



Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences

2011

## Review: Marcel Dzama: Behind Every Curtain

Moser, Gabrielle

---

### Suggested citation:

Moser, Gabrielle (2011) Review: Marcel Dzama: Behind Every Curtain. *C Magazine* (110). p. 42. ISSN 1193-8625 Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1049/>

COPYRIGHT 2011 C The Visual Arts Foundation

*Open Research is a publicly accessible, curated repository for the preservation and dissemination of scholarly and creative output of the OCAD University community. Material in Open Research is open access and made available via the consent of the author and/or rights holder on a non-exclusive basis.*

*The OCAD University Library is committed to accessibility as outlined in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) and is working to improve accessibility of the Open Research Repository collection. If you require an accessible version of a repository item contact us at [repository@ocadu.ca](mailto:repository@ocadu.ca).*

*Impossible Colour* series (1997; 2001–ongoing).

Joseph Albers and Sol Lewitt are explicit art historical references, but they're called up with the sentiment of a novel's dedication page rather than as keywords for conceptual links. Even *cfaal 59*, which clearly echoes Albers' immense series of painting and prints, *Homage to Square* (1940s–1960s) seems peacefully self-contained, as if arriving at the same conclusion (or question), independently. Eaton's process resembles Albers' too: the studio as a laboratory where carefully controlled amounts of colour are combined in particular orders. Accordingly, the images feel experimental, like beautiful test results approaching some larger unknown.

Subtractive colour theory is an analogue photographer's game, but *Interpolation Dramatization 4* turns to the digital blending enabled by image-manipulation software, which can increase the resolution of a file by generating additional pixels based on the average values of surrounding ones. Starting with a wall of dark and light blocks, Eaton shifted the camera up and down, and side to side, between multiple exposures, creating the effect of a closely cropped digital zoom. Albers stressed the adaptability of vision—how the eye adapts and compensates, filling in and relativizing information. Similarly, *Interpolation* made me stop and think about how the human eye adapts to digital light, how viewing information on screens for hours every day might actually, immediately and over time, alter one's perception of the off-screen world.

Just as those versed in art history can interpret Eaton's photographs with knowledge of modern and conceptual movements, those of us who have spent hours fumbling around in darkrooms can read them with a nuanced physical awareness. Such understandings add other layers to Eaton's photographs, but what makes them so compelling is their ability to transcend such labels and techniques, to directly absorb viewers in the pleasure of images through their radiant, mysterious integrity.

*Rose Bouthillier is a curator, writer and artist currently based in Toronto.*



## MARCEL DZAMA: BEHIND EVERY CURTAIN

DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK  
FEBRUARY 17 – MARCH 18, 2011  
BY GABRIELLE MOSER

Winnipeg-born, New York-based artist Marcel Dzama's multimedia practice—encompassing drawing, sculpture, diorama and now film—has consistently involved an interplay between historical and contemporary narratives that uses dream logic to unlock the psychic effects of quotidian materials and forms. Influenced by surrealist approaches, such as dream analysis and automatic writing, Dzama's works bring together a cast of animal and human figures who struggle (sometimes violently) with one another and with their environment in scenarios that simultaneously evoke childhood games and late-19th-century guerilla warfare. But while his earlier projects subtly reworked the representational strategies of Marcel Duchamp and others associated with the modernist avant-garde, in his recent solo exhibition at New York's David Zwirner gallery, Dzama's appropriation of these themes takes on an explicitly gendered dimension. In an exhibition that gradually builds from Dzama's characteristic two-dimensional drawings to larger-than-life-sized sculpture and, finally, to a live-action video of a ballet conceived by the artist, *Behind Every Curtain* focuses on the links between chess, art and the subconscious that long preoccupied the work of people like Duchamp. Rather than offering us an ambivalent pastiche of the modern avant-garde, however, Dzama's work invests surrealist tropes with a rich substratum of new meanings that seem to respond to the contingencies of the time and space in which he works.

The exhibition opens with *Untitled (Winnipeg was won, Winnipeg was one)* (2009), a large, panoramic drawing in three sections that maps out a fictitious and epic battle set in the artist's hometown. Recalling the narrative structure of medieval battle representations (such as the Bayeux Tapestry), Dzama employs his trademark palette of muted browns, olive green, rusted burgundy and steel blue to depict a human conflict that is firmly set in an ambiguous past, yet unmoored from any particular historical moment. Organized in "shots" numbered from 1 to 59, in much the same way that a commercial film is plotted out on a storyboard, the dozens of figures who march and fight alongside one another engage in a serious, yet strangely bloodless, battle over unknown spoils. On

↑ Marcel Dzama, *Turning into Puppets [Volviendose Marionetas]*, 2011, steel, wood, aluminum, and motor 165.1 cm × 198.1 cm