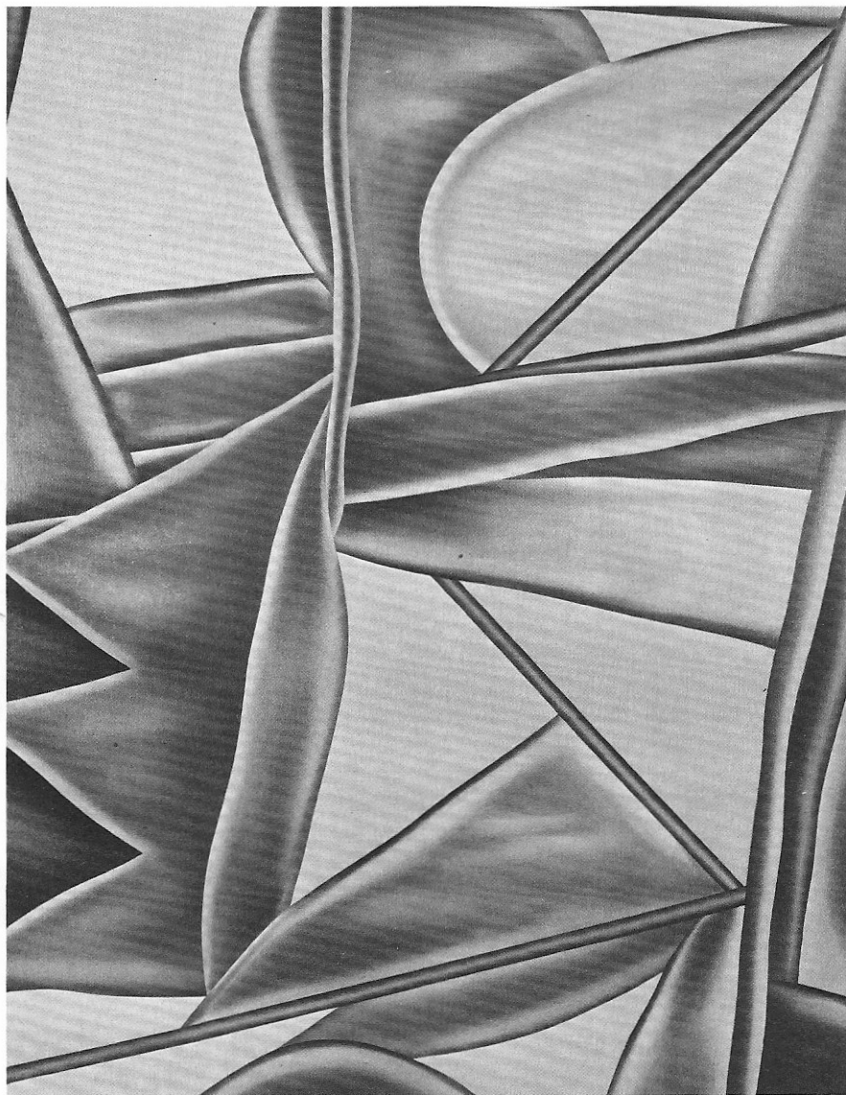


# ARTFORUM

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Bill Conger, *Niagara*, 1975, o/c, 66" x 50".

BILL CONGER's oil paintings begin simply as a way to organize a flat surface, but they go beyond that fundamental. Conger is an eclectic, an appropriate disposition in the city of Chicago, where people, objects, and other influences continually come and go; and his work might appear "dated" in art history's sequence. But if art is a changing, overlapping "mosaic," as Lawrence Alloway suggests, rather than a "crystallized" mainstream, the concept of datedness is irrelevant to Conger's work. It has a metaphysical light, a cubist spatial orientation, a surreal juxtaposition of elements, and an intuitive Abstract-Expressionist color development. Each initially geometric design is modelled with dense earth-tone or "Easter"-color paints and a "neon" illumination that has no visible source and casts no logical shadows. The paintings appear as webs of linear and dislike elements that cross, push, overlap, and intermingle. Like certain Légers, they have an innate mural scale.

This work grows out of Conger's late 1960s masonite-disc sculpture, which was arranged on the wall, a surrogate canvas. By the early 1970s, his painting used the shape of a "reed" to establish the position in illusionistic space of other volumetric forms. But in his new painting, a similar "reed" only functions secondarily as an optical cue and primarily as a metaphoric, physical support. He relates form-families in space and shows how these elements get along. The forms all stand out individually, one leading to the other, the flat and volumetric areas equally important, and the forms substantiated but not overpowered by the color. An implicit crawling motion seems to animate each shape. Families of "beans," "plasma clumps," and large flat circles—something like Dali's draped clocks—threaten to join, rotate, ooze around, or wheeze in and out. The work is his own, growing thing.

—C. L. MORRISON