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Association for Public Art in Philadelphia Appoints Charlotte Cohen as its New Executive Director

The Nation's Oldest Public Art Organization Commences a New Chapter

Philadelphia, PA — The Board of Trustees of Association for Public Art (aPA) in Philadelphia is pleased to announce the selection of Charlotte Cohen, a nationally recognized leader in the arts, as its new Executive Director.

An accomplished organization leader and coalition builder, Cohen takes the helm of the nation's first organization devoted to public art at a time of sweeping change in the field. She is the second professional executive director in aPA's 150-year history, succeeding the former director's forty year tenure. Prior to that, aPA was led by its civic minded board who helped to build the collection of public art enjoyed by Philadelphians to this day.

The aPA is unique as a private, nonprofit organization that not only commissions new art, both permanent and temporary, but also preserves historic works and interprets a vast permanent collection. Barbara B. Aronson, President of the Board of Trustees, shares "We are thrilled that Charlotte is coming aboard to lead aPA. After undertaking an extensive search, we found her expertise in public art to be the right fit to help lead aPA in the 21st Century. Her belief in the role that artists play in strengthening the bonds that connect us as a community as well as to our city and

our nation will serve us well.”

“This challenging new position is a perfect fit. It draws on so many of my professional experiences and lifelong passions.” Says Cohen, “and in coming to Philadelphia, I’m returning to the city where I spent formative years of my childhood and where, in visits to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Fairmount Park, I was first struck by the impact that public art has on the vitality of urban life.”

“Leading aPA will allow me to collaborate with others to do what I love best—empower artists to realize their visions, create new opportunities for them in new contexts, and connect their work to the public.”

About Charlotte Cohen

For nearly 20 years, Cohen’s professional focus was almost entirely public art related.

In 1996, she became the Director of New York City’s Percent for Art Program, Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA). There she commissioned dozens of artists—including Alison Saar, whose *Swing Low, a memorial to Harriet Tubman* in Harlem was the first public monument to a Black woman in New York City, and worked with Mierle Laderman Ukeles on the master plan for Fresh Kills Landfill. She also was responsible for developing policy and planning in partnership with many city agencies.

Later, as Fine Arts Officer and Urban Development Manager for the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), Cohen managed projects in the New York City metropolitan region, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, including Robert Mangold’s large-scale stained-glass window project for the U.S. [Robert H. Jackson](#) Federal Courthouse in Buffalo, New York. In addition to her work with living artists, she also oversaw the care of the Fine Arts Collection.

From these public art assignments, Cohen went on to become Executive Director of Brooklyn Arts Council, where she designed and implemented the agenda and vision of Brooklyn’s foremost nonprofit cultural organization supporting artists. She energized the organization’s commitment to equity and diversity in all aspects of programming and staffing and ensured the advancement of forward movement during COVID.

Most recently, as Interim Executive Director at City of Asylum in Pittsburgh, Cohen worked with writers exiled from their countries of origin and managed the organization's performing arts programs and a bookstore dedicated to translated and international authors. Cohen helped ensure that financial, medical, and housing support for writers and their families continued uninterrupted during the nonprofit's international leadership search.

About the Association for Public Art

Since 1872, Association for Public Art (aPA, formerly Fairmount Park Art Association), has been bringing contemporary art to Philadelphia, evolving over time to become one of the few nonprofit public art organizations in the U.S. that commissions new works, preserves historic works, and interprets a collection of public art.

The artworks commissioned and acquired by aPA tell the story of the history of American art. These range from examples of contemporary performances and installations by such international artists as Cai Guo-Qiang to bronze, steel, or wood sculptures by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Daniel Chester French, Louise Nevelson, Isamu Noguchi, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Mark di Suvero, Martin Puryear, and Pepón Osorio.

Last year aPA launched a digital archive on its website that provides free open access to more than a hundred years of aPA's institutional history, shedding light on many aspects of Philadelphia's urban development, societal change, and public art planning.

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