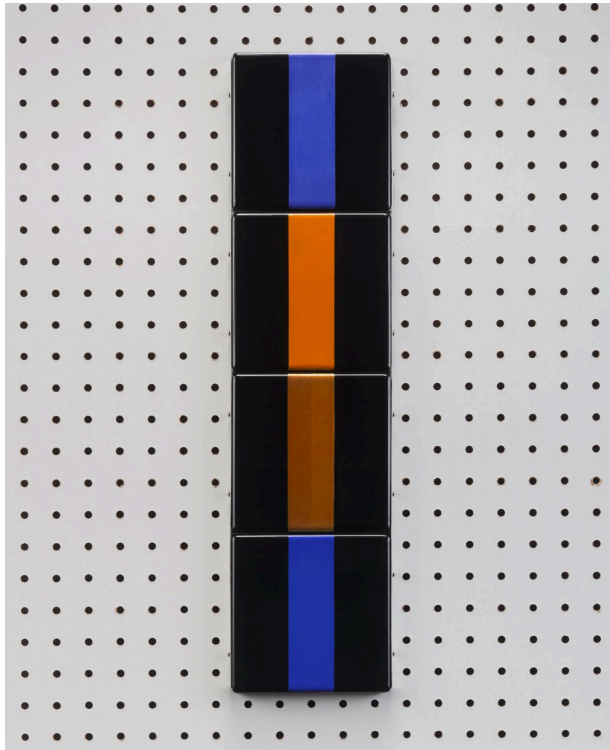


DESNIVEL 220 1st Ave. New York, NY 10009 | www.desnivelgallery.com | info@desnivelgallery.com



Carmelle Safdie

HARDWARE

September 13-October 5

Opening September 13, 4-6pm

DESNIVEL at H&W Hardware

220 1st Avenue

New York, NY 10009

Open Mon - Sat, 9am - 6pm

*Carmelle Safdie- "Continuity Test - Windsor Blue" 2025
Vitreous enamel and Japanese silver foil on enameled steel, anodized aluminum, rubber and stainless steel hardware. 20 in x 5 in.
Photo by Chris Austin*

Desnivel is thrilled to present **HARDWARE**, an exhibition by **Carmelle Safdie**, taking place at **H&W Hardware** in the East Village. This is part of our ongoing efforts to expand on the gallery model while recognizing the East Village as a historic neighborhood for artists and small business owners.

For the occasion, the artist has made a special edition of enameled outlet covers that will be on sale at the store. These smaller-scale works, available at an accessible price point, offer a way for the art to live on in the homes of those who have visited the show.

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H&W Hardware store opened in 1924 at 220 1st Avenue in the East Village. One block away from H&W Hardware was KK Polish Restaurant at 194 1st Avenue, where my family and I would sometimes go after school at P.S. 19 across the street. We would occasionally run into family friends and poets from the neighborhood there—likely because around the corner, at 437 East 12th Street, was a building where so many poets lived. KK closed around 2003; P.S. 19 is now called East Village Community School. In the hardware store, Carmelle Safdie's enamel pieces inhabit empty shelf spaces as well as the store window facing 1st Avenue, where their configuration becomes part of the city's architecture. While these materials and techniques were originally intended for large-scale public installations, Safdie's work in H&W Hardware also addresses the public—yet at an approachable scale that draws attention to the complexities of both personal and community legacies. Safdie's practice engages the visual language of

the “paint swatch” commonly found in hardware stores, where shoppers consider a range of color options. This ritual echoes her own system of preserving, labeling, and numbering powdered enamel colors. Over the years, she has built a body of work with materials inherited from the studios of her grandmother Vera Ronnen, Stefan Knapp, as well as their contemporaries, centered on the practice of color testing. Color tests are essential when working with vitreous enamel, since the powdered hues often shift dramatically once fired into glass. There is an alchemy in Safdie’s process: silica dust transforms into glass fused onto metal, while the spirit of her grandmother’s practice—and the colors she once witnessed—carry forward into the present. This transformation pushes the materials beyond the index or archive into a more mystic space that unsettles traditional notions of artistic lineage.

Around the corner from the hardware store, I learned to swim at the 14th Street Y (344 East 14th Street). Years later, our older daughter Zola attended nursery school there. When I first learned to swim, my mom rewarded me with a seven-layer cake from Bela’s Polish deli (109 1st Avenue). Now I offer the same incentive to our younger daughter Veera, though the cake is harder to find since Bela’s closed around 2007.

Safdie’s *Continuity Tests*—bands of vibrant color adhered to steel plates with custom hardware—are placed in the window and throughout the store. What continues? The enamel colors, some once used or mixed by her grandmother, continue on. The act of working with colored glass in public space continues on. When a store closes but the building remains, what continues? When a store survives a hundred years, what continues? We can no longer get a cannoli at De Robertis (176 1st Avenue), which closed in 2014, but Veniero’s (342 East 11th Street) is still open for cannolis. Russo’s (344 East 11th Street) still makes smoked mozzarella, though they no longer smoke it in a flaming barrel on the sidewalk.

The Brooklyn Public Library now lends out tools—what might that mean for the neighborhood hardware store? The character of such stores often stems from their accumulation of objects across decades, creating a personality specific to their history. Some hardware stores carry long-forgotten items that no one has purchased but that still remain on the shelves, forming an eclectic archive of supplies and tools. Safdie’s series of green and blue wall outlet covers, made with vitreous enamel on copper, add to this array. These functional objects bridge the other works in the exhibition with the store’s own inventory, giving way to new modes of operation—and new audiences—for the artworks on view in this context.

In contrast to the specificity of colors on the outlet covers, Safdie’s *Counter Mix* compositions are born from the irreproducible remnants of leftover enamel powders. This combination of over 250 colors forms a cosmic field that speaks to the phenomena of color perception more broadly, as well as the production of color in digital spaces. Minuscule specks of color, fused to metal tiles and configured into gradients, conjure a vast lineage of artists, shopkeepers, and city dwellers—whom Safdie acknowledges, honors, and embraces—all absorbing color in the hardware store.

—Max Warsh, 2025

H&W Hardware opened in 1924 at 220 1st Avenue in the East Village. Six years later, in 1930, Carmelle Safdie’s grandmother, Vera Ronnen, was born in Hungary. Ronnen was an artist best known for her large-scale installations made of colored enamel embedded into public architecture. Twenty-five years ago this September, Safdie moved to the East Village to study at the Cooper Union School of Art at 7 East 7th Street, and often ate lunch at the Stage restaurant (128 2nd Avenue), which closed in 2016. Max Warsh grew up in an apartment on the ninth floor of 172 East 4th Street and walked daily along 1st Avenue to attend P.S. 19 from 1985–1990. In 2009, Maria De Victoria moved into a rent-stabilized apartment on East 5th Street, where her partner was born and raised and they live today. In June 2025, De Victoria moved Desnivel from the boiler room under her home to the storefronts of the East Village.