

SANTA FE SPOTLIGHT

Cyndi Conn

as told to Leah Pinkus



Cyndi Conn, in her capacity as Creative Santa Fe's executive director, is "a curator of art, ideas, people, experiences." She also serves on several advisory boards and, among other accolades, was honored by Albuquerque Business First as one of "40 Under Forty" awardees statewide.

How would you describe what you do for a living, and what is your favorite part of your job?

As the executive director of Creative Santa Fe, I lead an

organization that explores innovative and imaginative ways to solve some of our city's most pressing issues. Because we are deeply collaborative, much of my work is connecting with other nonprofits, city leaders and people in the community doing incredible work. My favorite part of my job is the people I get to interact with on a daily basis. From my truly extraordinary team and board of directors to the Santa Fe community and our national network of partners, I am constantly surrounded by brilliant and inspiring people.

What do you consider the greatest challenges and rewards of your job?

Creative Santa Fe has never been a simple organization to explain with a two-minute elevator pitch. My greatest challenge is also my greatest reward. Creative Santa Fe is a bold, iterative and audacious organization — which is everything I want it to be. We engage with artists to imagine the unimaginable, to find pathways forward that have not yet been discovered. As board member Dr. Victoria J. Mora recently noted, "No wonder it isn't easy to describe what Creative Santa Fe is up to: It hasn't been invented yet." Plotting an uncharted path is as thrilling as it is nerve-racking, but I can't imagine a more endlessly fascinating position to hold.

Explain how you ended up living in Santa Fe.

I was born and raised in Albuquerque. After graduating high school, I moved to New Orleans to attend Tulane University. I then moved to Mexico City, Austin and Paris. After being in Paris for a year at a high-tech software company, I missed working in the arts, and sunshine and green chile. At 25 I was given the opportunity to return to Santa Fe as the Director of EVO Gallery. Four years later I became the visual arts director and curator of the Center for Contemporary Arts, and I subsequently opened my own gallery and arts consultancy, LAUNCHPROJECTS. In 2011 I realized that I wanted to leverage my deep community connections and expertise in the arts to make a greater impact on our community and in the world. That is when I joined Creative Santa Fe.

What is your best insider recommendation for Santa Fe visitors?

Don't miss the must-do's. Visit museums and galleries, eat the chile, drink a margarita, watch the sunset, take a hike and hit some historic sites. Then break out of your comfort zone and simply wander. Or ask locals for wacky and wonderful experiences that would never be included in a *Travel & Leisure* article. Some of Santa Fe's true magic is found in the odd, unexpected and completely unplanned.

What is your favorite near or far getaway, and why?

"Somewhere I have never traveled" (with a nod to ee cummings). I live for adventure, to see new places, try new

experiences, and to continually shift my perspective on life and the world. Some of my favorite spots include New Orleans, Athens, Bali, Mexico City, Lisbon, Rome, Aix-en-Provence, Los Angeles, New York... but the list of places I dream of visiting is longer.

Describe an unrealized dream of yours.

One? How about three? First, to see the whole world. Second, to continue leveraging the arts as a catalyst for communication, community building and positive change. Third, to grow my global network of brilliant iconoclasts who truly make a difference.

From your perspective, what are the art trends in Santa Fe?

We are at a crossroads. Traditional arts, crafts and culture have made Santa Fe an iconic art destination for decades. We have a robust gallery scene with new and old gallery districts spanning from Canyon Road to the Railyard to Mid-town to the Southside. Innovative and experimental new spaces like Meow Wolf are changing our experience with the arts and making headlines globally. It is an exciting and curious time both in Santa Fe and in the country. I think that Santa Fe is truly at the forefront of exploring how the art world is changing.

How do these trends compare nationally?

Last year, the international cultural consulting firm La Placa Cohen released its 2017 "Culture Track Report." This report revealed that over the past few years the very definition of culture has undergone a profound global shift. Audiences are demanding fun, interaction and relevance in their lives and their cultural experiences in a way that is entirely unprecedented in modern history. This catalytic shift changes the way that art is presented and experienced, and it brings up important questions about the future of art and culture in society. Santa Fe is at the juncture of this transition. We are all exploring how we will respond to and evolve with this shifting cultural climate. This is why Creative Santa Fe recently hosted our "Future of Art: Disruptive Futures Dialogue" to engage the community in addressing these issues.