



Esther Cohen
Founder & C.E.O.
Canadian Posters International
PI Fine Art
PI Creative Art
Esther Cohen Gallery

I kind of, sort of, started an art business in 1976. And why that and then?

My earlier career was a primary school teacher for the Toronto Board of education. I chose that vocation because the pay was fabulous [\$3000.00] for my first year. And I loved children.

Then I married, had 3 adorable boys and decided that I didn't love kids that much and wanted to expand my horizons. And I also became a single mom looking to prove myself to myself.

I visited NY and discovered fine art, museum posters and a business that allowed me to be their exclusive poster distributor for Canada. After negotiations with New York lawyers and Canadian ones as well, the deal was done. I opened a small gallery between a beauty supply store and a bagel store. My visibility to the public was limited but I kept myself busy there. I gave myself manicures, wrote essays for a course I was taking and socialized with friends. Basically, I did everything except make a sale.

Trying to figure out the next step was difficult. But if no one was interested in coming in to buy these posters, I would have to go out and find these scarce people. Where was I to find people who could appreciate and buy my growing inventory?

Who NEEDS art? A vision came upon me; Hotels, 2 posters over the beds, single mat, and gold aluminum frame – priced at \$44.50 each. If I was lucky maybe I could induce the designer to get a 24x60 full length mirror to match.

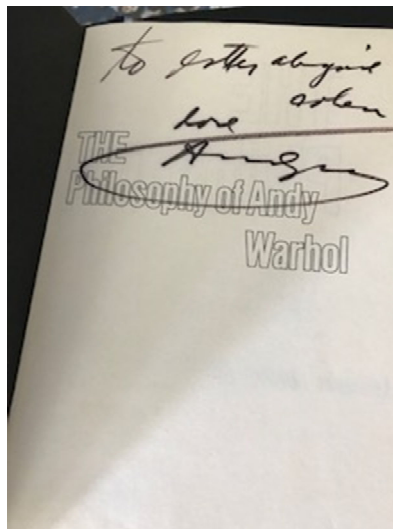
In the meantime, my exclusive deal with the company in New York was not exclusive and I had to reinvent myself. On the advice of my lawyer, who said stop crying, don't sue - GET EVEN.

I went on a family trip to Paris, saw beautiful art posters, asked the galleries if they had any extra, brought to Toronto, framed them and sold them. This is how I started importing posters from Museum of Modern art, Whitney and other American poster publishers.

Then I realized that my own country had a wealth of young talented artists. I started publishing and exporting these Canadian artists in poster form all the while importing wonderful American artists. We licensed Fred Flintstone posters from Hanna-Barbera and Woody Woodpecker from Walter Lantz Studios. With these in hand, I embarked on an extensive sales trip, 6 weeks in total to Asia under the auspice of the Canadian government to help in export development. I got shanghaied in Shanghai and sang Karaoke in a club in Kuala Lumpur just to get the purchase order.

I hired framers, after I attempted framing, then Shippers, sales assistants and grew. I diversified but really concentrated on art and framing for hotels. Holiday Inn was the first, then the Royal York; I visited my cousins in Baltimore and popped in at the Marriott in Bethesda for a presentation- called a write off.

As an aside I've always loved and collected investment grade art – and personally met Andy Warhol at his studio.



I was also lucky enough to meet Sam Francis and the seminal photographer, Andre Kertesz. Just last year, I met Alex Katz, the renowned American painter and printmaker. I was the only art dealer invited to his Black and White show at the Katzen Arts Center at American University in Washington.

I am blessed that my sons, Richie and Andy have inherited a passion for art, the hotel industry and working with an interesting group of people, called designers and purchasers. My sons are carrying on and surpassing me with their desire to grow and expand the company with a smile and some sweat.

We are no longer a little gallery, we are now a 70,000 sq. ft. facility, housing an extensive art department, framing gallery, showroom, and expanded into the printing of fabulous custom wall covering.

As my idol Frank Sinatra sang "I did It MY Way".

Organizations: 1. NEWH, New York {I couldn't wait for Toronto to start}
2. Women's Art Association of Canada
3. Member of Art Dealers Association of Canada