



A Portrait of Jean-Daniel Cadinot by François Orenn (2003).  
Courtesy François Orenn.

## Cadinot, Jean-Daniel (1944-2008)

by George Koschel

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Jean-Daniel Cadinot, French pornographer *extraordinaire*, attracted an international following for his audacious films, which manage to be both unusually artistic and enormously arousing.

Cadinot was born in 1944 in Paris, at the foot of Montmartre hill in the Batignoles Quarter. His parents were tailors who custom fit clothes. In reference to his parent's occupation, Cadinot noted the irony that whereas they clothed men, he earned a reputation for undressing them.

Cadinot realized he was gay at the age of twelve, but he did not delve into gay erotica until 1972. Prior to that, in the early 1960s, he studied at École des Arts et Métiers and at the National School of Photography. He then began his professional career at Valois Studios, where he directed mainstream films for French-speaking audiences.

Cadinot's professional coming out as a gay photographer began in 1972, when he created nude photographs of gay author Yves Navarre and popular singers Patrick Juvet and Pascal Auriat. These photographs, which circulated only among a small, appreciative coterie, did not receive widespread notice.

In the early 1970s, Cadinot continued his mainstream career, but took ever more photographs of nude men, gradually earning a reputation as a skilled still photographer. By 1978, when he turned to filmmaking, he had published 17 photo albums, which had sold more than 170,000 copies.

In 1978, Cadinot established his own production company, French Art, and issued his first 16mm film, *Tendres adolescents*.

Cadinot explained his embrace of filmmaking as an expression of gay activism: "The still photo became too limiting. I quickly reached its boundaries and I had a desire for action and movement," he remarks. "I wanted to go further, to tell our collective stories as gay men. Video enabled me to do just that. I have to say that when I'm shooting photos I prefer to work as an artist and make artistic photos because otherwise it's not long before it gets pornographic and I don't like that. In that sense there was a progressive evolution towards films in order for me to tell stories about men. In a way it was my first gay activism to illustrate our sexual stories."

While Cadinot disliked the term "pornography," because of its pejorative connotations, he had no apologies for the depictions of sexual action that animate his films. This action is often raw and even brutal, but sometimes tender and sweet.

Cadinot's films are plot driven, usually featuring interesting and strong narratives. They also usually involve a journey, either literally, as in *Sex Bazaar* (1982) and *Sex Oasis* (1984), which feature young Frenchmen in North Africa; or figuratively, as in *Tough and Tender* (1989), which chronicles the search for love in a boys' reformatory. In *Sex Drive* (1985), the journey is imaginary. There the protagonist is supposedly running away from home, but in the end it turns out to be a dream. Of course, all the journeys are picaresque; they,

quite naturally, involve many adventures, especially of the sexual kind.

Another characteristic of Cadinot's films is that they feature young men in their late teens or early twenties. They are not the pumped up, well-endowed, hot-waxed men who now dominate American pornography, however. Although they often interact with older and larger men, frequently of non-European background, the protagonists tend to be youthful and nonmuscular, and they tend to be more sexually versatile than actors in American pornography, who are often limited to top or bottom roles.

Regarding his young actors, Cadinot had this to say: "To me they represent the freshness and innocence of youth. They are provocative: a 20-year-old is more subversive than a 30-year-old; there is not yet the weight of socialization and education on his shoulders; he is not yet molded into society. I like the freshness but also the intelligence of these guys. I do not choose Apollo-type men with big penises. I want men that could be your average next door neighbors, fresh, natural without any complexes regarding their sexuality or their sexual tastes."

In devising his sex scenes, Cadinot stated: "I write a scenario that fits the young guys. This is the essence of my films. The performers do not portray things that are imposed on them by me, but things they like to do themselves. These 'puppies' kiss each other with real passion, with real lust. It is emotions that make my particular style. I tell a story. I don't do things that are 'robotical' like we often tend to see in the porn industry, my scenarios are based on the actors' tastes."

Although Cadinot said that he tailored his films to his actors, he also, rather paradoxically, insisted that his films are autobiographical, which may account for their intensely personal quality. He said that his works constituted a saga "that traces my life from the age of twelve when I became aware of my homosexuality, with all of the problems of religion and existentialism." While the films are not literally autobiographical, they are informed by events in the director's life.

For example, Cadinot did not spend time in a reformatory, the setting of *Tough and Tender*, yet the film nevertheless derives from his own experience: "It is a transposition of my vacations as an adolescent in religious camps," he explained. "The universe was, for me, similar (like a concentration camp, and the product of hierarchy among the teen-agers). The same with the time I spent in the Boy Scouts."

The time Cadinot spent in the Boy Scouts is used to good effect in *Hot on the Trail* (1984), a film that is notable for its fetishization not only of youth and genitalia, but also of underwear, especially jockey style briefs.

Cadinot made more than sixty films, usually limiting himself to directing no more than four a year. In 1992 he bought and restored a farm, which he subsequently utilized as his studio. "It is very satisfying to have this studio now," he commented, "to live with the actors for many days, to discuss with them and understand their personalities, which helps me to develop scenes. Here, there is space for more than a dozen people and each youth can do whatever pleases him, whether it is staying with the group and having fun or having some privacy."

Cadinot's films earned an international audience and numerous accolades. In 1997 Cadinot was honored with a Venus Award as Best Director at the International Erotic Film Awards in Berlin, the first time the organization recognized gay erotic films. In 2002, he won an AVN award, the adult Oscars in Los Angeles, for his entire body of work, and another Venus for *C'est La Vie* (2001). He completed his autobiography, *Premier*, but it has not yet been published in the United States.

On April 23, 2008, Cadinot died, following a heart attack.

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