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Cora Cohen cared little for looking back at the past. To my eye, she found it slightly indulgent, and in opposition to her unwavering engagement with the present and new work. For in Cora's mind there was always new work requiring attention—attention that could therefore not be squandered on the past.

Together, Cora and I staged the last exhibition of her work as a living artist. I was introduced to Cohen by fellow artist Sam Jablon, as a colleague and close friend to us both. Our meeting was warm and respectful. As she began to speak about her work, it became clear that Cora was interested in the puzzle of painting, both in terms of process and as an independent object.

She did not strive to reach the finish line of each painting, but rather lingered and enjoyed the discovery and challenge in the reworking of pictures, until they reached a point of completion—whether they resolved themselves or not, that was not Cora's primary concern. Once paintings were finished she of course enjoyed them, but more as old acquaintances rather than as points of pride, for she was consistently preoccupied and excited by new work.

As we pulled out a selection of historical works, from close to forty years prior, Cora recalled intimate details about each painting, yet always with a mind to the use of material in each, rather than her feelings at the time of creating them. The elements that gripped her were of the present, the orientation they would hang in, and how they could inspire, or more accurately modulate, the paintings she was currently working on.

I recall a slight nervousness when I sent the draft for the exhibition text of *Cora Cohen: Works from the 1980's* to her. For one of the first things one learned in any conversation about painting with Cora, was that she was very precise in her use of language. She would challenge the selection of a word such as *lyrical*—not through the lens of criticism, but rather due to a sincere curiosity of what had led you to this word, and why you had chosen it in particular, rather than melodic, rhythmic or expressive.

Cora was incredibly intentional. She insisted that each painting be considered under the integrity of its own internal logic: consistently refuting the grouping of her work, or herself as an artist for that matter, under any larger conceptual system or movement.

In a 2013 *Hyperallergic* interview with Sam Jablon, Cora asserted:

Although I don't know formalism on any deep art critical level, I do know that it has been utilized to remove a sense of the world from the practice of painting, and has enabled the consideration of a painting as an autonomous object, often outside of any social system. I refute this obliquely and explicitly.¹

This certain refutation makes me smile, for on painting Cora never trembled.

In recognition of Cora's unwavering dedication to the present, we should consider how we could best use the past to inspire the new. There is no question that Cora's work is her resounding legacy, and while we should certainly recognize that this work was at times overlooked in comparison to the caliber it bore, it is more important, and would certainly be more appreciated by Cora, to ask how we carry it forward with us.

To allow an indulgence which Cora would have never permitted, or at least squirmed uncomfortably in its utterance: I am proud to be friends with Cora Cohen, honored to have had a part in stewarding her work, and miss her greatly.



Cora Cohen, *Tropological Painting*, 1991. Copper powder, marble dust, oil, oil mediums, pastel and watercolor on linen, 75 x 47 inches. Photo: Alex Yudzon.

1. Sam Jablon, *Hyperallergic*, "The Formative Formlessness of Cora Cohen," August 22nd 2013. <https://hyperallergic.com/80124/the-formative-formlessness-of-cora-cohen/>