

RED DOT INTERVIEW – KAT CADENA, *¡QUE DESPADRE!*

INTERVIEWED BY ÁNGELA GARCÍA ON JULY 14, 2020



Kat Cadena,
¡Que Despadre!, 2020,
Acrylic and chalk pastel on Bristol,
24 x 19",
Courtesy of the artist.

AG: Can you tell me about the artwork that you submitted for Red Dot this year?

KC: So, I titled it *¡Que Despadre!* and in Spanish *que desmadre* [means] “what a mess” or “what a disaster.” I made this piece in February this year after the murder and brutal abuse of a 7-year-old girl in Mexico named Fatima. It incited riots in Mexico, and her mother came out in a video [giving] a really emotional speech [about] demanding justice

for her daughter, all the others who have been abused, and the women that we don't hear about in the news. She coined this term "que despadre," masculinizing this word that usually is feminine to emphasize the blame on men who are inciting violence against women and committing femicide. That's why I titled it that. I do this sometimes when I hear really bad news. I get really emotional because I feel like I'm a big empath, so I want to make something [that serves] as a visual representation for the victims, the victims' families, the people who care, and especially women who are scared for themselves or their daughters or sisters. In [*Que Despadre!*] the woman is wounded, really scared, and has this gaping hole in her torso and stomach. That's how I felt hearing about this poor little girl and other women who are going missing or being killed. I felt this pit in my stomach and when I heard her [mother's] speech, I could feel that in her too. She had this terrible loss that would never be able to be filled within her again. I just had to respond to it the way that I knew how.

AG: Do you feel that you have any childhood experiences that influence this kind of art that you make?

KC: Yeah, definitely abusive situations that I remember growing up. I also have a lot of sisters, and they have daughters. Bad experiences from when I was a kid really shaped my artwork now because I'm constantly worried about how they're doing and if they're okay. It's kind of scary to be a woman in the world in the first place, and when you have a bad experience it stays with you. You have so many women around who you love and want to protect, but you can't protect them all the time.

AG: Has there been an experience with art that's changed your life?

KC: I have this fun opportunity coming up that I think will [change my life]. I'm going to be doing a mural soon. I have assisted on murals before, but this is the first one that's going to be my own. After the murder of George Floyd, I started thinking about my work and its relevance. The things I started drawing changed because when I have something in the forefront of my mind, that's all that I want to draw or think about. After that I felt the work I should be doing should be more for the public realm. I started thinking more about representation in art, who gets to view the artwork and where it's placed. I started thinking that maybe a new goal for me should be [making] public art. I can provide representation for people of color in the public realm where they don't have to purchase it or go to the gallery to see it. I felt like all of this horrible news in 2020 is starting to change my practice a lot because it's starting to give me more perspective about what is relevant or what's important for people right now.

AG: Why do you think public art is important?

KC: If kids are bored at home and [they] go take a walk outside, [they] get to experience it. A lot of us, me included, make work right now and it goes into a gallery space or an institution. It doesn't reach as many people, so I think it's important for kids of color especially to have access to view and see artwork themselves, or see their people in it. Maybe [by encouraging them to] think about or mediate on it and have [the work] be a part of their community, it will beautify their living space. Maybe [the artwork] will inspire them. I think it's important for us to spread [art] in public spaces so that everybody has access.

AG: Do you feel that your work commits itself to a specific style or method?

KC: Definitely always—I always like things to be figurative. I did some paintings this summer that were of houses without people in them. It was really weird for me because I really like doing figurative artwork especially with women in it. I think that's the only theme that I have: I really like human form, especially the face, and drawing women. I can work in a lot of media and I like to because different media gives you different results. It helps you emphasize what you're trying to say with your artwork, so I don't really stick to only painting, drawing, or anything like that. I think the main thread that is linking all of my work is people. I think that's because I usually make work based off of experiences, things that I hear about, or things I'm thinking about, and it's always having to do with people. Especially now that we're stuck at home and we just have the news to hold onto, [my work] is all about other people.

AG: Do you think that living in San Antonio has affected your art in any way?

KC: I think so, yeah. I probably take myself less seriously than a very fancy New York artist. I still take my work seriously, but I have these great friends in the community and we will critique and look at each other's work. [Their work is] just an extension of their personality. I feel like living in San Antonio, [one has] this great art community here. They're all really supportive and will give you [feedback] if you want. It's not competitive [or] uptight. The gallery that I'm working in is really nice. We do fairs and all of our artists are super down to earth and will talk to you like a regular person. I really love that about the San Antonio art community. We're just people first and can be friends, have a beer together, and still talk about our work seriously.

AG: Do you think your work responds to questions about the future or questions about the past?

KC: I guess it's a mixture. It's not like black and white because a lot of what I make is in response to things that have happened. It's also thinking about the future and how we can change things so that [they] don't happen again—giving myself or the viewer a sense of hope for the future or a happier ending. Even in [*Que Despadre!*] the woman looks destroyed but she's still alive. I tried to draw her in this pregnant moment, like she's about to summon her courage and strength to make it out of whatever she is in. It's a mixture of all three: it's the present because it's what's happening and affecting me now; the past because these things have happened to people; the future because it is giving a sense of hope for a better tomorrow. Not to sound cliché, but we're all fighting this fight together to improve our futures.

AG: Could you tell me about the experience of having your artwork purchased for private collection?

KC: I've sold my work to private collectors before and it's really nice. I always keep in touch with them. They're all super nice, down-to-earth people. It's like selling it to friends who want to support you, which is really great. This is my first time in Red Dot and I've been to Red Dot before. I've always looked up to Red Dot and enjoy the work that's there. It's a great way to raise money for Blue Star Contemporary which always puts on these excellent exhibitions for us. They have a really great residency program. I'm happy to be a part of it and hopefully raise money for their programming. I'm still excited about it even though it's online. I got to take a look at the work online, and I'm really proud to be among some of these artists.

AG: I'm looking at a picture of [*Que Despadre!*] on my computer. This woman is like completely orange/red. Why did you choose this color?

KC: The paint underneath all of the pastel is pink, and that's long been the symbol of womanhood. I used a lot of red and chalk pastel on top of it to brighten the color, make it more intense, and give some heat to her flesh to symbolize this intense physical hardship that she's enduring. I then try to place her inside of the constraints of the page like being [squashed] by it. Whenever you [press your skin] and you release you'll have a red mark or something like that. It's about the color pink as [a symbol for the] woman, this physical harm that's coming to her body, and the intensity of red. I just thought that it would strike the viewer as a more intense color than if I had chosen blue or green. I try to keep it kind of monochrome. There are pieces of blue in there too, but I just wanted her whole body to be like unified by this one color.

AG: What do you think these kinds of works mean to other people? Why do you think it's important to make these kinds of works for other people to see?

KC: I think that I talk about being scared as a woman. When you're walking down a dark alley, you're looking over your shoulder every couple seconds because you're scared. Sometimes when I talk about that to men, they don't understand it. I think about people kind of dismissing the fear of "what's going to happen to you" or "what could happen to you." I'm trying to put [this fear] in [the viewer's] face. This is really happening to people, [and] it happens not only to the victim, but to [their] family too. I always think about how women are always suffering. We suffer through childbirth, periods, and menopause. Not only that, but you could be abused or murdered. I just wanted to get out this pent up frustration about why women are always living through suffering and put it out there for

people to see. Even though we are suffering in different ways that are not [always] visible, we're still persevering. It makes it seem like nothing's wrong or nothing is hurting, but you could feel like this on the inside. I think it's important for women to feel seen or understood, and for men to see it and, maybe it seems dramatic to them, but this is the reality of how women are feeling in the world.

AG: Where is the best place to follow you for updates?

KC: I have an Instagram. It's @kat.cadena, and then my website is katcadena.com. I'll be on there, that's my only social media.

ABOUT KAT CADENA

Kat Cadena is an artist born, raised and working in San Antonio, Texas. Her recent work uses an interruptive collage aesthetic to explore habits of the human mind in both interpersonal and internal relations, like compulsive destruction and reconstruction of identity and memory. Cadena disregards some conventional ideals of portraiture in an effort to uncover the hidden condition of the human body struggling in its battle with the mind. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree with Highest Honors and International Distinction from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2016. More at www.katcadena.com

ABOUT ÁNGELA GARCÍA

Ángela García is Blue Star Contemporary's Arts, Letters, and Enterprise summer intern from McAllen, TX. She is pursuing a BA in Art History at Trinity University, and plans to study architecture after receiving her undergraduate degree. García has also worked as a studio intern for Artpace San Antonio, a radio host for KRTU 91.7FM, and has done

volunteer work at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, TX. She works in digital and film photography and analog collage.