

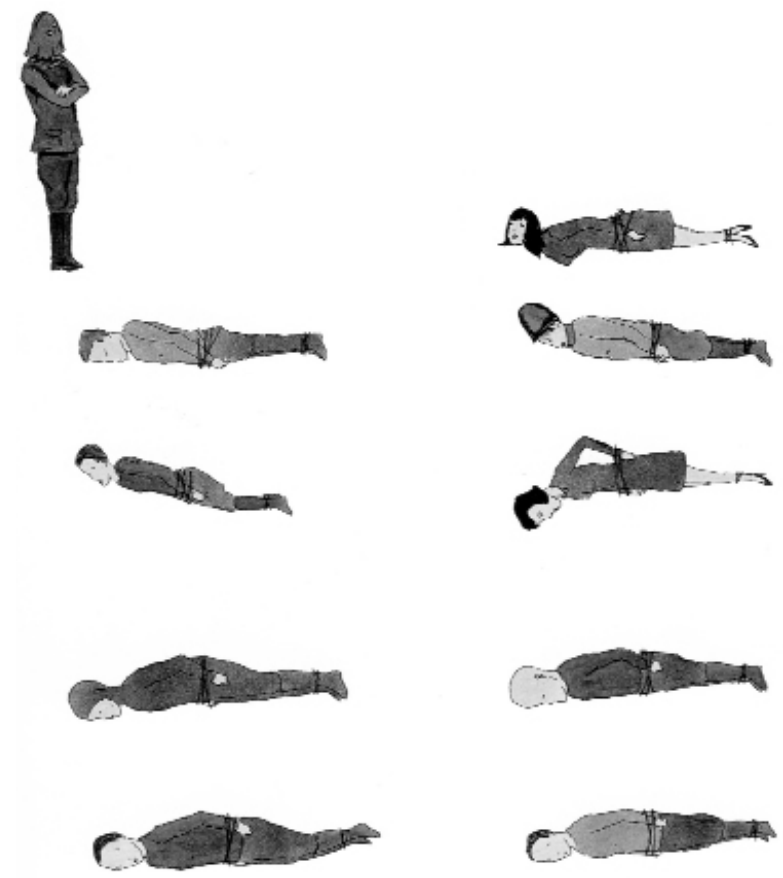


5

In drawing #5 a smoking gun and human tears frame a group of slaughtered four-legged creatures. Some of these animals have human faces. It is a common convention in books for young audiences to equate children with animals, but a writer on children's fiction says this indicates how we over-simplify young people's personalities. We tend to mistake innocence for a lack of complexity. The animal holding the smoking gun in this drawing toys with our perception of innocence. Marcel Dzama's drawings hover between the sinister and the innocent. They have a child-like quality without reducing reality to a benign over-simplification. As Einstein once said "Everything should be as simple as possible; but no simpler."

Simplicity is important to Marcel Dzama. You can see this in his style. Working with other artists at Winnipeg's Art Lodge influenced his way of drawing. Their practice of passing around pieces of paper to make shared drawings allowed him to be more spontaneous. An automatic simplicity in his drawing style reveals the universal nature of the imagination when it is uninhibited. The familiar and the strange live together, the pure-hearted is on equal footing with the sinister, violence and humour come together without conflict.

6



Marcel Dzama:

More Famous Drawings



Looking at **Marcel Dzama: More Famous Drawings**, one gets the sense of long afternoons. Sitting down with illustrated books or comics one drifts into the fantasies and daydreams of illustrated fiction. A strange world seeps into one's thoughts, disrupting logical sense. Nostalgia hovers freely. From root beer syrup with the scent of vanilla, the characters in Marcel Dzama's universe emerge. They appear from stories whose plots remain a mystery, like fragments of a dream.

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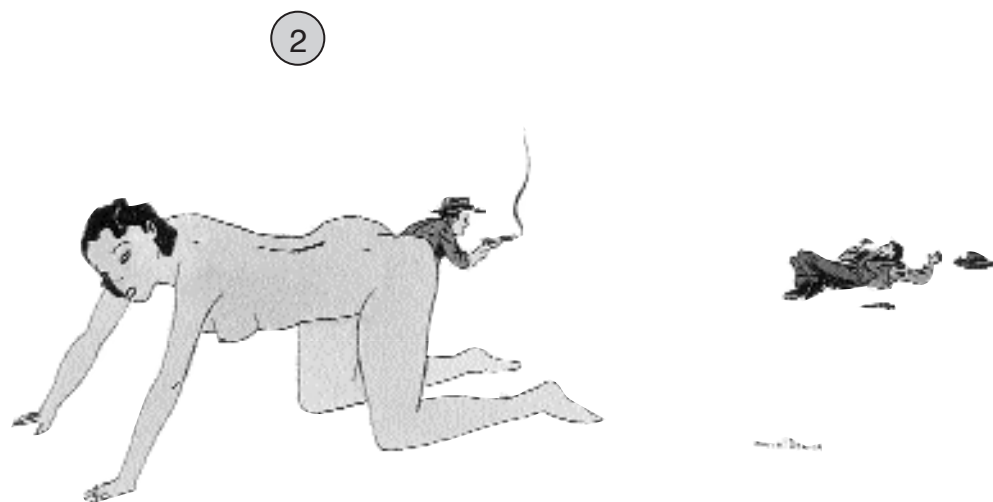
A Self-guided Tour

Winnipeg artist Marcel Dzama often gets ideas for drawings while his waking mind rubs up against his unconscious mind; in that state as one floats between waking and sleeping. From the once popular scenes of illustrated fiction come the characters who populate his dream-inspired dramas. In drawing #1 the masculine adventure story comes to terms with bizarre science fiction. Letting go of logic's reign, Dzama's picture shows a seamless reality between two different kinds of species, or two different fictional genres. In this drawing two genres merge together with an easy familiarity.

The characters seem to join together from the archives of illustrated fiction. During the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century illustrated magazines sold well to a growing and increasingly literate middle class. Illustrated pulp fiction became a North American staple. Marcel Dzama's characters seem to span the final decades of illustration's heyday - from the 1920s to the 1950s. They appear from the popular genres of the period, from adventure, mystery and science fiction stories, from women's glamour magazines and art deco design, from Captain America comics and children's books.



1



2

In drawing #2 the western adventure genre meets the alluring woman. What would the popular imagination be without gun fights and desirable women? They are often-used conventions in twentieth-century pulp fiction, as well as in other vernacular art forms. Dzama's whimsical design mimics the aimless use of sex and violence to make stories more appealing to a buying public. Many publications incorporated well proportioned young women into their illustrations, even if they had no relevance to the plot. In this drawing the woman is playfully out of place with the dueling cowboys.



3

Along with the conventions of illustrated fiction *Marcel Dzama: More Famous Drawings* explores social conventions as well. In drawing #3 two women are around a table smoking cigarettes. Smoking as a social ritual recurs throughout this series of drawings. It is significant here that these women look like Flappers. Flappers took full advantage of the new freedoms for women after the First World War, and smoking was something women had been previously denied. Cutting their hair short, experimenting with men's clothing and going out drinking and dancing unchaperoned defined a new vogue for fashionable young women in the 1920s. Old social decorum was replaced by a new liberal mode of behaviour. Ironically, smoking was a sign of liberation.



4

Dzama uses the ritual of smoking as a common denominator in this series of drawings, another standard from which to turn our gaze counterclockwise or against the grain of convention. In drawing #4 animals dressed in clothes, sit around an ashtray smoking and talking. This everyday social activity is askew as animals take the place of humans. There is a constant interplay of roles between animals and people in Marcel Dzama's universe. He draws people sporting animal skins as a costume or an alternate identity, or human faces appear like growths on animals' bodies. He animates stuffed animals or gives animals human characteristics. There seems to be a question as to our animal or human nature.