

ARTFUL LIVES

THE COHEN SISTERS

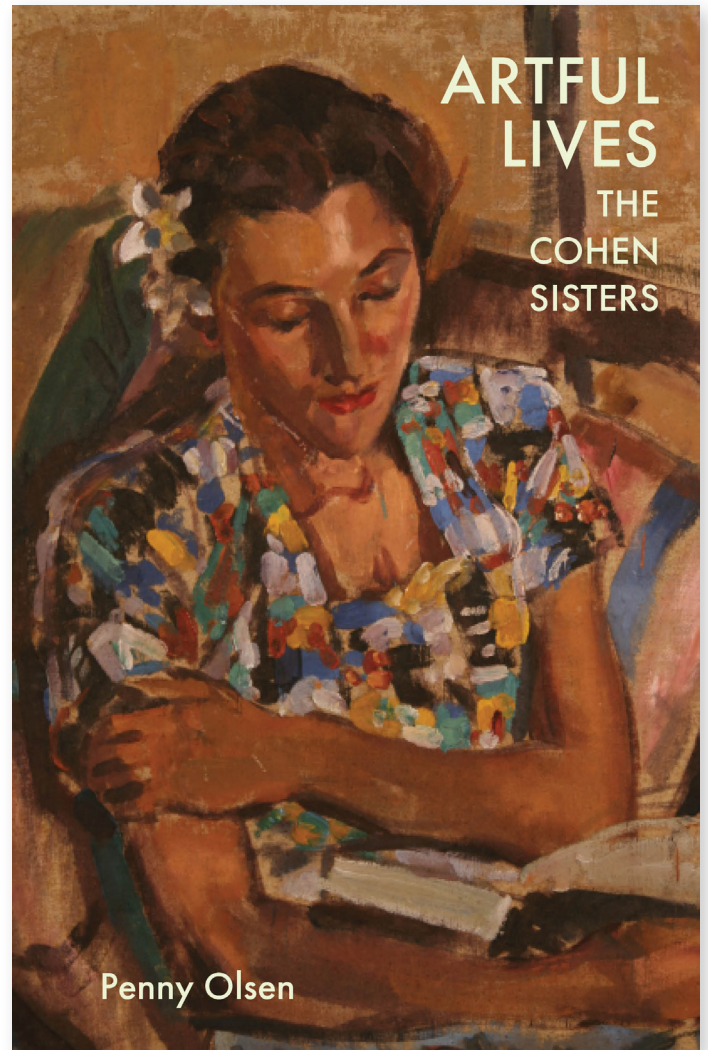
Penny Olsen

'Romance is in all of us. We long to fashion romantic careers for ourselves. We yearn to read those of others, whether they be of love, life, wealth'—so wrote artist-journalist Valerie Frankel Cohen in 1936.

The Cohen sisters lived frugally, enjoyed mischief and flaunted their bohemian lifestyle. Raised in the Melbourne suburb of Elwood and then drawn to the tropics, their winters were spent painting, fishing and gardening on their tropical island in Far North Queensland—then an undeveloped part of Australia. Far from the gaze of civilisation, life was simple and bronzed. Artistic men were a temptation.

They mixed with prominent artists, writers, designers and academics longing for a more progressive, independent Australia. Lina Bryans, Jock Frater, Arthur Boyd, Clif Pugh, Noel Wood, Roy Dalgarno, Roger Kemp, Ian Fairweather, Clem Christesen, Alan Marshall and Alistair Knox were among their friends and associates.

The sisters' lives spanned the twentieth century, two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the making of modern Australia. Beginning as wealthy, young Melbourne socialites, they gradually shed their skin to become bohemians, painting and writing—more than anything, enjoying the milieu. Part family history, part social history, part art history, as the sisters' extraordinary story unfolds, so too does an art heist.



The Author

Penny Olsen is an Australian ornithologist and author. Cousin to the late Cohen sisters, she has access to unique material and insights on their lives. She has written about thirty books on natural history subjects, including two major biographies.