



Inherited Succession: Instill & Inspire

Work by Élan Cadiz

October 29 – November 23, 2024

Opening reception: Tuesday, October 29, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

Artist's Gallery Talk: Tuesday, October 29, 5:30 p.m.

James K. Schmidt Gallery / Voney Art Center / Principia College / Elsah, Illinois
<http://content.principia.edu/sites/jameskschmidtgallery/>



(above) *Heart Burn*, 2022, collage, 12" x 19"

(right) *Tempest*, 1999, photograph, 11" x 14"

(front cover) *Let Them Eat Cake, I*, 2023, acrylic and gouache paint on poster paper, 18" x 24"

Élan Cadiz - Introduction

By Debi Zoe Worley

Élan Cadiz has shared a powerful exhibition that helps us understand *What is art in the post-modern world in which we live?* Today, art is more than a beautiful expression of the artist; it requires a thoughtful, authentic social exchange with the viewer.

According to academic art theorist, Alana Jelinek, art is not political activism nor is it education or psychotherapy. Profound work begins with *self* and not the *other*. (*This Is Not Art* p. 159). This notion of self, or identity, turns us to Dr. Martin's essay where he shares the anthropological view of our identity, that *we are the sum of our experiences*.

Cadiz's work gives us a glimpse into her lived experiences of intersectionality and resilience. She provides us with innovative and new ways of seeing through her lens of experience, which gives us the opportunity to alter our way of seeing. Her brilliant use of humor allows us to spend more time contemplating this profound work. She is telling us her difficult story and we, as the viewer, have the privilege of working to understand, forgive and empathize with humanity as she does.

Cadiz is an interdisciplinary, multiethnic, multiracial, North American, native New Yorker, and Visual Artist that deconstructs and balances her intersectionality through her projects. Her art and practice are grounded in the documentation of her personal narrative through the use of portraiture, domestic, and historical imagery.

Cadiz's artworks explore the ways societal and personal histories overlap and affect individual relationships, power dynamics and identity. The materials she works with are influenced by the subjects she discusses which is why she moves masterfully through mediums, collaging the best materials to convey her visual language. Her intention is to speak to the boundless potential in humanity despite impediments and ways our pasts can inform our future for the better. Her goal is to

have viewer's question their condition(s) in ways that bring about helpful inner inquiry and thoughtful discussion.

Cadiz's formal training began in the High School of Art & Design in New York. She graduated from City College of New York City with a BA in Studio Art and received her Master's in Fine Art from the School of Visual Arts. She received the Martha Trevor Award/World Studio AIGA Scholarship, Paula Rhodes Memorial Award and the School of Visual Arts Merit Scholarship.

In addition to an extensive exhibition record, she has instructed young people in the arts for 24 years and taught in collaboration with institutions such as the Harlem School of the Arts, Thurgood Marshall Academies, Harlem Children Zone, No Longer Empty, Cool Culture, Bank Street College, Weeksville Heritage Center, the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York Historical Society, Center for Arts Education, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Boys' Club of New York City, Foster Pride, the Children's Museum of Manhattan, the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling, and Bridgehampton Museum.





Élan (Élan means tree in Hebrew), 2006, photoshop, 9.5" x 8.25"

A Collage of Experience: Élan Cadiz's journey of joyful resilience and resistance

Élan Cadiz

By Dr. Andrew Martin

Bruno Latour, philosopher and anthropologist, has written that apart from the cards of race and gender we are given, our identity is not innate or predetermined. He writes that the idea that we have any intrinsic traits or naturally align with any identity, emotions, desires, mental and physical characteristics, is unstable ground once any of these particular characteristics are examined closely. "If you began to probe the origin of each of your idiosyncrasies, would it not... force you to visit many places, people, times, events that you had largely forgotten? This tone of voice, this unusual expression, this gesture of the hand, this gait, this posture, aren't these traceable as well?" (Latour 2005, 209). Instead of the Neo-Darwinian interpretation that we are born with cognitive abilities, a psyche and emotions, Latour argues that each one of these has a local history that can be traced to books, songs, films, family and friends, not genetics. "Every competence, deep down in the silence of your interiority, has first to come from the outside" (ibid, 213). We are the sum of our experiences.

Élan Cadiz is an interdisciplinary visual artist based in New York whose work defies categorization. Yet this exhibition, titled *Inherited Succession*, offers a window into her life and artistic development and shows the myriad influences and experiences that have shaped her. Drawn from her experiments with different media and styles, from artworks created for fun, and artworks created for major exhibitions, this collection showcases her life and work. It takes us on her journey through hardship and her refusal to be defined by stereotypes and conventional categories. Her art practice, deeply rooted in her history, weaves her personal narrative through a rich tapestry of domestic imagery, family and cityscapes exploring the intersection of her personal experiences and broader cultural contexts.

This month I spoke to Cadiz about her influences, family and artworks, and she shared her life story with me. Growing up in the diverse neighborhoods of Queens in the 1970s and 80s, Cadiz was influenced by a melting pot of ethnicities, including Polish, Jewish, African American, and Irish individuals, sometimes all in the same building. This diverse upbringing, coupled with her own multifaceted ethnic, racial, and cultural background, shaped her belief that she cannot be confined to a single race or ethnicity. Her name, Élan, meaning "tree" in Hebrew, symbolizes her intersectionality. She acknowledges, like Latour, that we are composed of our histories, partnerships, upbringing, cultural and social contexts. While she has shared in the extreme trials that African Americans have faced in her neighborhood, including poverty, harassment, racism and systemic prejudice and portrays these in her art, by refusing to categorize herself, she is allowed to express herself freely on those subjects.

She quotes Dorothy Roberts's concept of the Triangle of Violence – how the perpetrator, victim and witness cannot escape the trauma of violence, thus reinforcing the cycle of violence (Roberts 1997). Roberts writes that we must break free of the triangle of violence. Cadiz believes that through creativity we can empower individuals and communities to envision new systems and work towards a future free from violence and can nurture strong community bonds and collective action so essential to healing trauma. This philosophy has guided much of Cadiz's creative production, and you can see this in the importance she places in refusing to react with anger, in supporting her community and by envisioning a brighter future.

Early Work

This artistic journey is deeply influenced by her family. Growing up in Queens during the 1980s and 90s, and later Harlem in the 2000s, her family provided a haven of inspiration and safety. Much of her work is devoted to her parents and an understanding of community, recreating that sense of support. Her father, Edwin G. Cadiz, an artist with a Master's in Fine Arts from Queens College, and her mother, a writer with a PhD in Early Child Development, both



(above) *Dad (My First Art Teacher)* 2004, mixed media collage, 8" x 10"

(right) *From the Harlem Hospital Window*, 2007, Color pencil on copy paper, 6" x 9.25"

played significant roles in her development.

Her parents took her to many museums and galleries as a child. Her father was introduced to collage during his master's by Benny Andrews and his thesis was on Picasso with a combination of collage. Cadiz would sometimes copy her father's cubist works at an early age and a formative moment occurred for her around 8 or 9 years old when her father became upset that she was merely copying his artwork, and he told her to be original. Some of her first original works were in collage, a form that her father helped her with, and which she has returned to many times

over her life. One of her first collages won a channel thirteen Children's Art Award in 1986. In the 1990s she began the complicated technique of placing collage pieces into a unified form. One in particular was a woman's face composed of numerous faces to illustrate how we are all composed of influences from different people. This is a theme that runs throughout her life.

In the early 2000s, she did similar portraits of her father, mother and brother in collage. In this collage of her father's face, she includes all his inspiration, ideas, loves and hobbies. Each image

depicts a different influence and associated story – his bicycle, his wife, the Puerto Rican and US flag in his eyes, Vietnam (from his tour of duty), The Statue of Liberty, Tea Pots (from his gift of 100 tea pots to his wife) and his Picasso, Matisse and Van Gogh influences.

But collage was only one of her many mediums, and her artworks in this exhibition illustrate her many styles that represent her own diverse intersectionality. From figurative art, cubism and collage to metal cut printing, Expressionism, cartoon, Pop Art, abstract art, folk and indigenous art, abstract naturalism, Surrealism, Cuban graphic art and computer art, this exhibition illustrates the many styles that Cadiz has mastered over the years, bringing her own unique take to them.

One of the distinctive feelings you get from this collection of Cadiz's work is how she has brought a joyful and playful lens to the world, even while she depicts a world that is hard and unkind.

This seems to come from her mother's influence

in Child Development. Cadiz continued in her mother's footsteps by working with children as an art educator for 25 years, inspiring young people in after-school care and summer camps and later in collaboration with not for profits and museums such as The Studio Museum in Harlem. This work with children and families taught her to be playful with art and the importance of inclusivity. She refuses to allow bias, racism and acts of violence due to hatred, affect the purity and endless abilities of our creative imaginations.

Social Commentary

This joyful style leaves an impression that is sometimes more impactful than treating troubling themes with somber, angry images. Her work echoes the Trojan horse paintings of Millet—entrancing at first glance, but revealing deeper, darker truths upon closer inspection.

Like Millet, she doesn't consider herself an activist, but the effects of her works are almost more profound than combative or vulgar artworks.





(above) No Vacancies, 2004, mixed media collage, 8" x 10"

(right) Home Series II Internal Conflict, 2016, mixed media collage, 8.5" x 11"

Similar to the photography of Edward Burtynsky, the beauty and color of her artworks draw the viewer in and avoid triggering our filters before we realize the content of their pieces and are impacted by them. Often our filters turn us away from shocking images or make us compartmentalize content as subjective by categorizing it as "activist". By presenting hard truths in this way, she might not be an activist in the conventional sense, but perhaps an actual changemaker. As Cadiz explains, via Dorothy Roberts, she doesn't want to engage in a battle with the world that merely perpetuates the cycle of violence, but to lift it out of that cycle, to support change.

The City Scope is another example of a painting imbued with sadness and anger for Cadiz but that she cannot help but make joyful. It was her view from

her hospital bed where she spent three weeks due to medical malfeasance that caused her to almost bleed to death. During this time, her husband lost his job, and their world came tumbling down. Yet even this image, that brings back so much trauma, has color here and there depicting her faith in her personal journey.

A confrontational mixed media collage, *No Vacancies* was created during the early 2000s. Harlem underwent massive gentrification, leading to skyrocketing property values and change in landscape. This transformation came with increased police harassment and violence against Black and Brown communities. Cadiz connects this with the greed that drove landlords and local government to try to evict residents to make way for higher paying renters. The depiction of a family with many skin





(above) *The Plantation*, 2022, collage, 12" x 18"

(right) *Am I Not A Man*, 2015, mixed media collage, 19.5 x 26.5

colors being evicted illustrates that the problem was faced by all. She herself was served with an eviction notice that threatened to destroy her family. This palpable sense of the unfairness of the capitalist system in this collage is another thread that connects many other artworks here, capturing the anger and sadness that she felt and witnessed.

Am I Not A Man was created soon afterwards when her husband was arrested and falsely accused. It is an interesting piece. The quote from "Am I

not a man and a brother?" is a phrase that refers to a well-known 18th century abolitionist image of an enslaved Black man in chains, kneeling with his hands outstretched and asking the question. The image has been used to symbolize the struggle for abolition and emancipation ever since and it is a universally understood plea for equality and justice.

In the piece, she has removed the faces in the same way that the Zapatists in the 1990s wore balaclavas – so that others could put themselves in their shoes.

Removing faces makes it not about a person, but about all people. In place of their faces, Cadiz put delicate floral rice paper to depict their innocence and gentleness – their humanity.

Family and Home

Depicting the gentleness of family, friends, homes and interiors is a constant throughout Cadiz's life. These familiar people and places provide images of comfort but also provide contrasts with the outside chaos – juxtapositioning warmth and safety with threats of losing home and violence.

The image of her parents on their wedding day is from a series of artworks she created called *Let Them Eat Cake* about family gatherings. Weddings, holidays and funerals are only a few times a year her family and friends would get together and represent their communities of support, safety and love. Interestingly, she doesn't depict the skin tones of portraits because she feels that skin color shouldn't define you. Depicting a shade or tint of brown is too complicated, she feels. It distracts from the social message of her artworks. She understands

that concepts of acceptance, love, togetherness and so on transcend race.

Another way that she avoids painting faces, while depicting family, is to objectify family members as furniture. This connects with her love of homes that symbolize safety but also her love of nature. Cadiz grew up loving nature, with her parents taking her camping many times. When she was young and her mother was working on her Master's in Education, she attended a residency with the Audubon society, teaching her all about birds and other aspects of nature.

The *Chair Tree* series were made from Aquatint between 2007-8. Aquatint is an intaglio printmaking technique, a variant of etching that produces areas of tone rather than lines. The chair is symbolic of many things. Chairs are a large part of our household and symbolic furniture. They are anthropomorphic in many ways, with arms, legs and made to hold us up. They are often identified with family members – father's chair, grandpa's chair, etc. She appreciates how they sit quietly and how ideas grow when we sit quietly in them, like the branches growing out of



the backs of these.

After Cadiz was served an eviction notice, lost money, and was divorced, her sense of home as a secure place was severely shaken. Consequently, she exhibited a series called *Home* in 2017 with various depictions of homes in collage. In this collage depiction of home, she is interested in the variations of identity that exist within connotations of home and its effect on individualization. It also discusses conflicts that can arise when dealing with home as place, such as eviction, privacy and power distribution.

Supporting others

Once Covid hit in 2020, Cadiz lost all three of her part-time jobs and had to find something different to do. She used an exhibition she had been asked to apply to called *Brooklyn Utopias 2020* to work on a project about the encouragement of self-reflection, preservation and support of ourselves and others. At a time when frontline workers were putting themselves in danger for others, she felt

that everyone needed to be supported by equitable treatment in all communities. The scaffolding she erected around paintings of individuals from her community symbolized the individual care and support that we all need.

A strong influence on this work was the fact that her parents often helped others to fight for equitable treatment in her old community. They would help others to write letters, offer \$1 art classes for community children out of their apartment, take folks on group trips to museums, galleries and pow wows. They gave enormous support to people. In a way she is continuing this model of supporting others to enable them to fight injustice.

The image here was the first image of the project that led to her creation of 175 images in the *SCAFFOLD: EQUITY OF TREATMENT* exhibition, also known as the *Scaffold Project* series, that has been exhibited at numerous galleries around New York City and New Jersey. Another theme in this painting is the idea that history is folded into us – it is all connected, and we are all connected, relying



(above) *Bernard*, 2000, photograph, 8" x 10"

(right) *Chair Tree I*, 2008, aquatint on archival paper, 9.5" x 7.5"

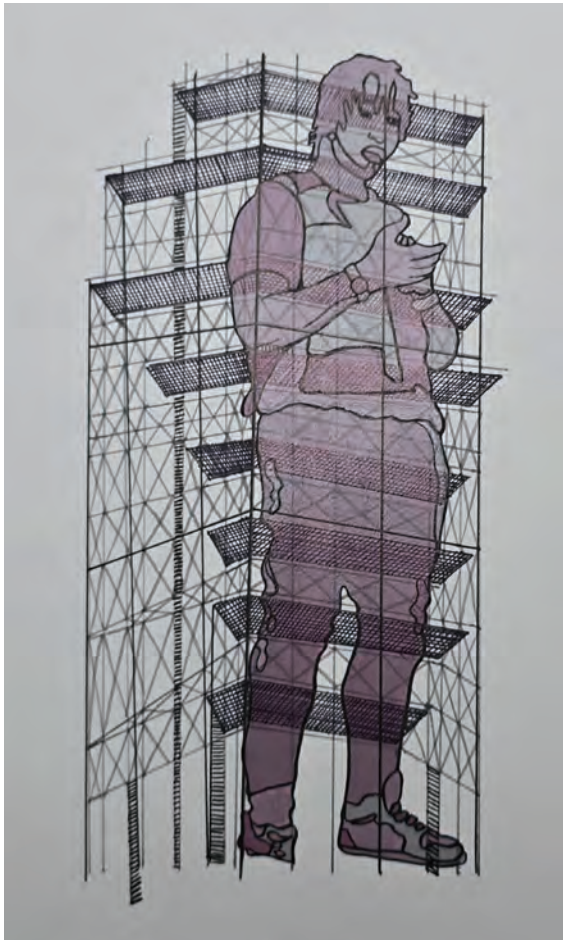


on and supporting one another.

Over time, her scaffolding around individuals became more organic and less constraining. She painted many activists in her community, creating scaffolding around them to illustrate their need for support. There is a lot of burn out for activists due to exposing themselves to attacks, and her images are reminders for us to provide the community support they need to continue helping others.

Conclusion

Through her thought-provoking, diverse and playful expressions, Cadiz challenges us to question our response to surface appearances and invites viewers to engage with difficult themes while simultaneously fostering self-awareness, support and community. Her refusal to be confined by conventional identities allows for a broader, more inclusive dialogue about the human experience. By



(above) *Scaffold Project (first attempt)*, 2020, acrylic paint, pen and fine marker on paper, 9" x 12"

weaving personal narratives into her work and emphasizing interconnectedness, she not only captures the complexities of her upbringing, and the challenges faced by her community, but also illustrates the need for empathy, support, and collective resilience. Ultimately, her art serves as a powerful reminder that while our past challenges us and builds our identities, we can use that experience and growth to inspire transformative change.

"I want there to be a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility. Not this 'In order to love you, I must make you something else.' That's what domination is all about, that in order to be close to you, I must possess you, remake and recast you."

– "Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies"

Bibliography

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.



Artist's Statement

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Artist's Bio

Cadiz's formal training began in the High School of Art & Design. After graduation she was accepted to the Fashion Institute of Technology where she studied Advertisement and Design and Photography for two years. Cadiz graduated from City College of New York City with a BA in Studio Art and Education in 2008. Elan received her Masters in Fine Art from the School of Visual Arts May 2018 and received the Martha Trevor Award/ Worldstudio AIGA Scholarship, Paula Rhodes Memorial Award and the School of Visual Arts Merit Scholarship.

She has instructed young people in the arts for 24 years and taught for or was in collaboration with programs/institutions such as the Harlem School of the Arts, Thurgood Marshall Upper and Lower Academies, Harlem Children Zone, No Longer Empty, Cool Culture, Bank Street College, Weeksville Heritage Center, the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York Historical Society, Center for Arts Education, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Boys Club of New York City, Foster Pride, the Children's Museum of Manhattan and the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling, Bridgehampton Museum and more.

Gratitude

Penny Schmidt and the Schmidt Family for their generous support Principia's Art Department.

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Élan Cadiz for sharing her personal journey through this exhibition.

Dr. Andrew Martin for his essay connecting anthropology and sociology with the why of art.

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Sarah Foster and Becky Hill who keep this gallery sparkling.



Grandma and Great Grans, 2019, Acrylic paint on cardboard, 15" x 18"

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This exhibition was initiated and curated by the James K. Schmidt Gallery.



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