SHELLYNE RODRIGUEZ
NADA House | Governors Island
May 8 - August 1, 2021

EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop is pleased to present printshop member and SIP Fellow ‘19, Shellyne Rodriguez for the third edition of The New Art Dealers Alliance (NADA) House on Governors Island with 66 other galleries, non-profits, artist-run spaces, and curators, presenting over 100 artists.

NADA House will be open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, 11am–5pm.
Shellyne Rodriguez is an artist, educator, writer, and community organizer based in the Bronx. Her practice utilizes text, drawing, painting, collage and sculpture to depict spaces and subjects engaged in strategies of survival against erasure and subjugation. Exhibited work includes painting and white-ground etchings, drypoint with chine collé.
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Boy with Wave Brush 2021
White-ground etching, drypoint and chine collé on Hahnmühler paper
Sheet: 18 x 14 in.
Unique
$900

Seated figure with throwie 2021
Soft-ground etching and chine collé on Hahnmühler paper
Sheet: 21 x 14 in.; Plate: 12 x 7 ¾ in.
Edition of 2
$900

La Doña Raises her Cane 2019
Oil on Linen
48 x 48 in.
$5,000
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White-ground etching, drypoint and chine collé on Hahnmühler paper
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Mission
EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop (RBPMW) is a co-operative printmaking workspace that provides professional-quality printmaking facilities to artists and printmakers of every skill level. We are committed to inspiring and fostering a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse artistic community dedicated to the making of fine art prints in an environment that embraces technical and aesthetic exploration, innovation and collaboration. We seek to improve the overall quality of fine art printmaking by providing low cost, unfettered access to printers, equipment, and education. Robert Blackburn's vision of a welcoming creative environment with a spirit of openness serves as the backbone of the workshop today.

History
An influential teacher, celebrated collaborator, and pioneering artist, Robert Blackburn (b.1920-d.2003) initiated The Printmaking Workshop in Chelsea in 1947 by acquiring his own lithography press. He ran it as collaborative atelier for 24 years, until 1971, when he incorporated “The Printmaking Workshop” as a not-for-profit organization. The son of Jamaican immigrants, Blackburn created a welcoming space for all artists to learn, experiment, and exchange. His shop became a magnet for diverse international participants, resulting in a richly varied graphic output unlike any other workshop in the United States. Although Blackburn taught widely, was a highly respected color lithographer, and served as the first master printer for ULAE (Universal Limited Art Editions, where he printed the first 79 editions for artists including Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Larry Rivers) he remained dedicated to his own Printmaking Workshop. Thirty-two years later in 2002, as he began to suffer from health issues, Blackburn closed The Printmaking Workshop. He passed away in 2003. The Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop re-opened in 2005 as a program of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, to continue to make space for diverse artists to experiment in the graphic arts, in the spirit of Robert Blackburn.

Archives
There are over 4,000 artists with over 20,000 prints in the archives. Artists include: Elizabeth Catlett, Emma Amos, Charles White, Krishna Reddy, Faith Ringgold, Melvin Edwards, among others. To view the archives, please contact: essye@efanyc.org to make an appointment.

For inquiries, please contact: essye@efanyc.org
On Governors Island, Art Interventions Are Everywhere
NADA House hosts 66 galleries, nonprofits and artist-run spaces arrayed in and around stately officers’ residences. Expect the refreshingly unfamiliar.

By Roberta Smith
May 6, 2021

If you want respite from the moneyed, big-name glamour of some of your larger art fairs, you can, in one little trip, leave it all behind; see some relatively untrammeled parts of New York and also revisit the way that many things in the art world begin — that is, in a D.I.Y., grass-roots situation, when people take things into their own hands. If you want V.I.P. services at this event, you’ll have to bring your own; snacks and fluids are recommended and of course sensible shoes. The V.I.P. lounge is a huge greensward graced by tall, regal trees.

I refer to “NADA House 2021,” which opens Saturday on Governors Island in New York Harbor and runs through Aug. 1. It is not an art fair, technically, but it remains a lively, confab of art, artists, dealers and such organized by the New Art Dealers Alliance or NADA. To get there requires a short ferry ride from Lower Manhattan or Brooklyn. (The Brooklyn ferry runs only on weekends right now.) An eight-minute walk — past Castle Williams, a circular red sandstone fortification from the early 19th century — brings you to Colonels Row, a string of stately brick officers’ residences. “NADA House 21” occupies five of them side by side, from 403 to 405 Colonels Row.

... The upstairs landing is dominated by the muscular realism of Shellyne Rodriguez’s “La Doña Raises Her Cane” (EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop).
Windows are often described as the eyes of a building. They are a symbol of pondering, an aperture through which we can experience the world outside while remaining inside — an important feature now that millions of New Yorkers have had to move their lives indoors.

We reached out to 17 illustrators and artists currently sheltering in place in neighborhoods across the city and asked them to draw what they see out of their windows, and to show us what it feels like to be in New York at this rare moment in time.

We received images full of conflicting and immediately recognizable emotions: images that communicate the eerie stillness of the city and make connections to history, odes to essential workers and the changing of the seasons.

The act of drawing offers a different kind of truth than photography can. It is an additive form where images are built up from a blank surface. Illustration can evoke empathy and bring shared experiences into view as millions of people around the world find themselves in a similar position: staring out their windows, wondering what’s ahead.

“In the Bronx, we are banging pots and pans, calling on Cuomo to cancel rent for the tenants in the city during this unprecedented crisis. I feel indignant.”

—Shellyne Rodriguez
When the coronavirus pandemic hit New York, artist Shellyne Rodriguez was emerging from a very different battlefield. In February, she had helped organize FTP3 — the third in a series of actions protesting police intervention in the city’s subway system, led by activist groups Take Back the Bronx, Decolonize This Place (DTP), Why Accountability, and others. By mid-March, a shelter in place order had been imposed in the city, and Rodriguez, like many New Yorkers, hunkered down at her home and studio.

"People were like, ‘How are you even able to make work right now?’ Well, it’s partly because dystopia is always my reality as a political organizer," Rodriguez said in an interview with Hyperallergic. "For me, it was an opportunity to archive. And there was this sense of urgency to make as much as I could before I was pulled into the street again."

During the months of lockdown, the Bronx-based artist created 15 drawings and five paintings depicting her fellow community organizers and the essential workers around her, fueled by a drive she describes as core to her artistic project: archiving disappearing spaces and people under threat of displacement.

One of her first drawings was "The Debrief," depicting her two colleagues, Tre and Dalaeja, returning from a meeting to discuss the failures and successes of their last action. The figures, rendered in painstaking detail in colored pencil against dark paper, seem to emerge from their surroundings as though from a fog. The ghostly outlines of a subway car convey a sense of place, but the focus and specificity is distinctly placed on the figures.

Shellyne Rodriguez, "Najib Sits by the Door (After Grace Campbell)" (2020), oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches

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“I’m a former MoMA Educator, and at the museum, I was always looking at all these Austrian painters, [Egon] Schiele, and artists who were working and documenting their friends,” Rodriguez said. “Even Picasso was documenting people who died in concentration camps, doing wartime documenting of the intellectuals and the thinkers and the movers and the agitators. I was reflecting on the people — on the collaborators and the times that we’ve broke bread together.”

In “Hillary Paints a Banner,” one of her colleagues takes a break from painting what would become a 40-foot-long banner used during the FTP3 protests. The text reads “turistas go home,” a cheeky reference in opposition to the popularization of a step street in the Bronx, which became a tourist draw when the film The Joker was released. During FTP3, Rodriguez says, they marched from the local courthouse, where people pay their fare evasion summonses for jumping over the train turnstiles, to the so-called “Joker stairs.”

The FTP protests were born out of the rage and horror spurred when police on the NYC subway drew their guns on Adrian Napier, an unarmed Black 19-year-old, after he hopped a turnstile last year.
“The spirit behind launching the FTPs was an angry auntie spirit — it was Black women, who were like mothers,” Rodriguez said. “Cuomo declared they’re going to put 500 new cops in the MTA and immediately our kids are getting beat up and getting guns pulled on them. You’re criminalizing the poor. And that means our babies, Black teenage males, first and foremost. ‘Hilary paints a Banner’ was just thinking about the labor that went into all of the ruckus we caused in New York.”

Eventually, Rodriguez turned her pencils to the people immediately around her, a limited group that included her building’s super, Dragan, and her mailman, Andy. The latter dons the light blue surgical mask and gloves that have become somber symbols of the pandemic, nearly camouflaged by his head-to-toe navy USPS uniform. Only Andy’s eyes are visible, revealing the candid but weary stare of one of the many workers who could not stay home, facing daunting risks as the virus continued to spread.

Still, Rodriguez was wary of falling into the trope of the “essential worker” portraits that she began to see everywhere. “I didn’t want to be pigeonholed into that idea, the ‘COVID drawings.’ To me this was just part of a moment,” she said. “I did a diptych of two bikers I saw outside in front of the bodega. But even the kid, he’s adjusting his mask. You’ve got to kind of look for it, it’s not in your face. Here is a kid from my neighborhood, and he happened to be wearing this mask because this is COVID 2020. I wanted it to be part of the story, but not the story.”

When restrictions began to loosen, Rodriguez made the last drawing of her lockdown series: “Mr. Softee,” a comparatively sanguine rendering of an unmistakable blue and white ice cream truck on bright yellow paper. “Summer came, it got hot, and the truck was out, you heard the music. I finished it the same week that Minnesota popped off,” said Rodriguez, citing the Minneapolis protests demanding justice for George Floyd and other Black victims of police violence that ignited demonstrations across the country.

“We had already been planning FTP4. I literally finished it and hit the streets,” Rodriguez said.

The colored pencil drawings she produced during this time are rigorous and exact, with intricate attention paid to every fold, shadow; the medium, she says, allows her to “indulge her meticulousness.” With painting, however, she seeks looser, more expressive passages exemplified by two portraits of community organizers, painted from life in her apartment and finished during quarantine: “Najieb Sits by the Door (After Grace Campbell)” and “Lisa Ortega Rolls the 4,5,6 (Ceelo).”

“I respect painting immensely. I look at Henry Taylor, I look at Alice Neel, and I wanna cry, the way they can lay a mark down,” Rodriguez said. In both works, the artist layered paint richly to build up the thick architectural molding on the walls of her apartment, yielding a visual discord between the sitters — radical activists, women of color — and their surroundings.
The title of Najieb’s portrait refers to Grace P. Campbell, the first African American woman to run for state office in New York and become a member of the Communist Party; and to *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969), a novel by Sam Greenlee that tells the fictional story of the first Black CIA agent, who leaves the profession to train Black militants.

“There’s all these coded things in the painting, the way that traditionally portraits have been,” Rodriguez says. “What’s in the portrait? What’s this still life? Why the skull, why this, why that?”

Though she laments that political art and artists are often talked about “with little nuance,” Rodriguez recognizes that her activism and her artistic practice are intertwined. “I usually like a really strict line between my practice and my political work, but I know it comes from my subjectivity, this is who I am,” she said.

“You look at my body of work and it’s always talking about the Bronx, it’s always talking about our subjugation, how we survive. It’s being a geographer to some degree, it’s my built environment.”

The drawings and paintings Rodriguez pursued during the early days of the pandemic pay homage to the people in her intimate organizing circle as well as to those who became part of her daily environment when the world abruptly changed. In different ways, both could be described as “essential.”

Rodriguez recalled the words of Kazembe Balagun, a renowned intellectual from the Bronx. “He told me, ‘Y’all have to archive and document all the work that you’re doing. Black and Brown revolutionaries get forgotten. If you don’t do it, it will be erased,’” she said. “And that stayed with me.”