

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born in Chatham, Ontario, Kimberley Kohan spent the first thirteen years of her life living in the quaint town of Aurora, north of Toronto.

From an early age, Kohan's teachers lauded her creativity. Whether it was drawing in the margins of her notebooks or building mazes in the snow for her siblings, Kohan had an insatiable thirst to create. Of course, no gift is without its cost: report cards often came back disappointing, with teachers commenting that her tendency to doodle and daydream drew her focus from academic pursuits.

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On her eleventh birthday, Kohan did find some focus- but it wasn't academics that ignited her passion, rather it was a set of 48 oil pastels. The tidy row of brilliant colours enchanted her from the moment she unwrapped the box, running her slender fingers over each one and the endless possibilities they held.



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Two years later, Kohan packed up her growing collection of pastels and immigrated to Australia with her family, setting roots in the coastal town of Mount Eliza.

Shortly after beginning classes at her new high school, Kohan was introduced to painting with acrylics- a completely new medium to immerse herself in!

Willful and focused- *with the right motivator*- Kohan immediately set out saving her pennies to buy her very own set of acrylic paints. Between babysitting for her neighbours and taking in ironing, she quickly saved up enough money and purchased her first set of acrylics, paper and canvas.

To Kohan's great surprise, her first painting sold for a handsome sum- \$20! A veritable wealth of riches considering the 50 cents an hour she earned ironing.

A passion she could make money from? This was almost too good to be true. When she grew up, she would become an *Artist*.

However, life was to throw the headstrong Kohan a bit of a curve-ball...

In her final year of high school, Kohan's favourite subject- *Art*- was graded on three major facets: a portfolio demonstrating specific skills, a 3-hour Art History exam and finally, a 3-hour supervised painting exam in which the students were required to complete a work of art from start-to-finish.

A timed painting exam? This seems ridiculous, thought Kohan. *Good art takes time, it is not something to be rushed or measured objectively.*

Given her qualms with the syllabus and teaching method, Kohan found herself skipping out of most of her art classes senior year. How could this be, that her favourite thing on earth could be made into something so unenjoyable? The living, breathing passion she had for art was being squashed- snuffed out. She continued to work tirelessly on her portfolio from home but felt defeated in the classroom.

The end of the school year finally arrived. Kohan was awarded a B; praised for her portfolio but losing marks on her exams.

Kohan felt bruised. Her love for painting and drawing had been clouded, leaving a foul taste in her mouth. She couldn't even look at her beloved paints without feeling sad, defeated and anxious.

She would not paint anything for the next 10 years.

It is said that "life is a garden of forking paths." With her creative spirit quashed, Kohan finally turned her focus to academia. As it turns out, her elementary school teachers were correct in their assessment that "Kimberley [was] clearly a very bright young lady!" Despite modest grades as a child, Kohan excelled in university.

Over the next 10 years, Kohan earned a handful of business-related degrees as well as one post graduate degree. She qualified as a Chartered Accountant and quickly became a partner in a mid-size Australian Chartered Accounting firm. She set up and ran the firm's Management Consultancy division and eventually moved on, landing a position for the second largest private company in the United States as a Senior Executive.



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While she climbed the corporate ladder, Kohan’s mind would occasionally drift back to art. After years of letting her right brain sit dormant, she began attending sessional art classes... here and there, squeezed in the brief, quiet moments between corporate commitments.

One such class she attended taught the art of Sumi, East-Asian brush painting. Her instructor was an expert in the style and witnessing his sheer mastery stirred something deep within Kohan.

The brush gently loaded with black ink, a deliberate line on rice paper. A graceful waltz between artist and medium.

It was not long before Kohan’s art library became filled with Sumi reference books. Suffice to say, many of Kohan’s friends and family hold rolls of rice paper from this era, treasures from her passion re-ignited.

For several years, Kohan juggled both of her passions- art and business. It seems an unlikely pair, a curious duality, but Kohan enjoyed the opportunity to work both sides of her brain, and she happened to excel at both, so why not? Mathematics, imagination. Facts, intuition. Numbers, colours.

Of course, no one can devote 100% of their attention to two things at once. The more she painted, the less she enjoyed seeing her office each morning. In 1995, Kohan

decided to take a corporate sabbatical- a “creative furlough.”

She left her high-powered corporate life in Sydney and began planning her adventure, starting with the purchase of an 80 Series Toyota Landcruiser- dual battery system, heavy duty shock absorbers, roof rack, Engels car fridge, CB radio and heavy duty tires. There would be no half-measures here, she was going off-the-beaten-track.

The wild, rugged terrain of the Kimberley region- no irony intended- had long intrigued our dear artist. She contacted a renowned local artist in the area, Nadeen Lovell, and set up to study under her. Keys in the ignition of the Landcruiser and here we go! Kohan embarked on what would be a life-changing journey.

Almost 7,000 km stood between Kimberley Kohan and THE Kimberley, but she was not dissuaded. From Sydney, she headed south along the east coast of Australia. Down along the bottom, past the south-coast where she had grown up, all the way to Perth, and then back up-up-up north, until she hit the sleepy outback town of Kununurra.

The entire journey took two months. Two incredible months of driving and camping and exploring and seeing what hidden wonders Australia had yet to show her.

With the exception of a few blustery days, Kohan slept each night under the stars, wrapped in her swag.

Twenty-three years later, she still has the original canvas outer (which could tell many stories) but the mattress has been replaced many times.



/swag/, noun: In Australia, a swag is a portable sleeping unit comprised of a canvas bedroll which folds in half. It is has a thin, foam mattress, a pillow and sheets.

Eager to start her training, Kohan met up with her art instructor, Nadeen Lovell, shortly after arriving. Despite being a renowned painter of great national significance, Nadeen found it difficult to make a living from art alone. At first, Kohan found this disappointing to hear, but she soon discovered that having 'extra-curricular' sources of income provided some *artistic perks*, as it were.

When Nadeen wasn't painting (or teaching), she was a tour guide, taking people on 4-by-4 tours to the rugged and fascinating Bungle Bungles (World Heritage Site, Purnululu National Park) and other picturesque locales within the Kimberley region. It goes without saying, Nadeen was blessed with more stunning subject matter for her art than she could even keep up with.



Kohan reaped the benefits of Nadeen's extra-curricular work as well, as her mentor generously shared her knowledge of the local flora, fauna, history and geology with her eager apprentice.

"I fell in love with the region," said Kohan. "The water is occupied by predators (sharks, crocodile and sea snakes), the land is just as bad (spiders, snakes, dangerous insects). Everything seems like it can take your life- or threaten to. The temperature climbs to 45 degrees, sometimes with oppressive humidity- if the animals don't kill you, the climate certainly can. Still... this rugged, untamed landscape speaks to my soul, and I need to paint it."

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A mere, one-year sabbatical no longer made sense.

Thus, Kohan put down some new roots. For the next 10 years, Kununurra became home. She continued to study with Nadeen Lovell and, before her study was complete, was offered the opportunity to exhibit on a professional level at the Diversion Gallery (subsequently renamed Lovell Gallery in 2005) in Kununurra.

During her time in Kununurra, Kohan learned the art of gouache, also known as opaque watercolour. Expanding on her previous skills in Sumi and inspired by the bold, vibrant colours of her surroundings, she carved out a new colourful style of her own.

From rich cadmium to intense ultramarine, this bold use of colour later translated to her oil painting as well and allowed her audience to experience her representations, not just simply view them: the sizzle of heatwaves coming off of red rock, the clear midnight sky kissing the earth, the sound of water flowing around lilies, the gentle swat of a tail as Brahman cattle brush away flies.

Kohan's work was so authentic in its representation of the region that she received a commission from the government of Western Australia's Department of Conservation and Land Management to create a set of panels for the Parry's Creek Nature Reserve, located northwest of Kununurra. The finished product totaled six metres in length and continues to provide invaluable information to visitors to the area.

Despite running a business consultancy practice and assisting non-profit organizations in her area, Kohan was determined to continue painting and held over 15 exhibitions (solo, joint and group) throughout Australia during her time in Kununurra.



In 2006, Kohan moved south to Perth, Western Australia, where she continued to juggle her two loves: art and business. She soon started working with a multinational company and was sent to Mongolia on a business trip. Remembering her mentor Nadeen Lovell's sage advice, Kohan captured hundreds of images while taking a unique 350km drive through the Gobi Desert, during Winter no less. The resulting images were translated on to canvas and sold almost immediately at an art show upon her return.

After 10 years in Perth, Kohan began to feel restless. Perhaps it was because she had never lived anywhere more than 10 or 15 years, but she felt her Perth roots drying, dislodging from stasis. Like a dandelion in spring, she had grown, she had bloomed and now it was time to float on the wind again.

But where would the wind take her this time? Back to the land of her birth. Well... sort of. She would return to Canada but instead of Ontario, she would head west to British Columbia.



"From the red dirt of Australia to the icy reaches of Cascadia, this new palette provided a welcome new set of challenges."

Once again, she went through the process of packing up, selling off, donating or storing all of her worldly possessions. Unlike her previous moves, this time Kohan was determined to travel around. Thankfully, she was also afforded a convenient home-base on this particular journey, as her brother had settled in Central British Columbia some years ago.

Over the next year, she traveled extensively throughout British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska.



"A few days here and there in a special place is merely a tease. This expansive country demands time to understand it, learn its natural and cultural history, and its evolution. I am just not sure about the bears." Moving from hot and dry to cold and damp meant that her colour palette had to adapt along with her wardrobe ("What is, exactly, a 'winter woolie?'" she wondered). From the red dirt of Australia to the icy reaches of Cascadia, this new palette provided a welcome new set of challenges.

Kohan continues to live in British Columbia. Having amassed a new collection of artwork, Kohan held her first solo North American exhibition in June 2018 in Vancouver and has exhibited eight times with the Federation of Canadian Artists over the past year, including a Gold Medal win in the FCA's Autumn Gallery Exhibition in November.

How long Kohan will stay in the Pacific Northwest remains undetermined. One can surmise, as long as it takes for the winds of wanderlust to sweep her off her feet again...