, Mexico, visiting his friend Karl Nolde and family, Cohen painted an iconic abstract figure study of a woman (opposite and page 17). This painting is unique among the twelve paintings he completed during this trip; the others are mostly based on Christian symbolism. His bold use of primarily pinks and blues, combined with grays and browns as well as ocher, represents a departure for Cohen, resulting in a painting style that expresses a combination of East Coast formalism with the bright palette of the city in which they were painted.

By 1975 he departed from his female subject to paint a small series of musclemen, again with Soutine in mind—men flexing and posing, muscles bulging and protruding, in a display of bravado. Mostly drawings, these were inspired by his time in Los Angeles, where he visited Muscle Beach in Venice. He would revisit this series again in the 1990s, painting gymnasts against a bright red background.

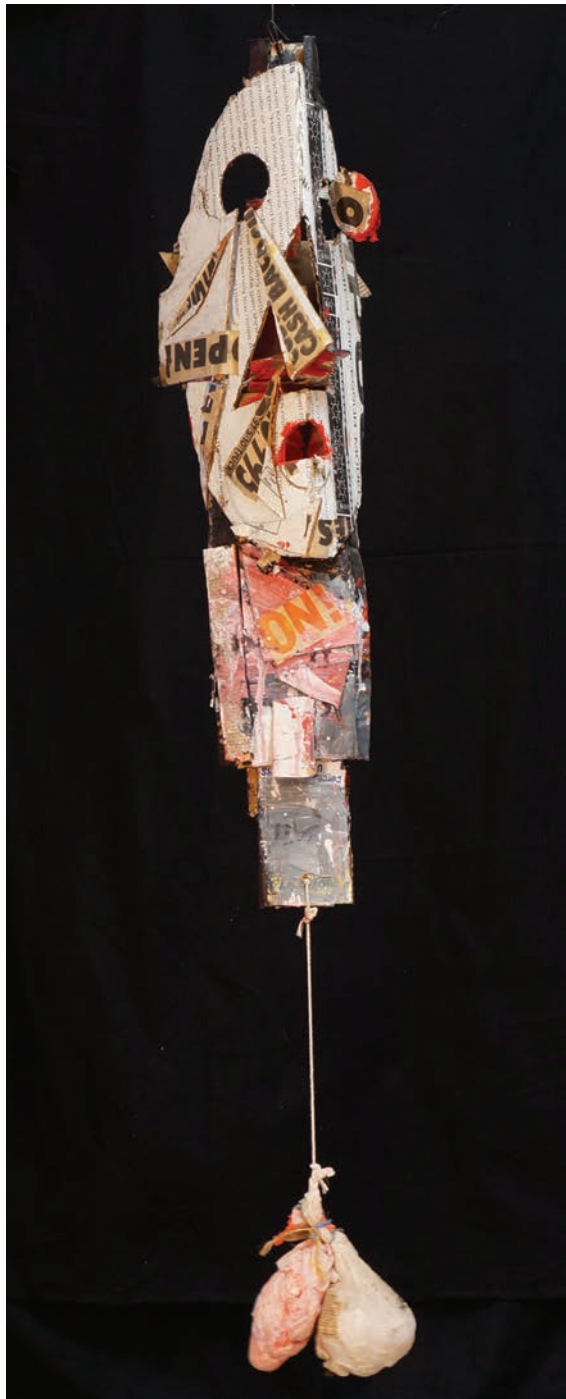
Through the 1970s and 1980s, Cohen primarily painted large semi-abstract interiors inhabited by female figures. His work often references another artist inspired by Picasso, Willem de Kooning—in particular his 1950s series

The Women. Another series of the mid 1980s was based on images of football players, specifically the San Francisco 49ers. These paintings of men in padded-shouldered uniforms walking on and off the field were committed to a gallery that wanted to market them to Bay Area football fans. Not a typical art-world subject, male sports figures, although it was a successful niche market of the commercial expressionistic painter LeRoy Neiman.



Harry Cohen. *3rd Down*. 1985. Acrylic on canvas, 69 x 69 inches.

By the early 1990s, Cohen's paintings took on a more abstract geometric style. Their bright forms and shapes against dark backgrounds reference the methods and ethos, strokes and forms of Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, and Barnett Newman. Inviting a new, multi-layered dimension to the paint-



Harry Cohen. *Untitled (Hanging Sculpture)*. 2006. Collage, acrylic, and mixed media.

ing surface, he also started making what he calls his “painted collage works.” Sometimes covering the entire canvas with newspaper, Cohen would then paint over the layers, giving him a different kind of spatial plane, which he created and re-created in new forms over time. These works occasionally included cutouts from advertisements with specific words that evoke a feeling or commentary on culture. Cohen also painted grid patterns, using strong colors and different types of paper—including construction paper, newspaper, and magazine clippings—and he used cutout words, a legacy of Bay Area Beat poetry art.

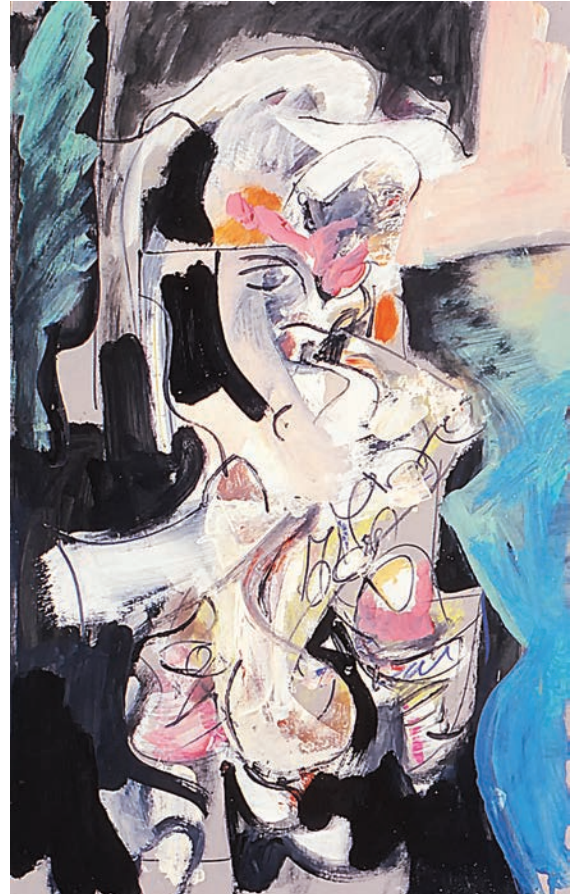
At the end of the 1990s, Cohen's paper collage works inspired an ongoing series of Hanging and Standing Sculpture that he used as distractions, to assist him in changing perspective while awaiting a resolution to a painting. These three-dimensional figures also included standing sculpture, box-shaped columns, and hanging heads that appeared to leap right off his canvas. Often he made them to exercise a dimensional impulse, using ash, black paint, sand, and shellac. Cohen also painted a few movable wall screens, or double-sided dividers.

It would seem that artists ought to be more prolific when they are young, as they do not have family responsibilities and a mortgage. At the beginning of his career, Cohen spent many years working as a waiter and a carpenter, painting between jobs. Surprisingly, his most prolific period

arrived around 2000, when he was in his late seventies through his eighties. There were a couple of gaps along the way, but Cohen has never gone very long without painting something. As he puts it, "I have a brush in hand, it happens easy. I do not think much about it."⁵

In fact, Cohen has produced at least seven series and close to five hundred paintings on canvas and paper over the last fifteen years, including his *Portraits* (1999–2013), which include the *Black and White* series (2002–14), the *Copy Cat* series (2003–5), the *Jazz* series (late 1980s–2005), the *Photo Heads* series (2008), the *Grid* series (2010–12), the *L* series (2010–12), and the *Hoss Opera* series (2011–13). His portraits on paper (POPs, as Cohen refers to them) are made with varied media—acrylic, crayon, pen, and cut-paper collage on archival paper. The same is true for his WOPs, or women on paper. These portraits have become Cohen's signature works.

In 2003 Cohen started the *Copy Cat* works, a small series of cat portraits on paper, and in 2004 he came across an article about a Sausalito firm that offered to clone your cat for \$50,000. He continued to paint these "copy cat" portraits through 2005, and in one of them, he included a cutout of the article's cover image. Cohen pieced together cutouts of brightly colored patterned paper and created human and feline forms in a composition that references both Picasso and Matisse. These works are some of his most cheerful.



Harry Cohen. *Untitled (Jazz series)*. c. late 1980s. Acrylic on paper, 28 x 22 inches. Courtesy of Mel Schockner, Colorado.

In 2005 he painted several pieces on paper for his *Jazz* series, which he had begun in the late 1980s while working on canvas, influenced by his Jazz enthusiast neighbors and art collectors Jan and Mel Schockner. This is somewhat ironic, as Cohen doesn't listen to music while painting; he prefers silence. Nevertheless, his painting style has always been loose and free-flowing—lyrical—so to create work honoring great jazz musicians was a natural choice. These include *Ain't*



Harry Cohen. *Untitled (Photo Heads)*. 2008. Acrylic with collage on paper 28 x 22 inches.

Misbehavin, Stompin' at the Savoy, Duke Ellington's Mood Indigo, and Count Basie's One O'Clock Jump. These are some of the few works by Cohen that feature male figures and, additionally, evoke sound through color, as well as suggest visual motion. They evidence Cohen's quintessential style of action painting.

In 2007 the artist began a series of about one hundred black and white collage works, including his *Photo Heads* on paper, which he layered

with magazine images of facial fragments, mostly eyes. Soon after, he had an operation that left him recuperating for what he described as "a long, dismal year." When his health returned, in late 2008, he returned to painting black and white nude female figures, as well as additional *Photo Heads*, which he continued to make through 2014. These works reference Cohen's love for Picasso's *Guernica*, which incorporates fragmented body parts of humans and animals that appear to pop out from the canvas as if they were collaged onto the surface. In fact, *Guernica* has been a powerful influence on Cohen's work as a whole.

The *Grid* series and the *L* series came next, which he painted simultaneously from 2010 to 2012. Using collage and pencil, he painted vertical and horizontal lines that created rows of squares, which he overlaid with anonymous figures. The *L* series were just that, painted collages of a single *L* shape, or a reversed *L*, on a white background. In these works, he leaves the viewer to imagine what's behind the structure presented.

Cohen, who was often seen wearing a cowboy hat, was inspired by his wife's family connections in Southwest Texas and painted a series of cowboys and horses, called the *Hoss Operas*. He did some of these in colorful paint on canvas, and some were part of his *Black and White* series on paper. Once again, he relinquished his preference for the feminine and put his energy into the male figure, or god-like heroes

of cowboy culture. With another nod to Picasso, the cowboy stands in for Don Quixote, either riding a horse or with a horse. Placed in an desolate landscape, the figure is often so abstracted as to be indistinguishable.

Cohen is a master at constructing and organizing space using color. He also excels at arranging forms to create surface excitement. Cohen says, "I don't think too much about color relationships. They just happen. There is no particular reason why white is white and red is red. I let it happen."⁶ In his 2006 painted collage *Player*, with painted and cut paper arranged on canvas, he combines fragmented elements of brightly colored patterns and shapes juxtaposed with thinly cut black paper in lines that hold all the pieces together formally. This work is unique in Cohen's oeuvre in terms of its structural perfection. It appears as if Cohen knew exactly where all the pieces would go before he approached the canvas.

Cohen views the artist's life to be a noble calling. In over fifty years, he has painted well over one thousand paintings and has sold hundreds of works, as well as given them away to friends. He feels he is privileged to make art, and that visiting an art museum is akin to going to church; it is a spiritual experience. When he speaks, he comes across as wise and thoughtful, as well as highly articulate in discussing the great painters of the past. Another of his preferred forms of communication is his animated style of typing letters to



Harry Cohen. *Player*. 2006. Painted collage on canvas, 62 x 56 inches.

form words. At first glance, the sentences appear to be a poem. They consist of fragmented thoughts and reflections ornamented with capital letters arranged in patterns.

Cohen and his wife, Marge, made several extended trips to Italy, France, and Spain, to see works by El Greco, Cézanne, Michelangelo, Titian, Tintoretto, and Correggio. They also traveled to Boston and New York to visit the art museums there. Though the artist has always yearned for a cultured and urbane life, he has remained in the Northwoods of the San Francisco Bay Area, quietly sustaining a distant yet heartfelt relationship with the important art of the past. Cohen doesn't pretend to be an intellectual, but it is evident that he is a genius in painterly expression.



It is rare when an artist allows himself to outwardly enjoy his own work, as Cohen does. Such artists are more likely to paint for themselves than artists who make work for the art market or others. Cohen admits that he could paint eleven paintings and not hit the mark, and that the next painting will simply fall into place. When asked when is a painting finished, Cohen exclaims, "Never! I think what you do is you abandon them." Addressing a painting, he says, "I've taken you as far as I can."⁷

NOTES:

1. Katherine French, Director, Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA, 2009; Hyman Bloom exhibition video trailer, *The Beauty of All Things*:

2. Rachel Rosenfield Lafo, *Painting in Boston, 1950–2000*, exh. cat., DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). p. 131.
3. Cohen, interview by Patricia Watts, Woodacre, CA, May 14, 2015
4. Cohen, interview by Watts.
5. Cohen, interview by Watts.
6. Cohen, interview by Kimberly Fabrizi, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_h7nysGkgk
7. Cohen, interview by Watts.

Patricia Watts is an independent curator specializing in mature artists in the North Bay region of San Francisco. She is also consulting curator for the Marin Community Foundation and was previously chief curator at the Sonoma County Museum.

“THE CONTINUITY OF ROMANTIC
PAINTING SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN LOST
TODAY—THE CONTINUITY THAT
FLOWED FROM DELACROIX THROUGH
DAUMIER THROUGH MATISSE AND ON
TO DE KOONING IS MISSING.

I FEEL I AM PART OF THAT
CONTINUITY, BUT I DON'T KNOW
WHERE THE THREAD HAS GONE.”

—HARRY COHEN

WORKS



ABSTRACT AT SEA 1959
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 83 X 83 inches



BICYCLE RIDER 1971
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 79 X 62 INCHES



UNTITLED (FIGURE STUDY) 1972
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 55 X 26 INCHES



APHRODITE 1979
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 78 X 60 INCHES



EUROPA 1979
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 74 X 79 INCHES



UNTITLED (MUSCLE MAN) 1975
ACRYLIC ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



MAN AND WOMAN 1981
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 92 X 60 INCHES



HALFBACK (FOOTBALL SERIES) 1990
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 78 X 68 INCHES



GOthic IV 1991
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 68 X 60 INCHES



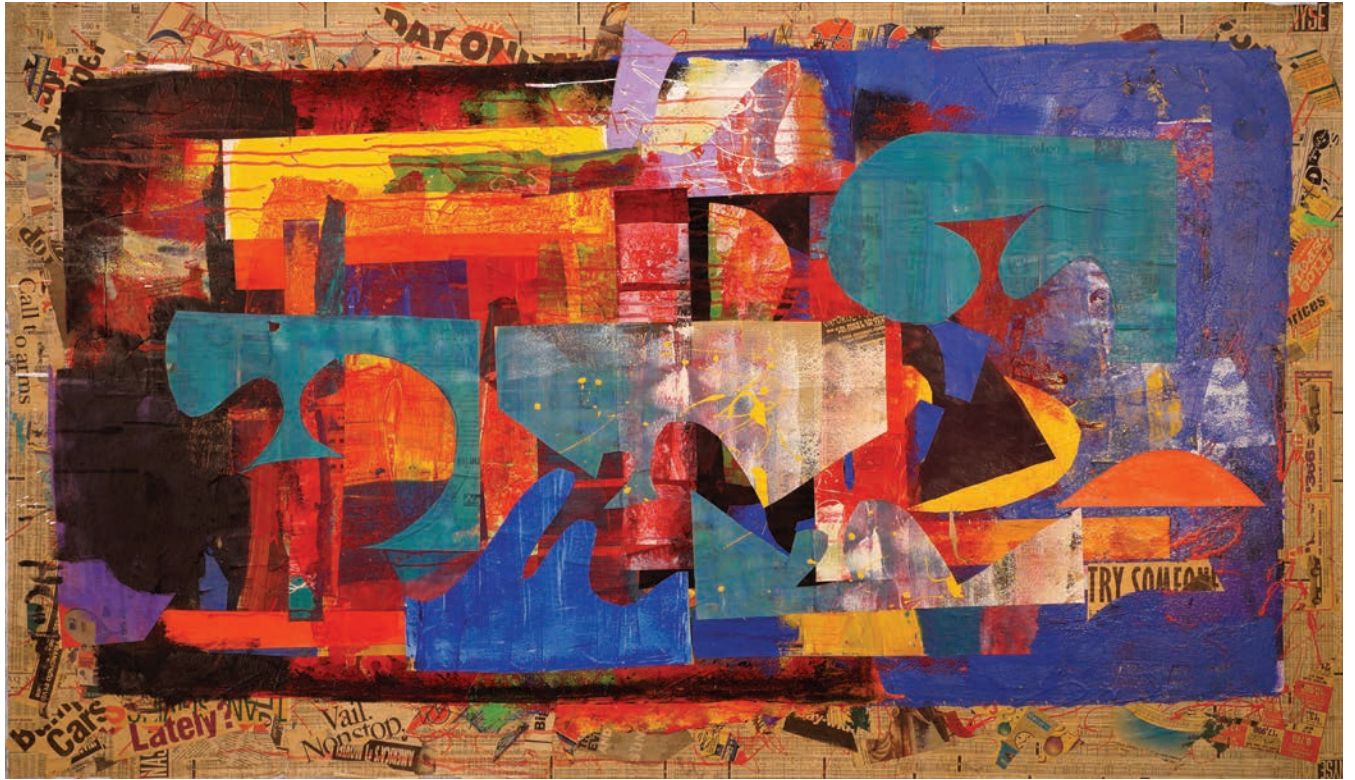
BODY PARTS #1 1995
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 74 X 67 INCHES



WASH #3 1997
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 84 X 67 INCHES



DELIGHTFUL AND PROFANE 1997
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 48 X 48 INCHES



SOJOURN 1997
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 40 X 70 INCHES



SEATED FIGURE 2003
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 36 X 24 INCHES



LADY IN GREEN 2003
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 36 X 24 INCHES



UNTITLED (COPY CAT) 2003
ACRYLIC AND CHRISTMAS COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED (COPY CAT) 2004
ACRYLIC AND CHRISTMAS COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



RED EYE 2004
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 36 X 24 INCHES



SONATA 2004
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 48 X 48 INCHES



INDIAN HEAD 2005
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 60 X 48 INCHES



SPLENDOR 2005
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 60 X 36 INCHES



KATRINA 2005
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 36 X 24 INCHES



UNTITLED (POP) 2005
ACRYLIC ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED #7 2006
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 60 X 60 INCHES



PLAYER 2006
PAINTED COLLAGE ON CANVAS 62 X 56 INCHES



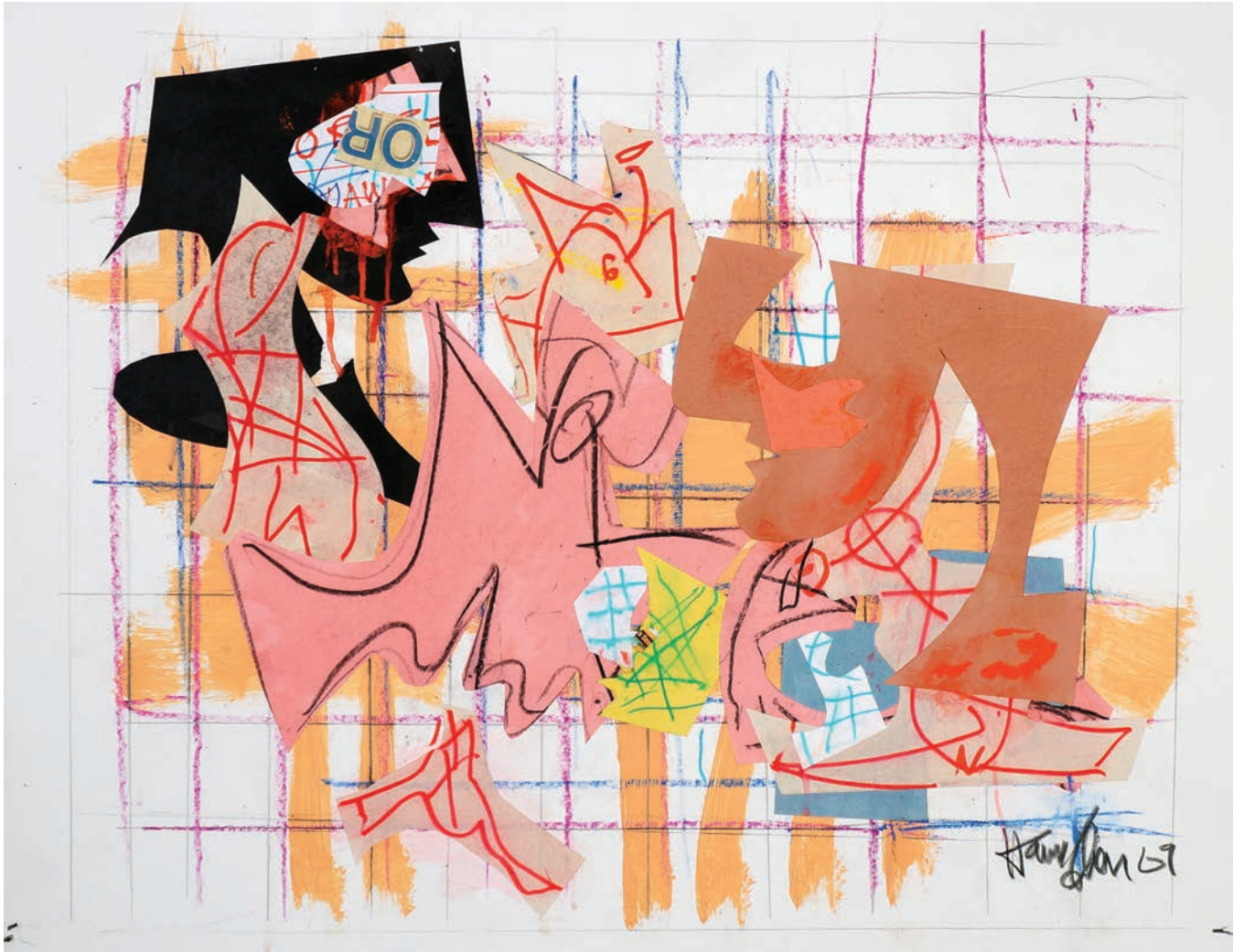
EXPLOSION 2008
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 60 X 48 INCHES



SHADOW MUSIC 2007
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 40 X 30 INCHES



UNTITLED (PHOTO HEADS) 2008
ACRYLIC AND PHOTO COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



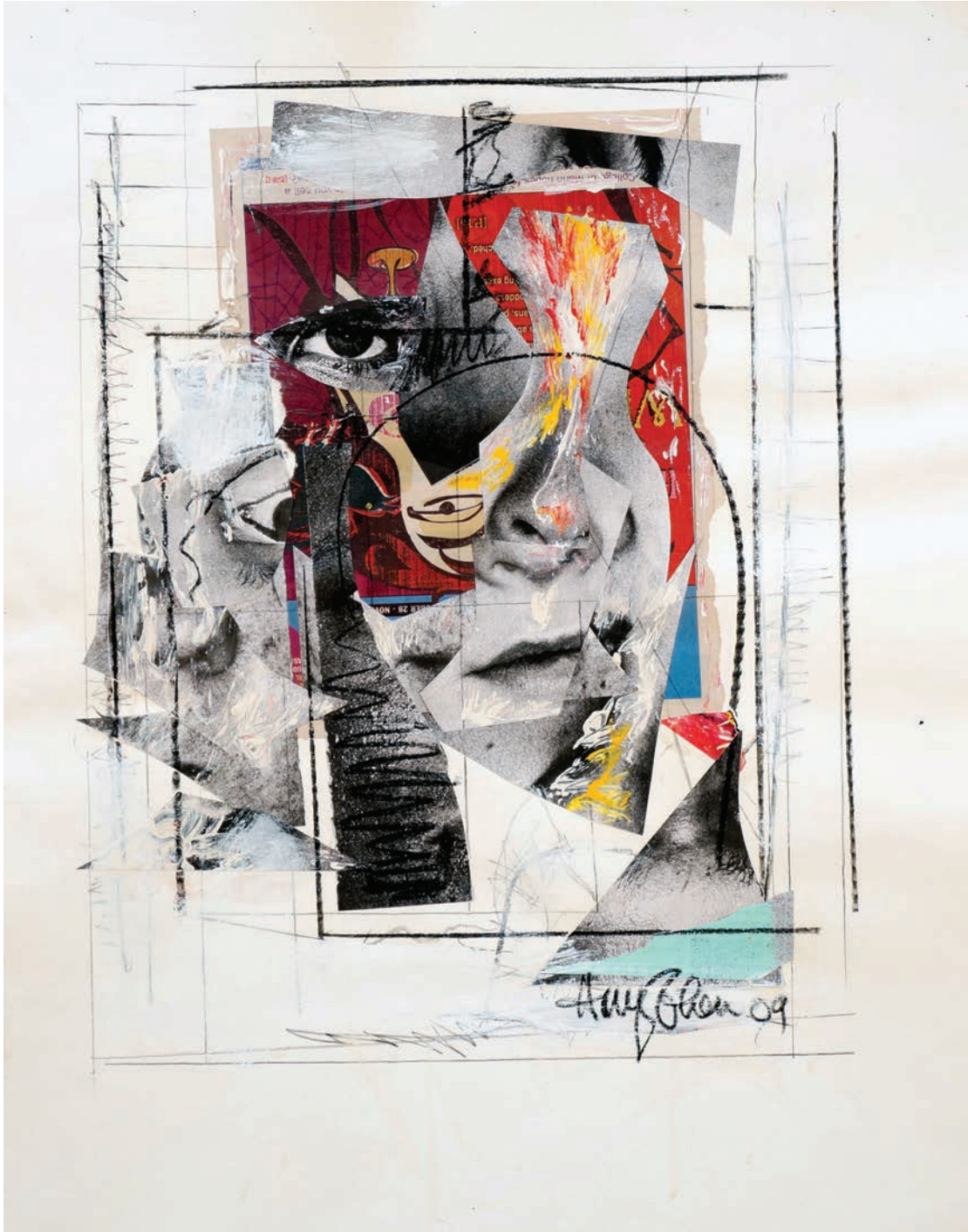
UNTITLED (NUDE) 2009
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON PAPER 22 X 28 INCHES



MY LADY 2009
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 36 X 36 INCHES



UNTITLED (COLLAGE FIGURE) 2009
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED 2009
ACRYLIC AND PHOTO COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED (NUDE) 2009
ACRYLIC ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED (GRID) 2010
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED 2010
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 28 X 22 INCHES



LOOKING AHEAD (GRID) 2010
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 48 X 36 INCHES



UNTITLED 2011
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED 2011
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



REVELATION 2010
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 60 X 48 INCHES



UNTITLED (SCREEN) 2011
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON WALL SCREENS



UNTITLED (HOSS OPERA) 2012
ACRYLIC ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



UNTITLED (HOSS OPERA) 2012
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



THE PUZZLE OF LADY (L SERIES) 2012
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 48 X 38 INCHES



WOMEN AT PLAY (L SERIES) 2012
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 60 X 48 INCHES



UNTITLED (BLACK AND WHITE) 2013
ACRYLIC WITH PHOTOS ON PAPER 28 X 22 INCHES



HOLOCAUST 2 2013
ACRYLIC WITH PHOTOS AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 60 X 36 INCHES



UNTITLED (HARRY'S SELECTS) 2014
ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON PAPER 22 X 28 INCHES



UNTITLED (STANDING SCULPTURE 12-F) 2004
MIXED MEDIA



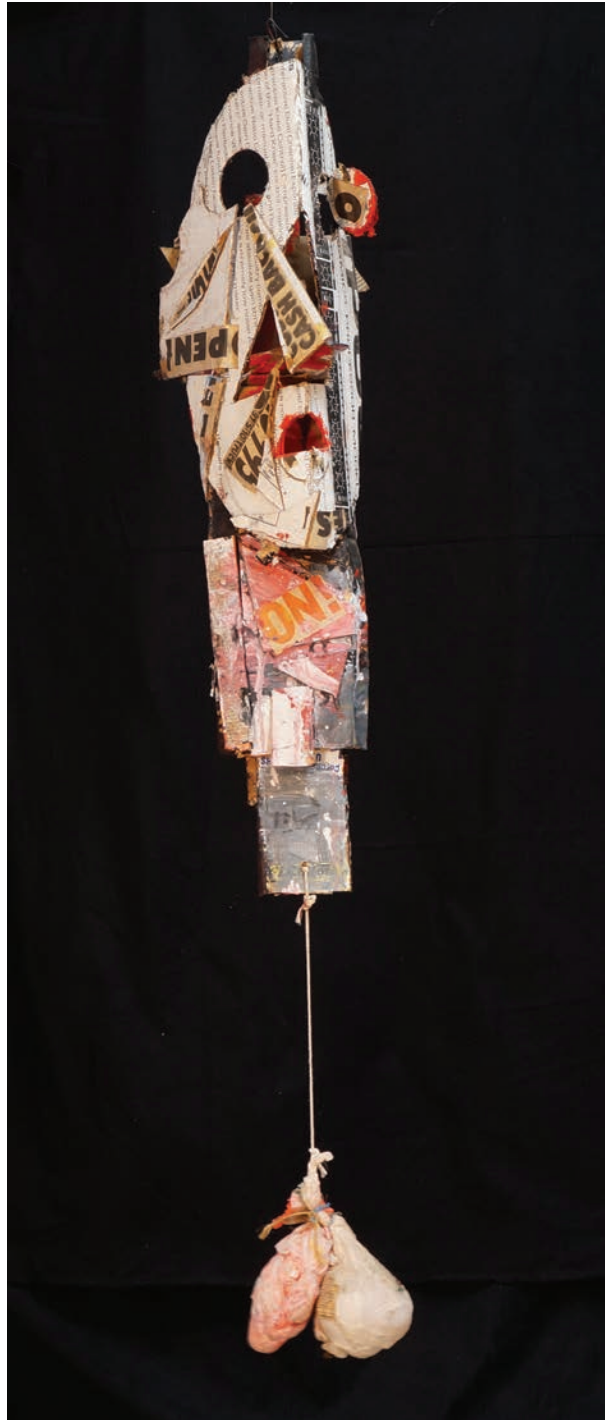
UNTITLED (STANDING SCULPTURE 11-F) 2005
MIXED MEDIA



UNTITLED (HANGING SCULPTURE 6-F) 2000
MIXED MEDIA



UNTITLED (HANGING SCULPTURE 10-F) 2006
MIXED MEDIA



UNTITLED (HANGING SCULPTURE 6-F) 2006
MIXED MEDIA



UNTITLED (HANGING SCULPTURE 7-F) 2010
MIXED MEDIA



COLLABORATIONS WITH FRIENDS

For Harry Cohen, his life and his art have always been deeply connected, and his friendships have played an important role in his art making. In the late 1960s, Cohen met Leonard Breger, four years his senior, a painter from New York who studied painting at City College and who moved to the Bay Area around the same time. Cohen built a studio for Breger behind Breger's home in 1980, and a few years later Breger connected him with a gallery on Hayes Street which prompted his paintings of the 49ers. In the late 1980s, for a three-year period, the two artists collaborated on an installation of freestanding painted sculpture made of interlocking Masonite panels; it was installed on Bernal Hill in San Francisco in 1990.

Cohen also formed a friendship with Ron Coulter, who has collected many of his works over the years. Coulter first encountered Cohen's paintings at the Pacific School of Religion, above Berkeley, in the late 1960s. Later, when Coulter founded the Myth and Magic Factory in Oakland in the 1970s, the artist made promotional posters for his plays and collaborated on creating puppets for a marionette show.

Another collaborator and supporter of Cohen's is Michael Killen, who was formerly a tech entrepreneur and is now an artist and filmmaker in Menlo Park. Also from Massachusetts, he moved to the Bay Area in the late 1960s. Killen met Cohen in 1996 through Breger, and since 2010, they have collaborated on at least fifteen large-scale paintings addressing environmental issues, such as energy, sustainability, and economics. Titles of their collaborative paintings include *Sustainability of America*, *Resilience of America*, *Don Quixote fights the Great Giant of Our Time*, *Don Quixote Fights Sea Level Rise*, *Gone with the*

Wind Is the Electric Grid, and Methane Joins Carbon Emissions to Boil the Planet. This animated series of colorful paintings portrays our impending ecological crisis using Don Quixote as the environmental hero. These works have been shown at the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and Stanford University, at various sustainability events. Cohen and Killen also painted *Knock Knock Knocking on Heaven's Door* and *Don Quixote Fights the Greatest Giant Ever*, which were displayed at an annual energy summit at Stanford University and at NASA, during national discussions on climate change strategies.

In 2014 Cohen collaborated with childhood friend Paula Kirkeby, founder of Smith Andersen Editions in Palo Alto, to create at least a dozen abstract monotypes. Kirkeby has worked with many important artists, including Enrique Chagoya, Bruce Conner, Claire Falkenstein, George Herms, Frank Lobdell, Michael Mazur, Ed Moses, Nathan Oliveira, and many more. She says that "Cohen is really one of the important artists the world has not discovered yet," during an interview with their mutual friend Killen in 2013.

BELOW: HARRY COHEN AND LEONARD BREGER, BERNAL HILL COLLABORATION, 1990. PREVIOUS PAGE: MICHAEL KILLEN WITH HARRY COHEN, *DON QUIXOTE FIGHTS GLOBAL WARMING*, C. 2010.



HARRY COHEN

**Born September 29, 1924,
in Boston, Massachusetts**

**Attended the School of the Museum
of Fine Arts, Boston, 1945–50**

Cohen's paintings were included in *Prime Time*, curated by Patricia Watts, at the Marin Community Foundation in 2014. This large group exhibition presented the work of five underrecognized mature artists who live in the Bay Area. From 2009 to 2014, Cohen was represented by Skip Henderson of Gallery Mona Lease, San Rafael, California. Henderson represented other artists of the same generation in the region, including Jenny Hunter Groat and Leonard Breger.



COHEN AT HOME, WOODACRE, CALIFORNIA, 2015

Cohen has also exhibited at venues in California—including a solo show at the La Jolla Art Center (1957); the annual group exhibition of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1956); a solo show at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley (1967); a group show at the Berkeley Art Center (1998); and a group exhibition at Smith Andersen Editions in Palo Alto (2014)—as well as in Texas, in a group show at Rare Discoveries Gallery (1982), and Nevada, where he was given a solo show at the Reno Arts Commission (1998). His paintings have been exhibited most extensively in San Francisco, in a solo show at Quay Gallery (1964), a solo and a group show at SOMA Gallery (1980, 1981), a group show at Bolles Gallery (1965), a solo show at Celini Gallery (1966), a solo show at Nathan Gallery (1976), and a solo show at Art House (1993). Cohen also participated in a group exhibition at the California School of Fine Arts (now San Francisco Art Institute) in 1958.

Cohen's work has been collected by admirers and friends throughout his career, and many works were offered by the artist as gifts. His hallmark, generosity, is evidenced in his personality as well as in his painting style: he paints without restraint, pouring his love of color and form into his work.