

## Oreen Cohen, *Darkest Dark*

July 23 - September 3, 2021



*Darkest Dark Series: Surface to Depth*, 2019, four hour durational drawing, charcoal, water, eraser, 60 in x 30 ft

### *Into the Depth*

Curatorial essay by Shirley Verrico

Oreen Cohen's interdisciplinary art practice spans the potentiality of material, including sculpture, painting, drawing, public installation, video, and performance. *Darkest Dark* is part of an ongoing exhibition series of major charcoal works on paper, including some as large as 30 feet long. Each drawing is built up with layers of marks and is the result of aggressive automatic drawing. In a ritualistic fashion, Cohen strikes the surface of the paper with boundless energy, thrashing to music oscillating between post-punk and heavy metal, and releasing emotional energy onto the paper's surface. Cohen works with both hands,

moving back and forth across the length of the paper while staying focused on only the mark she is making in that moment. Her process is simultaneously creative and destructive, leaving the paper wrinkled and torn.

In 2019, Cohen began collaborating with Pittsburgh movement artist Gia T. Cacalano and sound manipulator Jonathan Hodges with Echolightwaveunspeakable, to develop an improvisational work. Titled *Somatic Automatic*, the project combined sensory, meditative, and participatory drawing movements made in concert with an audience. Cohen expanded the collaboration by adding a live band component during the drawing, movement, and sound performance.

For over three hours, Cohen aggressively drew with charcoal on a 30 foot piece of paper. Noise musician Jonathan Hodges augmented sounds while instant composer, dancer, and educator Gia Cacalano interpreted the somatic environment. The team of artists acted and reacted to the space and to each other in concert, also incorporating the sound and movement of the over 1000 visitors. The final drawing, titled *From Surface to Depth*, became the physical record of the motion, emotion, and energy of the event.

Like *From Surface to Depth*, all of the drawings in *Darkest Dark* are the product of a single, feverish session. Cohen's physical process relies on full body gestures and allows her to push the possibilities of mark-making beyond the small motor functions of just her hands. Many of the works represent an outpouring of once-repressed narratives that express personal trauma, including experiences of misogyny, illness, and physical transformation.

Cohen amplifies the volume of her work by rejecting conventional installation formats. The drawings are presented with raw edges and without frames. On several walls, multiple works are staggered and stacked on top of each other, and the massive drawing *Tipped* even flows onto the floor. At 30 feet long, *From Surface to Depth* ignores the wall altogether, cutting off the corner of the room as it arcs across the gallery. Many of the titles serve as single-word calls to action, including *Wring*, *Sever*, *Bail*, and *Trust*. Although Cohen's work is clearly seeded in deeply personal experiences, it is also the product of a physical and emotional reality that is part of the larger collective consciousness.



*Darkest Dark Series: Tipped, Darkest Dark Series: Stemming* installation view



*Darkest Dark Series: installation detail*

### Artist Biography

Oreen Cohen grew up between the Rust Belt of the United States and Northern Israel. Cohen received a Master of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture (2014) from Carnegie Mellon University and a BFA (2008) in Painting at the University at Buffalo. Over the past eighteen years, Cohen has been participating in exhibitions and public commissions nationally and internationally. She has created site-specific installations at the Brooklyn Army Terminal in New York, NY, Carrie Furnaces in Pittsburgh, PA, Governor's Island, NYC, Chevy in the Hole in Flint, MI, and Squirrel Hill in Pittsburgh. Cohen is currently living and working in Pittsburgh, PA. where she is a mother, educator, and artist that honors process over intention in every aspect of making.

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