



## Biography – Les Cohn

Les Cohn gained a B.A. Fine Art Hons. from Michaelis Art School, University of Cape Town (1968). After graduation she worked in various capacities in the commercial world, married, spent a year in Europe and on her return raised a family.

Furthering her studies she gained her National Higher Diploma in Fine Art (with Distinction) from the Wits Technikon (now University of Johannesburg) in 1995, receiving a Technikon Honours Medal. Her solo exhibition was presented at the Rembrandt Art Gallery. Cohn's work was also included on several group exhibitions and was selected in the top one hundred of the Momentum Art Award, the Kempton Park Art Competition (now Thami Mnyele Art Award) and the PPC Art Competition. A work was selected for the Johannesburg Africus Biennale (1995).

In 1996 Cohn became the first Administrator of the Fordsburg Artist Studios (aka the Bag Factory Studios). Her key tasks were to manage the Studios, raise funding and establish an international artist residency programme. From 1997 onwards many contemporary mid-career, international artists undertook a three month residency, culminating in a public exhibition at the Studios. Artists hailed from Africa, India, the Caribbean, Cuba, USA, UK and Europe. During this period she obtained her Diploma in Arts & Culture Management from the School of Public Development and Management (PD&M), Witwatersrand University. Johannesburg

Cohn resigned in 2001 to found **Art Source South Africa**. Over the years she has contributed her qualifications, wide industry experience and professional expertise to artists, grassroots community development projects, tertiary institutions and corporate clients. Her extensive network and high profile have allowed her to play a significant professional role in the industry. Cohn was appointed to the Workplace Learning Programme, University of Johannesburg Fine Art Department. She has mentored many final year fine art undergraduates in project management and curatorship.

Awards include: Guy Stringer Bursary Award (2006) from the Resource Alliance, London in recognition of her fundraising successes to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> International Workshop on Resource Mobilisation, Bangkok, Thailand. The American State Department, (previously United States Information Services) granted her a travel award in 2011 to attend high level meetings at the Meridian International Foundation, Howard University Fine Art Department and the Corcoran Museum, Washington DC.

Papers presented: Arts, Funding and Sustainability Challenges seminar (2011) organised by WITS School of Education and the National Arts Council of South Africa, Museum Africa, Johannesburg. A peer reviewed paper on **Art Source South Africa's**

unique model 'A Plan for Success' presented at International Conference on Arts, Society and Sustainable Development at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in 2011, Pretoria. Presentations to: IEB Teachers Conference, 2013, Ekurhuleni and on the 1st SSASEA- UNESCO Art Education Virtual Conference, North West University, Potchefstroom, 2020.

Cohn has curated many exhibitions in museums around South Africa and several in the USA, undertaking the role of Project Manager and Curator she has presented artist's touring, long-term projects. Namely, Mbongeni Buthelezi's *Imizwa Yami*, Usha Seejarim's *Venus at Home*, Wilma Cruise' *Will You, won't you join the dance?* Prof Keith Dietrich's *Fragile Histories, Fugitive Lives, !IKauru contemporary art* project to name a few. Paul Emmanuel's exhibition *Transitions* including the film *3 SAI: A Rite of Passage* toured several museums in South Africa, Mozambique, Germany, the Smithsonian Museum of African Art, Washington DC (2010) and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Baltimore USA (2011). Emmanuel's *The Lost Men* site-specific (ongoing) counter memorial installation was presented in Grahamstown (2004), Maputo (2007) and the Somme, N. France (2016). The last installation is planned for Washington DC (2024-2025). His *remnants* exhibition toured to Freedom Park, Pretoria, 808 Gallery, Boston, USA and Oliwenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, Currently Cohn is project manager of Emmanuel's solo exhibition *Substance of Shadows* (UJ Gallery, Jhb, Sept. 2021) including the artist's new film *Rising Falling* (in production).

Cohn managed *Signs of Solidarity* for The Royal Netherlands Embassy, Pretoria. An installation of banners showing archived images and information on the Dutch support of the Struggle. It toured to nine venues around South Africa (2014 – 2016).

In 2015 and 2016 she served as a Thami Mnyele Fine Art Award adjudicator. As an ambassador she promoted the Award at several Gauteng tertiary institutions in 2017 and 2018.

Cohn has many years and extensive experience as a presenter and trainer since 2009 facilitating Professional Practice seminars and workshops. During the 2017 to 2019 period she managed and facilitated an intensive three month innovative skills development and business capacity building training course - the *Artist Career Boot Camp (ACBC) Programme*. Between 2018-2019 she conducted four two-day Business of Art workshops for the Isimangaliso Art Programme in St Lucia, KZN. They capacitated groups of rural artists in basic business skills and career management.

Board positions include: Executive Committee, Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), Executive Council of Artist Proof Studios (APS), Lehurutshe Community Group, North West Province, Rembrandt Art Gallery Committee, Market Theatre, Johannesburg.

Les Cohn lives and works in Johannesburg.