

Linda Kohen

b. 1924 in Milan, Italy – Lives in Montevideo, Uruguay

1924

28 of October Linda Olivetti is born in Milan to Guido Olivetti and Rina Colombo de Olivetti, Italians of Jewish heritage. She is the sister to Mario Olivetti, born in 1920.

1924 -1939

CHILDHOOD IN ITALY

Although her father works as an engineer, he is an art aficionado and amateur painter. On weekend strolls, he often takes Linda to visit Milan's museums and galleries.

*On Sunday mornings, [my father] took me on promenades, he taught me to admire – on the floor made with pieces of marble in our famous Galleria – the fossils. We studied them either because of their shapes or their essence. The outings were in general visits to a museum. He loved, in the art gallery of Brera, the work of the XIX century and together we admired especially the one of the Induno brothers and Giacomo Favetto.**



Linda (far right) and her family at the beach in Italy, c. 1934

With her family, Linda travels to other cities throughout Italy, visiting the artistic riches of Florence, Turin, and other sites. As a child, she exhibits a talent for drawing.

*I don't remember exactly when, but I have very present some drawing classes I attended when I would have been about ten or twelve years old; I remember I had to copy some plaster casts of Greek and Roman work. Another memory of my drawing, I think, was in 1938, when the Walt Disney movie of Snow White was released in Milan. I made several copies of the film scenes; I drew them with China ink and painted them with watercolors; I still keep one of them.**

1939

At age fifteen, on the eve of World War II and amidst growing anti-Semitism in Europe, Linda immigrates with her parents, brother, and maternal grandparents to South America. Arriving first in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the family moves to Montevideo, Uruguay shortly thereafter.

1940

Linda Kohen becomes a citizen of Uruguay. Lacking proper documentation from Italy to continue her education, she dedicates herself to artistic pursuits.

A mí me siempre me había gustado dibujar, (mi padre era muy buen pintor), pero al llegar a Uruguay yo todavía iba al Liceo y era mi intención terminar el Liceo y seguir una carrera: No fue posible. Los papeles que hubiera necesitado para inscribirme regularmente nunca llegaron de Italia (Italia estaba en guerra). Entonces me dedique al Profesorado de Ingles, que luego ejercí...al dibujo y a la pintura...me fui 'metiendo' en la pintura, y al tiempo estaba totalmente entregada.

I had always liked to draw (my father was a very good painter), but when I arrived to Uruguay I was still in high school and my intention was to graduate high school and go to college; it wasn't possible. The necessary paperwork for school enrollment never arrived from Italy because of the war. So I dedicated my time to study English, which I later taught...to drawing and painting...I submerged myself in painting and, after some time, I was completely committed.+

1940-1946

Studies drawing with Pierre Fossey (1901-1976), a French émigré to Montevideo.

*I started going to Pierre Fossey's studio, from whom I keep beautiful memories. The studio was in the Plaza Independencia. That studio was of much interest, either [sic] for the teaching than for the classmates that frequented it. There, I drew a lot of 'dal vero' (from life) landscapes with charcoal technique, for example the square, the Solis Theater, some old house, or whatever I was able to see from the studio window, and also portraits of my classmates. They were drawings and oil paintings.**



Linda and Rafael Kohen, c. 1944

1942

Linda celebrates her first solo exhibition at the Moretti Gallery in Montevideo.

*The painting[s] [were] almost all very white. When I showed them to Augusto [Torres], he told me: "Some day, this series will be called your white period".**

1944

Studies drawing and painting with Eduardo Vernazza (1910-1991).

*[Vernazza] used to come to the house to give me lessons, at the same he would pose for me and teach me. He taught me new techniques and a different way of seeing. It was a very prolific period...I used to draw him; sometimes I painted him full-body, or sometimes I painted parts of his body: hands, ears... with great prolixity and thoroughness.**

1946

Marries Rafael Kohen and adopts his surname.

*I took my painting equipment with me to my honeymoon. I remember myself in the middle of the hotel courtyard, in Villavicencio, Mendoza [Argentina], with my portable easel, happy and painting.**



Family portrait on Linda and Rafael's wedding day, 1946

1946-1948

With Rafael, Linda moves to Buenos Aires, Argentina. She studies painting at the Círculo de Bellas Artes and with the artist Horacio Butler (1897-1983).

*I use[d] to go to drawing sessions with live models (nude) in a beautiful old house in Florida Street. It was the Círculo de Bellas Artes. It was the end of the year 1946. At the same time, my husband put me in contact with a master of Argentinean painting, Horacio Butler. I started going to his classes in his studio in the Arenales Street in front of the square. Butler's teaching was excellent: it was painting, exercise of harmony and proportions, division of the space, study of color spectrum, of values.**

1947

Linda's daughter, Martha, is born in Montevideo in June.

1948

Returns to live in Montevideo.

1949-1962

TALLER TORRES GARCÍA

Linda resumes artistic studies as a member of the Taller Torres-García, arriving at the studio shortly before the death of its founder, Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949). Linda studies first under Julio Alpuy (1919-2009), then Augusto Torres (1913-1992), and ultimately under the direction of José Gurvich (1927-1974). She works and exhibits at numerous Taller exhibitions until the time of the studio's closing in 1962.

*When I went back to Montevideo in 1949, I decided to go back to the Torres-García studio. Being in that studio has enriched me. The Studio has been one of the great movements of the plastic arts, not only in Uruguay. The atmosphere inside the Studio was practically religious. There was a great respect and admiration for the master and an attitude of discipline, seriousness, and work, a lot of work.**

In addition to her studies at the Taller, Linda along with many of her colleagues takes classes with Gurvich in his home in the Cerro neighborhood of Montevideo.

Besides leading Torres' studio, Gurvich used to teach in his house of El Cerro and some of us used to go there; including, of course, Eva Olivetti [Linda's sister-in-law, the wife of Mario Olivetti]. I remember Lilian Lipschiz, Sara Capurro, Angelina de la Quintana, Gloria Franchi, etc. The house of Gurvich was beautiful, full of love for life, full of paintings of different

sizes and of small pieces of art, because he was tremendously creative and the items of ordinary use were in his hands objects of art. He used to transmit with his words, his suggestions, his example, something indescribable, the happiness, the fruitfulness, the joy of the task.*



Linda seated in front of a painting by Julio Alpuy, Montevideo, c. 1960s



Linda with Roberto and Martha in Montevideo, 1953

1950

Her son, Roberto is born in March.

*I feel that against all odds I managed to take care of the kids and paint! **

Linda's father, Guido Olivetti dies, followed by her grandmother months later. The impact of the loss of these beloved family members causes Linda to abandon painting for a number of years.

*They [my father and grandmother] had both been pillars of my existence; their death caused a great change on me. I stopped painting. I believe it was for four years. One day I retook the brushes and a very different painting emerged, like if I had matured something that was inside of me.**



1967

Linda and Rafael acquire a country house situated on a hill in Maldonado, Uruguay. Called *El Peñasco* [The Pinnacle], the house becomes a repeated motif in Linda's paintings.

1973

On June 27, a military coup d'état led by Juan María Bordaberry takes control of the Uruguayan government. Linda's children disperse to various countries. This change in the family dynamic affects her artistic production.

Linda Kohen in Montevideo, c. 1960s

1975

Linda begins to produce artworks that form part of a series, a practice which she continues to this day.

En cierto momento hubo un cambio importante: fue el hecho de querer expresar una idea no a través de un solo cuadro, sino a través de una serie de cuadros con diferentes enfoques, y empecé a pintar en series.

At a particular time there was an important transformation: I wanted to express an idea, not through one painting but through a series of paintings with diverse approaches, and so I started painting in series.+

1976-1979

Reacting to the changes brought about by the military dictatorship and its personal effect on her family, the artist works on the series "The Hours" (Las Horas) as a means of creating a record of her daily life.

...pinté una serie que era la descripción de un día de mi vida: fue una verdadera necesidad de fijar todo ese mundo mío que yo sentía que iba a desaparecer. Pinté unos 40 cuadros describiendo todo: desde la luz que me despertaba, el desayuno, la toilette, mi trabajo, la compra, la cocina, el llamado telefónico, la visita a mi Madre, la cena, la vuelta de Rafael del trabajo, etc.

...I painted a series which described a day in my life; there was a need to capture everything in my world which I felt was going to disappear. I painted some 40 paintings describing everything: from the light that woke me up, breakfast, the toilette, my work, groceries, the kitchen, the phone call, my mother's visit, dinner, Rafael returning from work, etc.+

1977-1979

Amidst escalating violence in Uruguay, Linda and her family travel to the United States and Europe. She continues to exhibit in numerous galleries in Argentina and Uruguay.

1980

Linda's brother Mario dies in Montevideo.

1979-1985**BRAZIL**

Linda, Rafael, and Linda's mother settle in São Paulo, Brazil as the military dictatorship in Uruguay continues. In São Paulo, Linda befriends Prof. Pietro Maria Bardi, critic, founder, and director of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). An admirer of her work, Bardi features Kohen's drawings and paintings in numerous exhibitions at the museum.

Fue una época muy buena para mi pintura. Tenía mi taller, tenía el Museo de Arte a dos cuadras, adonde iba constantemente a estudiar los maestros, y una gran sensación de libertad puesto que no teníamos amigos, ni familia, ni vínculos, tenía mucho tiempo para mí, mucho tiempo para pintar.

It was a very good period for my painting. I had my studio, I had the MASP two blocks away where I would constantly go to study the masters, and I had a great sense of freedom; since I had no friends, family or ties, I had a lot of time to myself and to paint.+

1985

The twelve-year military dictatorship in Uruguay officially ends on February 28, 1985.

1986

With democracy restored in Uruguay, Linda, Rafael, and Linda's mother leave Brazil and return to live in Montevideo. Linda's children have previously departed Brazil to live in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Following Linda's return to Uruguay, the family country home, *El Peñasco*, is adopted as a social center for the artistic community of Maldonado.

1988

Linda's first retrospective exhibition is held at the MASP, featuring over one hundred of her paintings and

drawings.

...en el año '88 fui invitada a una retrospectiva en el Museu de Arte de São Paulo. El título de la muestra fue 1943- 1988, 45 años de pintura. Fue un llamada reflexión: 45 años de pintura ¡¡¡ una vida!!!

In the year '88, I was invited to do a retrospective exhibit at Museu de Arte de São Paulo. Titled 1943-1988: 45 years of painting, it was a call for reflection; 45 years of painting; a lifetime!!!+

1998

Linda's mother, Rina Colombo de Olivetti, dies at the age of 103.

2000-2001

Mounting painted canvases onto wood panels, Linda creates, "El Gran Biombo". Taking the shape of a screen, this work brings her paintings away from the wall and into physical space. "El Gran Biombo" is the first in a series of works that bridge Linda's painting with sculptural installation.

2008

Inspired by "El Gran Biombo", Linda exhibits a large scale installation at the Palais de Glace in Buenos Aires. Titled "Laberinto", the work consists of large scale panels that are painted black and arranged in the form of a labyrinth through which viewers are invited to enter and navigate.



Linda at the MASP, São Paulo, 1988

O sea, quiero, y me importa, que en mi pintura cuente especialmente lo que no está, lo que una imagina, o intuye o presiente, o lo que inquieta y trata de entender: el misterio de nuestra vida, de universo, de nuestra mente...de la vida...

..."Laberinto" que es símbolo de nuestra incertidumbre, de nuestra búsqueda...del misterio.

...I want, and what I believe to be important, is that my paintings convey that which is not present; that what one imagines, senses or perceives, or that which one is troubled by and tries to understand: the mystery of our lives, of the universe, of our minds, of life...

..."Labyrinth" is a symbol of our uncertainty, of our search...of the mystery.^

2009

Rafael Kohen, Linda's husband, passes away. As her companion for over sixty years, Rafael's death has a profound effect on Linda, both personally and artistically. Rafael's absence and a sense of solitude become manifest in Linda's artwork.



Linda and Rafael in Montevideo, 2004

2014

After a career spanning over seventy years, Linda exhibits her work in the show, *Linda Kohen: Private Life: my house, my table, my bed, my self* at the gallery Cecilia de Torres, Ltd., her first solo exhibition in New York City.

Linda Kohen continues to paint from her home and studio in Montevideo.

All italics are quotations by Linda Kohen from the following sources:

* "Biography" Linda Kohen, accessed November 2013, <http://www.lindakohen.com>

+ *El Gran Biombo*, Montevideo: Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, August 2001.

^ *Linda Kohen: Laberinto*, Buenos Aires: Palais de Glace, 2008.