



Artist Instructor Profile – Mark Cohen

Mark Cohen has ‘dabbled’ in the arts his entire career. Trained as a graphic designer and art director, he enjoyed a highly successful, 30-year career in advertising at the helm of his own company. Despite a long list of accomplishments and accolades earned, there was still one more thing looming on his mind that he hoped to achieve. “I always wanted to learn to paint,” said Cohen, of West Palm Beach.

Early in his career, marketing for car dealers and homebuilders kept the creative teams at his firm busy, but in 1980, an invitation to market a hospital led to a change in Cohen’s plan – and ultimately a second career as a visual artist with something to ‘say.’

Visits to hospitals and shadowing physicians sparked his fascination and high respect for the medical community.

“Spending time in hospitals with doctors taught me how smart they were,” he said, adding that his firm’s marketing strategy turned the financial position of Shand’s Hospital.

“The hospital went from getting (generic) referrals to specific requests for doctors in various areas of specialty that we were advertising,” he said.

That account went on to be a 25-year account and the company still has the account - which is nice for the firm. “I gave the company to the employees,” Cohen said.

These days, Cohen spends his time expressing himself, realizing his goal as an accomplished visual artist.

He explains that a car accident about 15 years ago is what kick-started his career change. “It made me re-think what I was doing,” Cohen said. “I wanted to do something with meaning...I had always had this ambition to be a painter, I decided this is the time.”

Cohen found out about the Armory Art Center online, and soon met a painter who was teaching a class. “I said, ‘okay, this is the guy for me.’”

He spent three years learning to paint, what painting was all about, and why people did it.

“I was not interested in doing beach scenes,” said Cohen.

“At the time, I was looking around our society...it seems to be screwed up...There were school shootings.”

His early paintings expressed societal issues, "...things important to me," he said.

He painted, in his own words, 'killers, killers of children, the cop-killers.' He painted about The Holocaust.

"Then, this COVID thing came along and some of my good friends are doctors, having been with them so much of my career," he said.

He saw a New York Times and Time Magazine story with pictures of doctors and nurses.

"I thought, 'What is happening to these people?' Not only are they the smartest people in the world, but they are going to work not knowing if they could be dead," Cohen said.

He also saw jobs going away and people being hungry. His visit to a site, seeing cars lined up with families waiting to get food inspired his most recent work, *Painting #9*, depicting people who are hungry. It is the newest in his collection of paintings on raw canvas, entitled, *We're All Wearing Masks Now*.

The paintings – a statement series that honors critical workers – are large, with most roughly 7 feet wide by 15 feet tall, poured out of Cohen one by one, usually in the middle of the night.

"With every passing day...this is getting more and more horrible," he said. "Size gives it impact." When Cohen saw what COVID-19 looked like under a microscope it fueled his creative process. "I thought, 'This is how I can abstract this out... maybe make these paintings look as if COVID is attacking,'" he said.

Over the years, Cohen continues to enjoy taking classes at the Armory in painting and printmaking. He also enjoys teaching classes at the Armory, going on five years.

"The Armory is unquestionably the best resource in South Florida for people who want to learn the different forms of art, who have any kind of interest in art and who want to socialize with people interested in the arts," he said. "It's a resource for people of all ages."

He enjoys the social aspect people come to know at the Armory. "You become friends with your classmates and form lasting relationships. It is much more rewarding than the 'art schools' that we typically think of," added Cohen, "with limited course offerings, instructors and traditional curriculum."

To Cohen, the Armory Art Center feels like Disneyworld. "That's the Amory Art Center," he said. "It's a 'Small World' at Disney. It's such a feel-good place, you literally have no idea!"

– Contributed by, Laura Louise Tingo
JSS Marketing and Public Relations

About the Artist

Mark Cohen is an award-winning graphic designer, marketing and communications executive, teacher, painter, and print-maker. His subject matter utilizes contemporary and past iconic figures from all walks of life, including politics, popular culture, entertainment, and war and peace. Most of his paintings are strikingly large scale works. They have energy and impact. They exhibit a sparse and concise pictorial composition that combines abstract expressionism and pop art in their execution. In these works, viewers can investigate issues of racism, genocide, and bigotry. By using art to examine these issues, he hopes to remind viewers that we live in a world of continuing hateful biases that result in senseless violence around the world and that we should end hatred and promote understanding toward all people.

View his work at www.marklouiscohen.com

