

LOVE

About the Artist

Artist and designer Cey Adams combines graffiti, fine art, and graphic design to create layered murals and mixed-media artworks. Often incorporating bold typography placed onto backgrounds of colorful shapes, Adams references Pop Art imagery, comic book styles, and graphic design elements in his murals. His simple, bold statements uplift and empower communities and individuals, sending messages about social issues, race and gender relations, consumerism, and popular culture.

Adams, a New York City native, started creating graffiti as a teenager in the 1970s and 80s, and was featured in the 1982 PBS hip hop documentary *Style Wars*. He studied painting at the School of Visual Arts before starting a career as the creative director for Def Jam Records in 1983. Two years later, he co-founded the graphic design firm The Drawing Board. In addition to his design work and murals, Adams lectures and teaches throughout North America.

Featuring subject matter such logos, the American flag, music, and historic figures, Adams presents recognizable elements from popular culture in his work. In his mixed-media collage works, Adams layers found and handmade paper with vibrant colors to create value and texture, presenting familiar imagery in new ways for the viewer to discover.

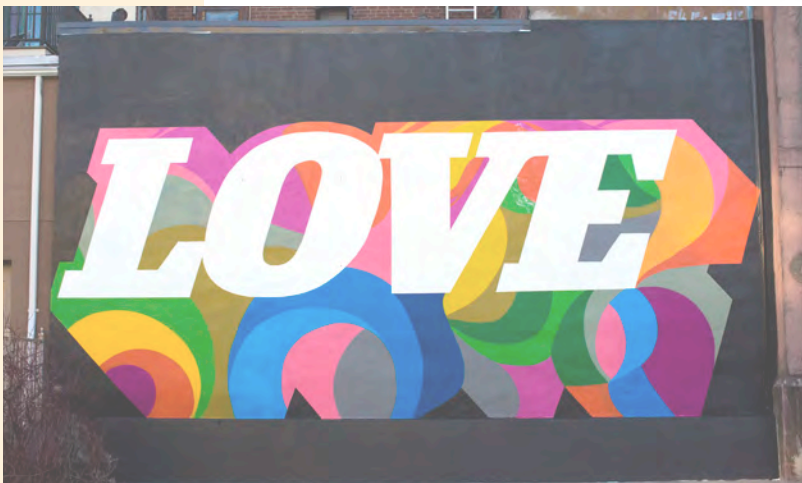


Courtesy of Cey Adams.

About the Artwork

Adams created the mural *LOVE* for the Superflat NB mural project, whose aim is to bring art and civic pride to New Bedford, Massachusetts. Adam's iconic visual imagery translates eloquently from his studio practice to his work as a muralist. He incorporates his fondness for collage and pop culture with his typography design and color and pattern choices, which give a three-dimensional quality to the letters, called 3D graffiti style. The bold, positive message of *LOVE*—referencing Robert Indiana's Pop Art *LOVE* works—can be viewed from miles away, inspiring a sense of belonging, or cultural identity, in the community.

By using a white fill for the letter forms and a black background, Adams emphasizes the sense of depth. With this illusion of depth alongside patterns, colors, and shapes—a nostalgic nod to 1960s style—Adams creates a visual unity in the mural. Unity is the sense of oneness or wholeness in a work of art, creating the feeling of harmony, solidarity, and peace. Adams consciously creates a unified design to highlight the meaning behind the word “love.” The effectiveness of this artwork is driven by Adams's knowledge of branding, communication, and graphic design.



LOVE, New Bedford, Massachusetts, 2018.
Created for the 3rd Eye Open Festival presented by Superflat NB.
Courtesy Cey Adams.

Artist Dates

born 1962,
New York City

Lives and Works

New York City

Artist Website

ceyadams.com

Key Terms

- collage
- creative director
- cultural identity
- culture
- iconic
- identity
- nostalgic
- Pop Art

Teaching the Work of Cey Adams

Big Ideas

Culture, Unity, Love, Identity

Essential Question

How can art and design affect individuals and communities?

Other Artists to Explore

- Romare Bearden
- Margaret Kilgallen
- Barry McGee

Artist Quote

"I believe that our similarities outweigh our differences. The goal here is to create a platform for discussion and understanding."
ceyadams.com

Discuss

- How do you define "love"? What kinds of "love" can be found in all communities?
- Why do you think Adams chose to depict the word "love"? How do the visual choices (colors, shapes, font, and so on) effect how we view the word in this context? Does the meaning change when this word is displayed in a public space?
- What are the connections between culture, identity, and community? How can your collective experiences, the physical location of the community, and your beliefs inform your cultural identity?

Explore

- What do you know about your community? Choose a community you belong to and search for historical information on how the community first began, how it has changed or grown, and what it is like now. Construct a timeline of your community. Then, identify the prominent attributes of this community and list the colors, shapes, and images that would help you describe this community to others. (VA:Cn10.1.IIIa)
- Explore album cover art designed by Cey Adams and make a short list of your favorites. Listen to some of the music in these albums and explain (using art and design vocabulary) how the overall design of the album works to describe the visual identity of the music. (VA:Pr6.1.IIa)
- Create a list of logos and symbols that are nostalgic for you. Sketch each logo from memory. Next to each logo, describe the feelings, memories, and characteristics that it represents for you. Choose one logo from your list and research how this logo may have changed over time. Compare your memory of the logo with the various versions. Discuss your findings in small groups. (VA:Re7.2.Ia)

Create

- Throughout history we have witnessed great leaders who rally for positive change. Identify some of those leaders and find a word or message that resonates with you. Create a design for a mural using that word or message aimed to uplift and create positive social change in the community. (VA:Cr1.1.IIIa)
- Choose a song or album that you connect with or that has stuck with you. Consider how all of your senses are activated when you hear this piece of music and how you can best communicate that feeling. Create an artwork that communicates your personal connection to the music you chose. (VA:Cr2.3.IIa)
- Use your list of nostalgic logos to identify the visual attributes of those logos and combine them to create your own personal logo. Consider your characteristics and what aspects of yourself you want to communicate to the world. Refine your ideas and choose the best way to create your logo (collage, digital design, drawing, and so on). When finished, write a corresponding short rap, jingle, or poem. (VA:Cr3.1.IIa)