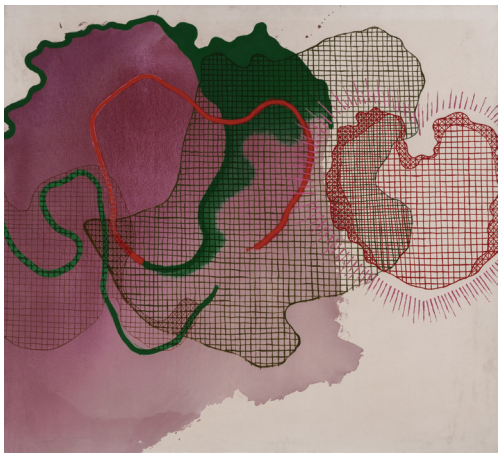
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© Harold Cohen, *Next Year's Valentine*, 1964

Harold Cohen: Painting About Representation (1962–71)

Opening reception: Thursday, November 12, 2026, 6 – 8 PM (EST)
Exhibition on view: November 12, 2026 – January 9, 2027
Gazelli Art House, 545 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001

NEW YORK – Gazelli Art House is pleased to present *Harold Cohen: Painting About Representation (1962–71)*, the first solo exhibition of **Harold Cohen (1928–2016)** at the gallery's New York location. Bringing together seventeen works from a transformative decade in the artist's career, the exhibition revisits Cohen's remarkable achievements as a painter before his pioneering work with computers. From the ambitious abstract canvases that established his international reputation to the increasingly systematic investigations of his later paintings, the exhibition reveals how his enduring fascination with representation laid the intellectual foundations for AARON, one of the earliest and most influential artificial intelligence art-making systems.

Best known today as a pioneer of computer-generated art, Cohen was already an internationally recognized painter when he began experimenting with programming in the late 1960s. His transition from canvas to computer was neither an abrupt departure nor a rejection of painting, but the continuation of a question that had occupied him for years: how do paintings come to represent things, and what knowledge is required to make them?

Throughout the 1960s, Cohen explored the relationships between line, color, form, and pictorial space, inventing visual material that could be understood "as if it were material in the real, physical world," as he later described in his 2010 talk *Driving the Creative Machine*. His paintings did not seek to reproduce recognizable subjects. Instead, they investigated the processes through which marks acquire meaning, shapes establish boundaries, and visual relationships suggest a world beyond the surface of the canvas. Increasingly, Cohen

became interested not only in the images he created, but in the decisions and procedures that made their creation possible.

Cohen's emergence as a leading figure in postwar British abstraction followed an early period of considerable artistic recognition. Having studied at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, he held his first solo exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in 1951. Between 1959 and 1961, he traveled to New York on a Harkness Fellowship, exhibiting at Allan Stone Gallery before returning to London. In 1962, he presented a solo exhibition at Robert Fraser Gallery, marking the beginning of an especially productive period in which his paintings developed a distinctive and increasingly complex visual language.

His international reputation grew rapidly. Associated with the influential Situation Group, Cohen participated in the *Situation* exhibition at the Royal Society of British Artists (RBA) Galleries in London in 1960, a significant moment in the development of British abstract painting. He went on to exhibit at Documenta III in Kassel in 1964, followed by the major survey *Harold Cohen: Paintings 1960–65* at London's Whitechapel Gallery in 1965. Writing in the exhibition catalog, critic John Richardson described him as "one of the most serious and thought-provoking painters in England today." In 1966, Cohen was selected to represent Great Britain at the 33rd Venice Biennale alongside Anthony Caro, Bernard Cohen, Robyn Denny, and Richard Smith, firmly establishing his position among the foremost British abstract artists of his generation.

The works brought together in this exhibition *Painting About Representation (1962–71)* trace the evolution of Cohen's thinking during these pivotal years. Among the earliest, *The Knight's Gambit* (1962) reduces the composition to a recurring contour, repeated, inverted, and reconfigured through contrasting bands of color. Writing in *Studio International* in 1966, critic David Thompson observed that Cohen referred to the ambiguous relationships within his paintings as "paradoxes". In *The Knight's Gambit*, a single visual element generates a succession of possibilities, anticipating the procedural thinking that would become central to his later practice.

By 1964, works such as *Next Year's Valentine* had developed into intricate arrangements of overlapping marks, grids, contours, and fields of color. A wash of mauve spreads across the bare ground; a scalloped dark green form, a loose dark brown grid and a looping red line are laid over it. At the right, a heart – the valentine of the title – is caught in a tighter red mesh and ringed with short radiating strokes. Each layer partly conceals and partly reveals what lies beneath. These paintings introduced a cartographic quality to Cohen's visual language, with enclosed territories, shifting boundaries, and lines of passage suggesting systems of spatial organization rather than conventional pictorial representation.

This exploration continued in *Pastoral* (1965), one of the paintings exhibited at the Venice Biennale the following year. Across its expansive surface, irregular fields of brown and teal are punctuated by clusters of vivid color and small looping lines. Although its title evokes landscape, the painting offers something closer to an imagined geography, viewed as though from above. Its relationship to mapping would later find an unexpected continuation in Cohen's computer-generated Contour Maps and Territorial Maps, which similarly investigated how a surface might be divided into distinct yet interrelated regions.

By the latter half of the decade, Cohen's paintings had undergone another significant transformation. In works

such as *Edge* (1967), the elaborate contours and enclosed forms of his earlier canvases gave way to repeated marks, atmospheric surfaces, and increasingly subtle relationships between color and space. Part of a series of rhombus-shaped paintings, *Edge* presents a field of blue dots across a red-brown ground, creating a surface that resists a stable distinction between figure and background.

The monumental diptych *Array* (1967) takes this investigation further. Across two panels, each more than two meters high, a continuous lattice of ochre dots extends over a softly sprayed ground of pink and violet. Variations in color and density create shifting optical relationships, as individual marks appear alternately to advance and recede. The painting's title, *Array*, evokes an ordered arrangement of elements, a concept shared by mathematics and computing. Here, however, the underlying structure remains entirely the work of the artist's hand: a repeated visual decision whose cumulative effect produces a complex and unpredictable experience of space.

In June 1968, Cohen presented *Harold Cohen: New Paintings* at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, an important exhibition that brought together the developments of his recent practice at a decisive moment in his career. Cohen wrote the introduction to the exhibition catalog himself, articulating the ideas that had come to underpin his painting. These investigations increasingly shifted his attention from the composition of individual images toward the systems of relationships through which they were formed.

The year 1968 also marked a turning point beyond the studio. Before leaving Britain, Cohen visited *Cybernetic Serendipity*, the landmark exhibition curated by Jasia Reichardt at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. Bringing together artists, engineers, and researchers working with computers and emerging technologies, the exhibition presented new possibilities for the relationship between artistic creation and computational processes. Later that year, Cohen relocated to California as a Visiting Lecturer at the University of California, San Diego.

In San Diego, Cohen began learning the programming language FORTRAN and exploring whether the principles underlying his paintings could be expressed as instructions for a computer. His earliest computer-generated works, followed by the Contour Maps, Territorial Maps, and Mazes, extended the investigations of form, boundary, and spatial organization that had occupied him throughout the preceding decade. The questions remained remarkably consistent, even as the means of addressing them changed.

By 1971, Cohen was developing algorithms capable of generating lines and partitioning pictorial space according to explicitly defined procedures. In 1973, he was invited to spend two years at Stanford University's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, where he continued developing the ideas that would shape AARON, the groundbreaking artificial intelligence program he developed during the 1970s and continued to refine for more than four decades. Unlike contemporary generative AI systems trained on existing images, AARON operated through an expanding body of rules and representational knowledge encoded by Cohen himself. His ambition was not simply to automate image-making, but to investigate the knowledge, decisions, and cognitive processes that make artistic creation possible.

Presented sixty years after Cohen's participation in the Venice Biennale, *Painting About Representation (1962–71)*

restores attention to a formative and historically significant period in the artist's practice. The exhibition positions Cohen's paintings within the broader history of postwar abstraction while revealing the remarkable continuity between his painterly investigations and his subsequent work in artificial intelligence.

The exhibition also provides a historical point of departure for the Digital Art Roundtable (DAR), taking place at Gazelli Art House New York on Wednesday, November 11, 2026. Bringing together artists, curators, collectors, and institutional representatives, the invitation-only gathering will consider questions of authorship, artistic agency, and the evolving relationship between human creativity and computational systems, from Cohen's pioneering work with AARON to contemporary artistic practices.

This dialogue extends to London with Jasia Reichardt: *AI Then & Now*, a significant new project at Gazelli Art House London. Conceived by Reichardt and co-curated by Alex Estorick and Peter Bauman, the exhibition previews on January 14 and opens to the public on January 15, 2027. Revisiting the historical context of *Cybernetic Serendipity* (ICA London, 1968) through archival material and the work of 50 leading international artists, the exhibition further explores the evolving relationship between art, technology, and artificial intelligence.

At a moment when questions of authorship, creativity, and machine intelligence have assumed renewed urgency, Cohen's work offers an important historical perspective. His paintings demonstrate that the conceptual foundations of his later innovations were established long before he wrote his first line of code.

For Cohen, the move from painting to programming was not a departure from art, but an extension of its possibilities: a lifelong inquiry into not simply what images represent, but how representation itself becomes possible.

About the Artist

Harold Cohen (1928–2016) was a British artist whose groundbreaking practice occupies a significant position in the histories of postwar abstraction, computer art, and artificial intelligence. Over a career spanning more than six decades, Cohen pursued a sustained investigation into the nature of representation and the cognitive processes underlying artistic creation. Working across painting, drawing, and computational systems, he challenged established distinctions between artistic intention, authorship, and machine autonomy, developing an influential body of work that continues to inform contemporary discourse on art and technology.

Cohen's work has been presented at leading international institutions, including Tate, London; the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Whitechapel Gallery, London; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. His contributions to postwar and contemporary art have also been recognized through his participation in major international exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale and Documenta. More recently, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, presented *Harold Cohen: AARON* (2024), a major exhibition examining

the evolution of his pioneering art-making software and its enduring significance within the history of artificial intelligence.

Alongside his artistic practice, Cohen maintained a distinguished academic career at the University of California, San Diego, where he served as Professor of Visual Arts, Chair of the Visual Arts Department, and Director of the Center for Research in Computing and the Arts. In 2014, he received the ACM SIGGRAPH Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement in Digital Art, recognizing his exceptional contribution to the field. His work continues to shape critical discussions surrounding generative art, computational creativity, and the relationship between human and machine intelligence.

Gazelli Art House is the worldwide representative of the Harold Cohen Trust.

About Gazelli Art House

With spaces in London, New York, and Baku, Gazelli Art House presents a cross-generational program spanning Post-War, modern and contemporary art. Founded by Mila Askarova in 2010, the gallery represents an international roster of artists and estates and brings together historically significant figures with contemporary practitioners working across painting, sculpture, photography, installation, performance, moving image and digital media. Through exhibitions, commissions and institutional collaborations, Gazelli Art House fosters dialogue between historical and contemporary perspectives, while maintaining a longstanding commitment to artists from Azerbaijan and the wider Caucasus region. In 2015, the gallery launched GAZELL.iO, a platform dedicated to artists working at the intersection of art and technology, supporting practices engaging with computational systems, generative processes, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, and other emerging technologies.

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