



MARCEL DZAMA:

Mischief Makes a Move

Described as a “Dadaist love story,” *Une danse des bouffons (or A jester’s dance)* is Marcel Dzama’s fictionalized account of the real-life romantic affair between the Dada artist and chess master Marcel Duchamp and the Brazilian sculptor Maria Martins. Featuring musician Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth, Belgian actress and model Hannelore Knuts (both playing the role of Martins in alternating versions of the film), and a surreal panoply of elements derived from art, dance, and chess, *Mischief Makes a Move* is an exploration of the mythological figure known as the Trickster, whose pranks frequently blur the line between good and evil.

Commissioned by the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival, *Une danse* has been shown at the Kunstmuseum Thun in Switzerland, the David Zwirner Gallery in New York, and now in Saint Louis at the World Chess Hall of Fame. Created as an homage to the famed Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg, the film also includes references to Dzama’s artistic heroes including Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Joseph Beuys, Francisco de Goya, and Oskar Schlemmer, among others. The score is composed by Will Butler, Jeremy Gara, and Tim Kingsbury—all members of the band Arcade Fire.

Centered on *Une danse*, *Mischief Makes a Move* includes sculptures, masks, dioramas, and works on paper inspired by the film as well as a chess set created exclusively for this exhibition. Additional works in the show include the videos *Robot Chess* (2014), which is on view in the gallery, and *Death Disco Dance* (2011). Displayed in the front window of the World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF), the latter work presents an array of dancers dressed as chess pieces to visitors and passersby at the Saint Louis Chess Campus.

In 2012, the WCHOF was honored to serve as the venue for the artist’s first solo exhibition in the Midwest titled *Marcel Dzama: The End Game*. The WCHOF is proud to bring Dzama, whose work beautifully complements our mission to celebrate the intersection of culture, art, history, and chess, back to Saint Louis.

—Shannon Bailey, Chief Curator

The fatal sister, 2014. Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper. 4 part work. Framed: 18 1/8 x 48 1/4 x 1 inches. Overall: 14 x 44 inches. Each paper: 14 x 11 inches.

ABOUT THE COVER

Inspired by Marcel Duchamp’s art and his love of the game of chess, Marcel Dzama frequently makes references to specific works by the iconic artist. The cover and corresponding inside pages are inspired by Duchamp’s *Pocket Chess Set* (1943). The drawings of the pawns and pieces, however, are original designs created by Dzama.



This spark will prove a raging fire, 2014. Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper. 6 part work. Framed: 55 1/8 x 32 1/4 x 1 inches. Overall: 51 3/4 x 28 1/2 inches. Each paper: 17 x 14 inches.

“The tricks of today are the truths of tomorrow.”

—Man Ray

Marcel Dzama was born on May 4, 1974, in Winnipeg, Canada. The oldest of three children in a working-class family, drawing was an inexpensive outlet for creative energies, especially during the oppressively cold Manitoba winters. The seeds of his prolific nature as an artist were sown early on in his childhood, when he was already redrawing the images in his coloring books after all of the uncolored spaces had been filled. He graduated to comic book superheroes for inspiration, as well as his father's collection of reprints of the iconic *Prince Valiant* comic strip, whose creator, Hal Foster, had lived and worked in Winnipeg during his teens and twenties. The young Marcel also showed a considerable appetite for his father's collection of illustrated classics, and it was this continued preference for drawing over writing that ultimately signaled a far less benign condition than simply a boyhood love for illustration. In grammar school he was diagnosed with dyslexia, and for several years was shuttled to a school that offered alternative programs for learning English. Despite some improvement in his reading, these results faded when he returned to the conventional educational system, which consequently pushed him deeper into his drawing.

Dzama attended the School of Art at the nearby University of Manitoba, where he studied with Alison Norlen, whose unobtrusive approach to mentoring gave him the space and freedom to develop on his own. Norlen not only introduced him to like-minded artists from the past, such as the Surrealists André Masson and

Joseph Cornell, she also encouraged him to approach the history of art as a resource without fear of appearing derivative, guidance that would have a lasting effect on his artistic development. His courses made liberal use of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, where he found the massive collection of Inuit art especially stimulating as it appealed to his inclination toward fantasy and mythology over reality, featuring a host of shape-shifting, animal/human hybrid creatures whose deceptively naïve execution belies the complexity of the shamanistic activities represented.

Even more crucial to his development at the School of Art was his role in the formation of a small group of highly compatible artists that came to be known as the Royal Art Lodge. In the wake of a devastating fire in his family home that forced them out of the house for several months in 1996, Dzama retreated more and more to his campus studio, where he and fellow Lodge members developed a process of collaborative drawing that demonstrated a strong collectivist ideology in the spirit of earlier movements like Fluxus. Eschewing personal gain, the communal methodology practiced by the Lodge (drawings were dated but not signed by individual members) has become quasi-legendary, and culminated in the exhibition *Ask the Dust*, organized by the Drawing Center in New York and the Power Plant in Toronto in 2003. The show brought the group international recognition, traveling to venues in Canada, Europe, Asia, and several cities in the United States.

Dzama's own path to prominence led him to the sunny shores of Los Angeles, where Canadian curator Wayne Baerwaldt was curating an exhibition of up-and-coming artists at Richard Heller's Santa Monica Gallery. Glowing reviews and a sold-out show led to a solo exhibition at Heller, quickly followed by solo shows at galleries all over North and South America. Dzama's biggest break, however, came as a result of Heller showing several drawings at the Berlin Art Fair that caught the eye of David Zwirner, who offered to represent the artist. In the spring of 1998, just months after his first show in the United States, Dzama had a solo exhibition at Zwirner's SoHo gallery and a review in the *New York Times* by Roberta Smith, who described his drawings as "both childish and perverse, like *Winnie the Pooh* illustrated by a devotee of *A Clockwork Orange* ... With guns, knives and masks as frequent props, they have a climactic, often violent mood and sometimes evoke television Westerns or action movies. The images dart into view like uninvited dreams or fantasies triggered by who knows what—surfeits of rage, desire, or maybe just popular culture."

Following several years of summers working in New York City and the rest of the year in Winnipeg, Dzama made the permanent move to New York in 2004. By the time of the move, he had already compiled a considerable resume of solo exhibitions, including *Drawings for Dante* (2002) and *The Last Winter* (2004), both at the Timothy Taylor Gallery in London; *Welcome to Winnipeg* (2003) at the Rizziero Arte in Pescara, Italy; *Drawings by Marcel Dzama: From the Bernardi Collection* (2003) at the Art Gallery of Windsor in Canada; as well as numerous eponymous exhibitions at Sies + Höke in Düsseldorf, Germany, and other European and North American

galleries. By 2004 Dzama had also established his relationship with Dave Eggers' publishing house McSweeney's, which had already produced his first artist's book *The Berlin Years* (2003), and would follow with a second edition of *The Berlin Years* (2006) and *The Berliner Ensemble Thanks You All* (2008). New York City broadened Dzama's purview dramatically, as the increasingly dense and expansive compositions seen in the exhibitions *The Course of Human History Personified* (2005) and *Tree with Roots* (2006) attest.

In 2006, Dzama was invited by José Noé Suro to work at his ceramics workshop Ceramica Suro in Guadalajara, Mexico. There Dzama was able to create work on a scale that matched his rapidly evolving vision, resulting in the epically scaled dioramas shown in *Even the Ghost of the Past* (2008) at Zwirner's New York space. This exhibition also saw Dzama's most direct engagement with the Dadaists, particularly Marcel Duchamp, in whom Dzama found a level of kinship that transcends influence. The significance of Duchamp for Dzama's artistic evolution can hardly be evoked without mentioning the former's deep passion for chess, which is so densely interwoven in the fabric of Duchamp's legacy that it is virtually impossible to ignore. Indeed, following his directorial debut with *The Infidels* (2009) and his first major survey *Aux mille tours/Of Many Turns* (2010) at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Dzama directed the ambitiously conceived film *A Game of Chess* (2011), the centerpiece of his exhibition *Behind Every Curtain* (2011) at Zwirner. Shot in Guadalajara, *A Game of Chess* evokes the feel of 1920s avant-garde film with its obscurely interwoven parallel story lines that alternate between a woman's fantasy of being trapped in a chess-match ballet and her reality of being an assassin in an unidentified war-torn land. In addition to nods to Dadaists



A blue box for Marcel, 2013. Fabric, acrylic, wood, plaster, metal, paper, vinyl, porcelain, film, plastic flower, graphite, collage, and string. Dimensions vary with installation. Assemblage: 26 x 52 x 31 inches. Box, closed: 5 1/2 x 17 1/2 x 19 5/8 inches. Box, open: 27 x 17 x 23 3/4 inches.



Une danse des bouffons (or A jester's dance), 2013
Video projection, 35:22 min, black and white, sound
Overall dimensions vary with each installation



like Duchamp and Francis Picabia, the work of this period abounds with references to his emerging interest in dance, inspired by the grotesquely surreal dance sequence from the Technicolor extravaganza *The Red Shoes* (1948) and the costumes and choreography of Bauhaus polymath Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* (1922).

With time to spare following the filming of *A Game of Chess*, Dzama and the performers quickly improvised another film called *Death Disco Dance* (2011), which was shot nearby outside of the recently torn-down factory of a company coincidentally named Canada Shoe. The masked dancers in polka-dotted unitards (inspired by Picabia's costume designs for the ballet *Relâche*) who represented the pawns in *A Game of Chess* take center stage in this film, while the normally more mobile pieces shimmy in the background to a disco drum beat of Dzama's own creation composed on a drum machine. Recalling Public Image Ltd.'s *Death Disco* in its title (and not, tempting though it may be to speculate, The Smiths'

Death of a Disco Dancer), the film plays tricks with time and continuity, as the stops and starts of the music's synthetic beat are mirrored in the subtle but visible loops and reversals of the film, creating a spasmodic continuity in the repetitive movements of the lithe and anonymous dancers, one of whom still inexplicably bears a gruesome wound sustained in *A Game of Chess*.

Duchamp remains at the heart of Dzama's *Une danse des bouffons* (or *A jester's dance*), which was commissioned by the Toronto International Film Festival and debuted at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto in 2013 as part of an exhibition of artists influenced by Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg, with whom Dzama shares a penchant for violent imagery and a dark, often inscrutable psychology. *Une danse* casts Dzama's menagerie of characters and beloved art historical references in a surreal account of the unmarried Duchamp's affair with the married sculptor Maria Martins, which lasted from the mid-1940s until Martins ended the relationship despite

Death Disco Dance, 2011. Video on monitors, 4 min (loop), color, sound. Dimensions variable with installation.



Too many nights and only one queen or Long knights for a lonely queen, 2014. Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper. Framed: 20 7/8 x 18 1/8 x 7/8 inches. Paper: 14 1/8 x 16 3/4 inches; *Bon voyage or The punishment of pride*, 2014. Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper. 2 part work. Framed: 18 1/8 x 26 1/8 x 1 inches. Overall: 14 x 22 inches. Each paper: 14 x 11 inches.



Duchamp's protestations by moving permanently back to her home country of Brazil in 1950. Martins, who was in the United States during the 1940s with her second husband and Brazilian ambassador to the United States Carlos Martins, was long speculated and is now known to have been the model for the nude torso in Duchamp's grand final opus, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . .* (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .). Assembled in secret during the last two decades of Duchamp's life, it is a haunting tableau of an undressed figure laying supine in the brush with her face obscured holding a gas lamp aloft before a deep landscape with a waterfall, all of which is viewed through two peepholes in a weathered wooden door. How an artist of Duchamp's notoriety was able to construct a work of such magnitude in secret remains a mystery to many. However, it is easy to forget that Duchamp was not as heralded in the 1940s and 1950s as he is today, and many were still under the misapprehension that he had given up art to pursue his professional chess ambitions.

Following Duchamp's death in 1968, *Étant donnés* was installed, per his wishes, in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where in 2003 Dzama would encounter it in person for the first time. Five years later, Dzama exhibited his own tableau at Zwirner titled *Even the Ghost of the Past* (2008), an installation in which one finds what Dzama suspects one would see if the view of *Étant donnés* were expanded to the left, revealing not only the woman's face, but also a similarly nude and recumbent male figure identified by Dzama as Duchamp. Dzama was inspired to engage with this particular work because it seemed to provide a rare and revealing glimpse into the normally opaque and coldly conceptual mind of a man who clearly possessed a sentimental side to his complex personality.

*“Something about **Étant donnés** really struck me when I first saw it,” Dzama recalled. “There was also the fact that it was like a love letter to his mistress and his last wife. It was just really a beautiful story that found its way into some of the work that I was doing.”*

Enigmatically standing over the doomed lovers in *Even the Ghost of the Past* is a stuffed fox, an animal that numerous cultures worldwide associate with the Trickster, a mythological and literary type who presents a disruptive element, upending convention and cultivating chaos, sometimes in a malevolent spirit and at other times to the benefit of others by showing them the folly of their own narrow perspectives or attitudes. Fueled by duality, the Trickster, whose role is substantially expanded in *Une danse*, thrives on playing both sides, confusing traditional binaries like good and evil or love and hate. In the film, the woman representing Martins (played by both indie-rock star Kim Gordon and Belgian model and actress Hannelore Knuts in two different but nearly identical versions of the film) seeks to rescue the man representing Duchamp (played by artist Jason Grisell), who plays both the victim and the victimizer. Chess, which at one time liberated Duchamp from having to make art, now holds him captive, with gun- and camera-wielding terrorists forcing him to mindlessly recite chess moves. Many of the elements of the film are doubled, with Duchamp conspicuously playing both the captive and the captor. Maria represents Duchamp's salvation, and yet, according to Dzama, it is also her face behind the double mask of the executioner, whose impish dance was choreographed and performed with nefarious panache by Vanessa Walters.



In true Dzama style, the supporting roles are helmed by a survey of his chosen art historical ancestry, most notably Francisco de Goya, with his sinister and surreal *Los Caprichos* (also the source of the perversely stylized arabesque cursive that titles many of Dzama's drawings) and the pseudo-mythically constructed artist/shaman/Teuton Joseph Beuys, complete with his "coyote." The coyote (played here by the stuffed fox from *Even the Ghost of the Past*) is another common manifestation of the Trickster in native North American cultures and a reference to Beuys' legendary cohabitation with a wild coyote in the performance *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974). But perhaps the most critical figure for Duchamp from the Dzama pantheon is Picabia, for, according to Dzama, Duchamp became a significantly more compelling artist after he was introduced to Picabia in Paris in 1911. In the end it is Picabia, represented by the berobed and venerated cow from his painting *The Adoration of the Calf* (1941), whose frightening visage

Picabia had previously purloined from Erwin Blumenfeld's macabre photograph *The Dictator/Minotaur* (1937), who holds the key to Duchamp's true salvation. Duchamp must be symbolically reborn through his bon vivant friend in order to break down the psychic walls erected by a lifetime's obsession with chess. Following Duchamp's Cronenbergian quasi-natal emergence from a vulvic opening in the calf's chest, the film loops back to beginning, and we are left to replay the purgative cycle of love, torture, death, and rebirth over and over again until lie becomes fact, fiction becomes truth, and the star-crossed lovers are united once more.

—Bradley Bailey, 2015

We three kings, 2014. Printed steel and spray paint. 18 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches.
The red king's head, 2014. Printed steel and spray paint. 17 x 14 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches.



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Curated by Shannon Bailey.

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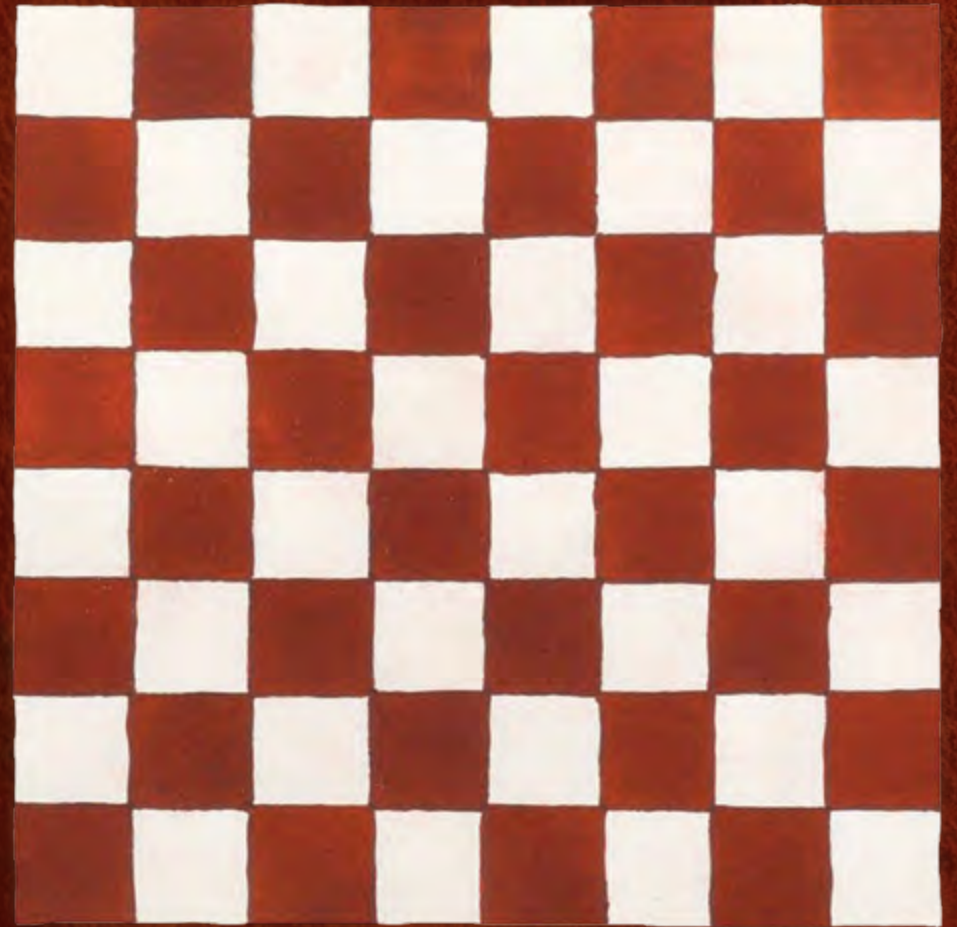
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Golden Calf, 2014. Papier-mâché and spray paint. 18 1/2 x 19 x 23 inches.

Images courtesy of David Zwirner, New York





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