MARK SHEINKMAN 2007

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DRAWING WITH LIGHT

MARK SHEINKMAN: DRAWING WITH LIGHT

by Michaël Amy

As Mark Sheinkman put it to me one recent morning in his studio in the South Bronx: "When you live in New York, you deal with the New York School, and when you live in Rome, you deal with classicism". The viscosity of oil and enamel, which is partly governed in Abstract Expressionist painting by the dramatic gesture and partly by the laws of chance, would immediately have come to my mind upon hearing those words, had I not been familiar with Sheinkman's recent work. As an artist who is fully committed to a type of abstract drawing and painting in which line plays a fundamental role. Sheinkman owes a debt to Jackson Pollock -although the vounger artist's use of materials and techniques is very different. Like Pollock, Sheinkman is a master of line. Significantly however, the lines in his drawings and paintings are generated through a process of elimination, and not of accretion. Pollock's drip and de Kooning's loaded brush are simply not part of his arsenal.

Sheinkman's sensibility is undeniably marked by the look of photography. This artist aims for effects of light coming out of darkness as well as for the sheen and flatness of surface of photography—in fact, his recent pictures purposely lack facture and even texture. Sheinkman observes that because his new paintings have qualities that are more closely associated with the language of photography than with that of pictures in which brush-marks are conspicuous, we may be prone to respond to his recent pictures rather differently than we do to most abstract paintings in which gesture plays a critical role. He knows that we come to photographs with expectations that are different from the ones we have when we approach painting, and

believes that a different state of mind may lead to new perceptions and sensations.

The pictures are produced in the following way. Oil mixed with alkyd is first applied onto a linen surface that is stretched over a wood panel. (However, Rider, one of the largest works in this exhibition, is produced on canvas, without a wood backing), Once a smooth white surface is built up, powdered graphite is applied onto the dry ground with brushes and rags. Once this is done, the artist begins to draw lines by removing black graphite from the surface of the canvas with an eraser, thereby exposing white ground. The resulting effect is that of lines glowing in the darkness. The artist may subsequently choose to darken certain lines by adding graphite to these, thereby achieving greater depth, as the darker lines appear to lie deeper in fictive space than the brighter ones twisting and turning in a zone that becomes the foreground. Sheinkman does not shun illusionism. In fact, the images he now produces may remind us of drawings that are rapidly executed with an electric light or flame in midair, in the dark.

There is a well-known photograph of Picasso executing such a drawing for the camera. Significantly, from 1991 to 1994, Sheinkman drew with light by drawing flashlights and the like across photosensitive linen, thereby arriving at simulacra of loaded brushstrokes, black on top of white. These values are reversed in the recent paintings. The evolution from those works of 1991 to 1994 to the body of drawings and paintings that were generated at the start of our new millennium through the

act of erasing, and whereby darkness makes way for ribbons of light, is perfectly logical. In 1994, Sheinkman began working with erasers. In 11.3.94, a drawing presently in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, thin, vertical, equidistant bands of graphite—separated by wider bands of exposed white paper—are intersected in different places by uneven, more or less horizontal streaks of exposed paper that were obtained by dragging a thin eraser across the vertical lines, thereby cutting or smudging these so that a visual static is achieved. That same year, the artist also began drawing lines with an



Marc Sheinkman: 11.3.94

eraser through fields of graphite. It is only by 2002, however, that this technique—which was by then handled with far greater assurance than before—became central to his practice.

The artist draws intuitively without the help of preparatory sketches. Once the initial composition is

laid down, he returns to it to make changes, strengthen a passage, sharpen an outline and/or blur a boundary. The process of removing material from the surface of an object to transform its appearance and/or uncover what lies beneath it has a rich pedigree in both the modern and pre-modern transformation of images. As is well known, such an act may amount to censorship or defacement—numerous examples abound. Sheinkman's erasures, on the other hand, have their origin in operations aiming to make an image or mark choppier, blurrier and/or softer, and thereby more visually intriguing, as it becomes richer with accident. The effects thereby obtained can be likened to those

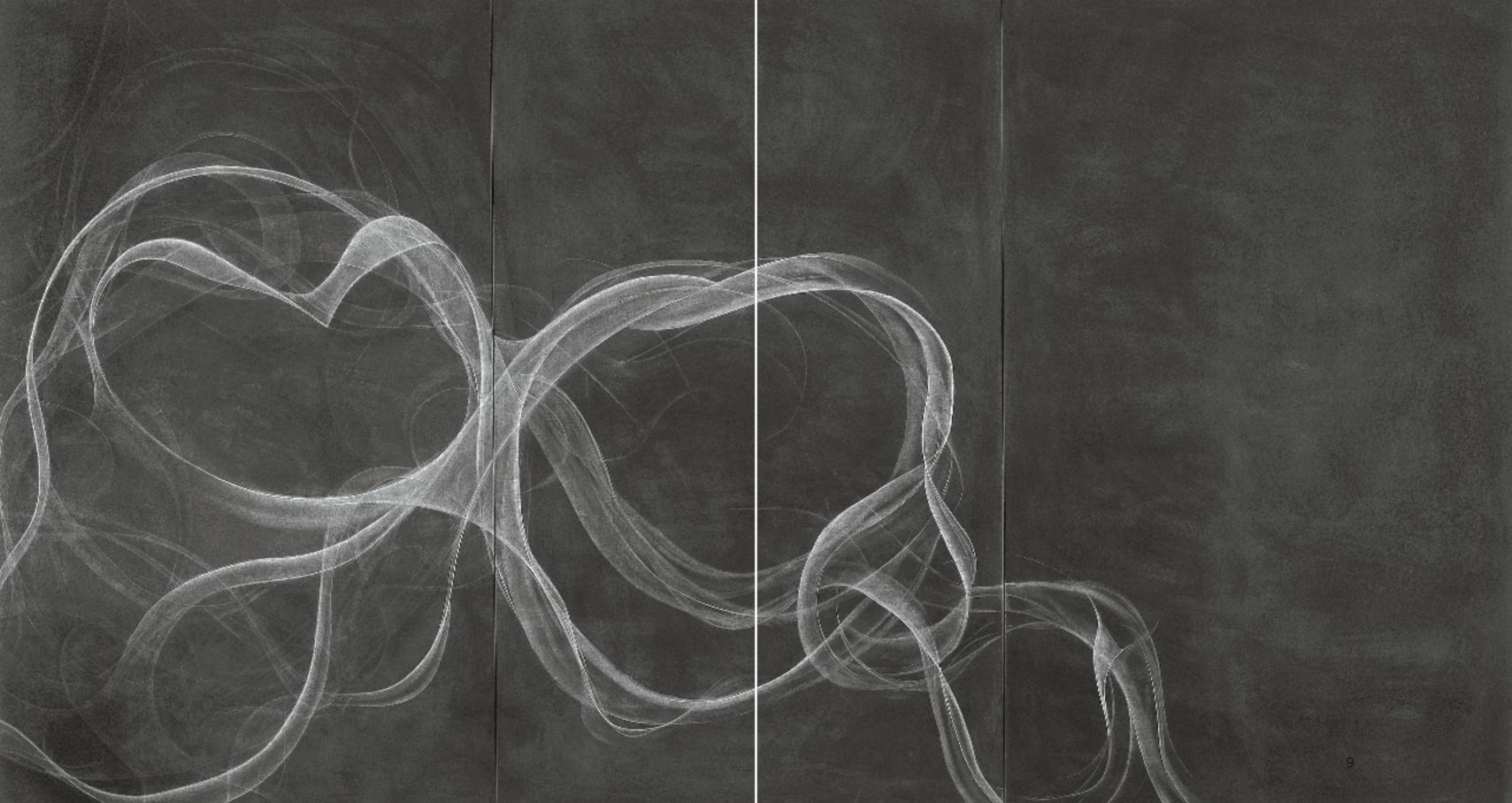
found in photographs with blurred passages. This brings us to the painter Gerhard Richter, who—like Mark Sheinkman—is fascinated by the look and trickery of photographs, and who has —since the 1960's—been dragging pigment from one zone into an adjacent one to create effects of photographs that are out of focus. However, the acts of scraping and erasing to generate new forms and meanings can be traced back to Dadaist and Surrealist practice—Max Ernst comes to mind. Interestingly, the Early Renaissance theorist of the arts Leon Battista Alberti would define carving—and not drawing or painting- as the *art of taking away*. As Sheinkman explains it: "I think the recent works have a lot to do with carving into space".

The strict geometry of the all-over, dense, multi-layered grids of 2002 and 2003, made way in 2004 for crowded, all-over curvilinear networks that in forceful retribution now relegated all verticals, horizontals and right angles to the attic. Sheinkman's work has an energy all of its own. In both of those bodies of work, the erased lines were arbitrarily cropped by the edges of the picture, thereby hinting at a continuum beyond the picture plane and possibly into infinity. Those pictures gave intimations of a cosmic dimension. However, Sheinkman realized that year that all-over painting had limitations he was no longer willing to accept, while recognizing that: "Restrictions open up all kinds of possibilities". In all-over painting, every inch of the composition is—at least in theory—of equal importance. Sheinkman had taken this principle as far as he felt he could at that time. What the artist wanted in 2004 was greater contrast than could be obtained by playing off all-over patterns of luminous and light grey lines against discrete zones of darkness. A different order of drama was needed than what could be achieved through symmetry. In short, Sheinkman was prepared to re-introduce distinct hierarchies into his paintings. This latest move brings us to his most recent body of work.

The striking, vertical painting titled *Rider* shows interweaving, diaphanous ribbons, subtly shifting from grey to white, rising from the bottom right towards the top left of the composition and delineating three irregular ellipses, as large fields of darkness remain untouched in the bottom left and the top right. The mellifluous torsions of the translucent ribbons are suddenly arrested—as if in a snapshot of smoke that has risen from a mouth blowing rings—although we can easily imagine how they will continue to unfold in the following moment, and rapidly dissolve. Sheinkman now explores volume, transition, change, velocity and ephemerality, in ways he was not previously prepared to do. The three enclosed cells may bring early Terry Winters to mind—an artist Sheinkman tackled in the grid paintings of 2002 and 2003—while the lyrical movements of the arabesques offer an interesting take on late de Kooning. There is a searching quality to the line-work in this picture, which brings Leonardo's revolutionary drawing practice as applied by Raphael and, later, Guercino to mind. This artist shamelessly embraces virtuosity. The silvery tones of both the graphite washes of uneven density and the ribbons, are reminiscent of gelatin silver prints, while the curvilinear rhythms of Sheinkman's organic abstraction hark back to the work of Edward Weston.

Sheinkman notes that: "The titles of the works are not important to me. I chose street names from the Bronx to designate these paintings, since that is where these works were made. The titles of my earlier works consisted of nothing more than dates, indicating approximately when each painting was completed". This artist's abstractions open themselves up to different readings, which their titles refuse to endorse. Remarkably, his compositions never allow us to see an object—such as a landscape, or body—in them. His designs remain resolutely and uncompromisingly abstract. In the even more Baroque

Southern, the movement unfolds precipitously along a diagonal running from left to right into immeasurable depth. Interestingly, this work's decorative motions evoke the sailing veils of Isadora Duncan as well as Giacomo Balla's birds in flight. Mark Sheinkman's selective historical outlook provides him with the tools that are required to persuasively proclaim the ongoing relevance of abstract painting.





Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen 59 x 55 inches



Concourse, 2007

Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen 96 x 174.5 inches



Third, 2007

Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen 40 x 35 inches



Southern, 2007
Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen
50 x 60 inches



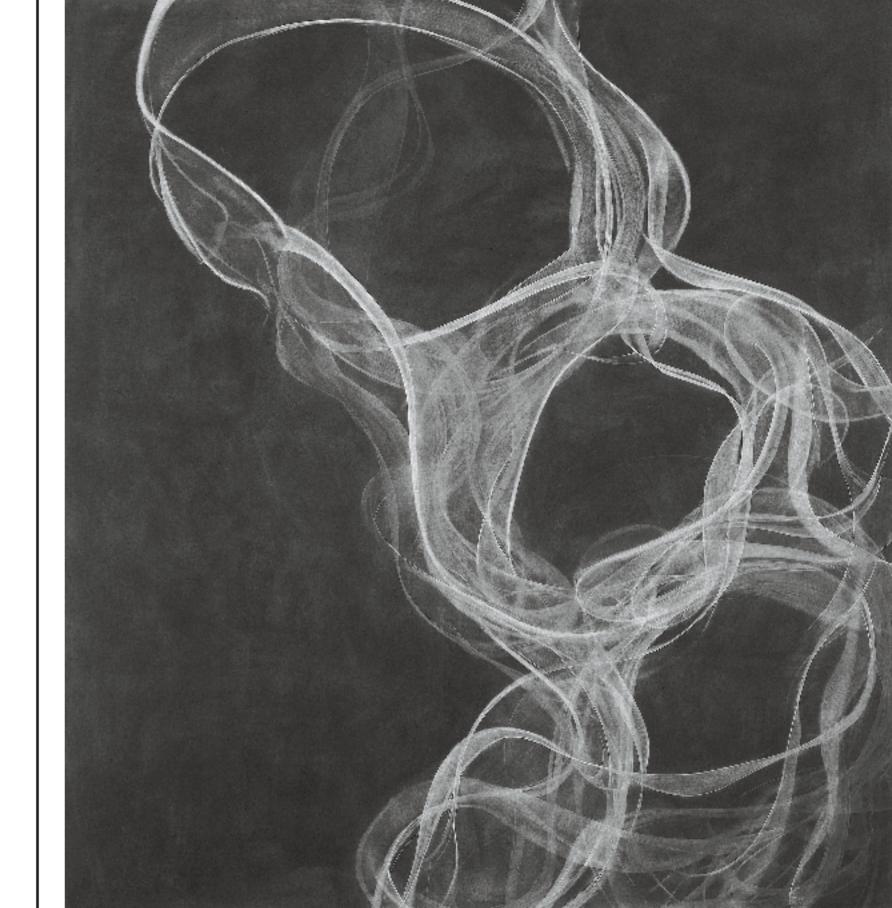
Sheridan, 2007
Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen

40 x 50 inches



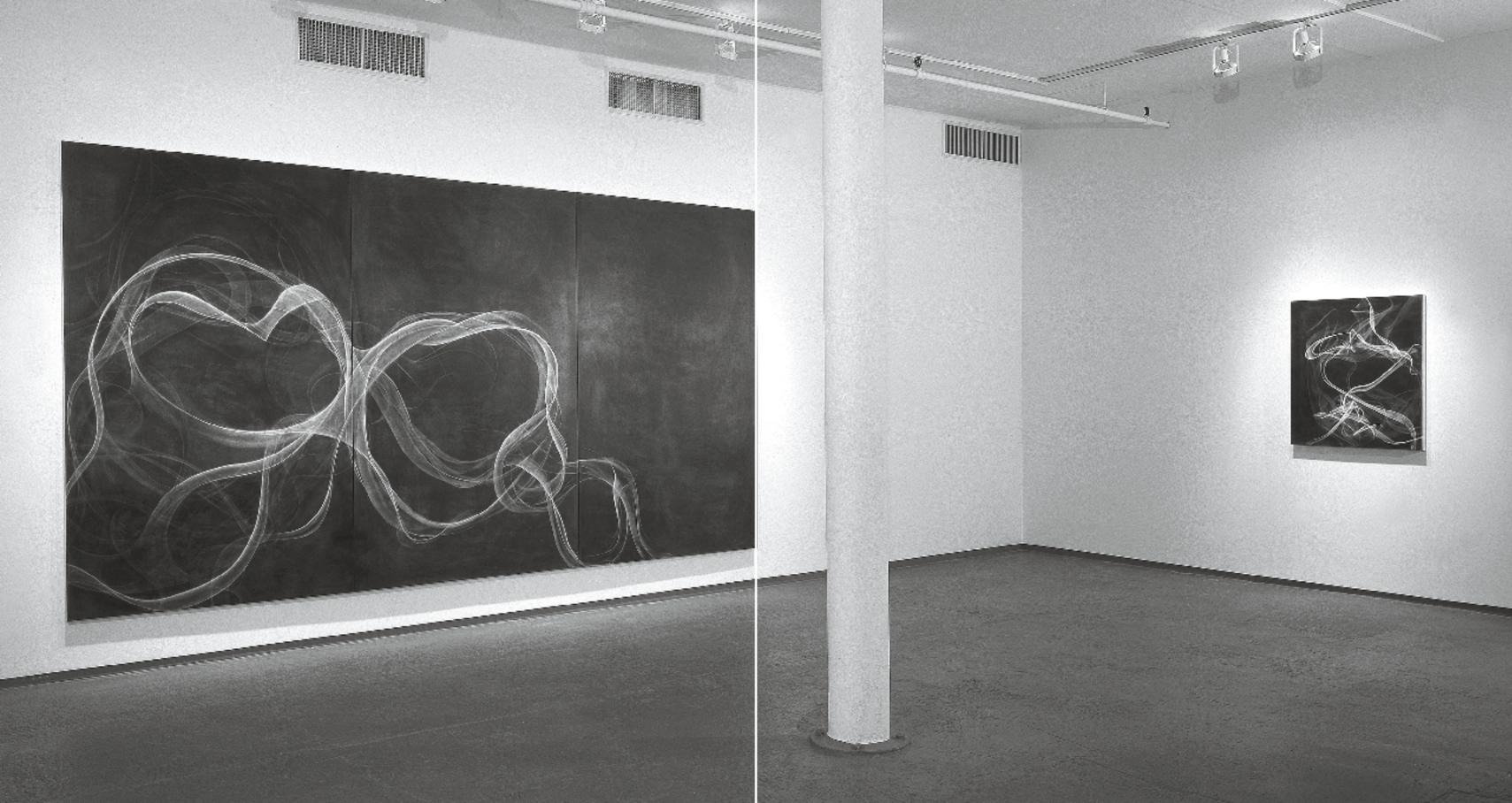
Rider, 2007

Oil, alkyd and graphite on canvas 88 x 80 inches



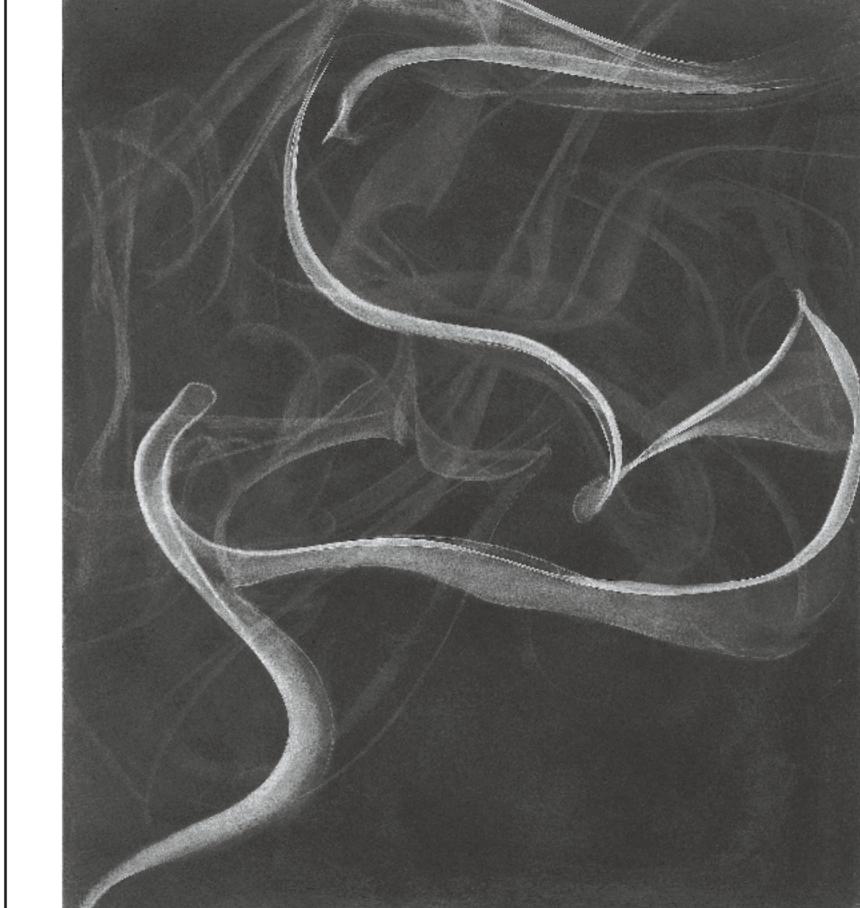
Morris, 2007
Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen
30 x 39 inches





Intervale, 2007

Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen 40 x 35 inches



Griffin, 2007

Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen 70 x 58 inches



Deegan, 2007
Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen
54 x 78 inches



Beekman, 2007

Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen 58 x 31 inches



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Bruckner, 2007

Oil, alkyd and graphite on linen 90 x 56 inches

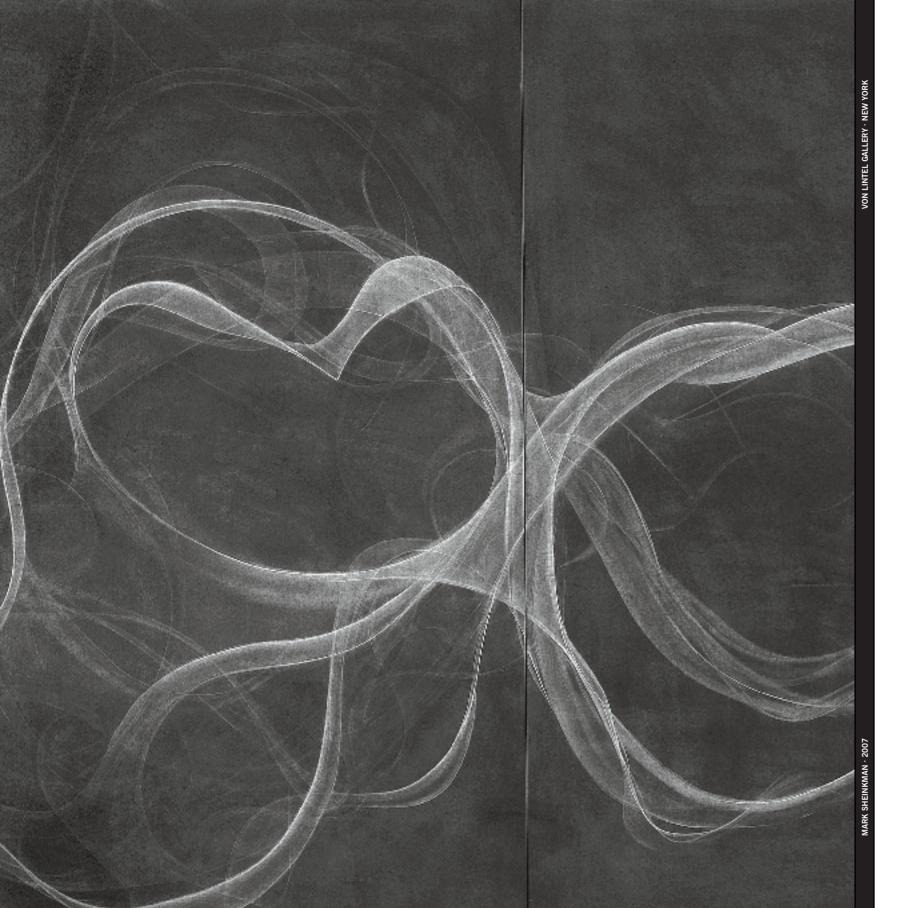


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MARK SHEINKMAN

BIO

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