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EXHIBITION: MARCEL DZAMA & JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM

DATES: December 12, 2003 – January 24, 2004
Reception: December 12, 6 to 8 PM

The gallery will open on December 12th with two concurrent solo exhibitions by Marcel Dzama and Jockum Nordström. This will be Canadian artist Marcel Dzama's third solo show at the gallery. A solo exhibition called *More Famous Drawings* traveled throughout Canada and Japan in 2002-2003. Dzama (born 1975) is also part of the Winnipeg-based artists' collective *The Royal Art Lodge*, an exhibition of which opened earlier this year at the Drawing Center in New York, and then traveled throughout the United States and Europe. The artist's work was also included in many international group shows this year.

Dzama is known for his figurative compositions of pen and watercolor on manila-colored paper, with their characteristic palette of muted browns, grays, greens, yellows, and reds. His 14x11-inch drawings are populated by human characters, animals, hybrids---sometimes combined with text---that are placed against bare backgrounds. Caught in unlikely situations, his characters and their environments are stripped of narrative contexts and offer many possibilities for interpretation. Despite this absence of narrative, Dzama's cast of characters is expansive and many characters reappear, creating various threads in the many different compositions. As the artist himself said: "There is a narrative, but it's so muddled that it's like an inside joke that has gone too far".

Dzama's work draws from a wealth of sources: comic strips; classic gangster films; children's book illustrations; 50's interior design; Surrealism; Henry Darger's *Vivian Girls*; silent B films; S&M; science fiction, etc. Despite these readily apparent sources, Dzama's characters are specific and autonomous constructs from the artist's imagination: cat women; smoking bears; tree-men; living flames; femme fatales, etc. His compositions function as playgrounds for the artist's absurd and fantastic obsessions, and serve as Rohrschach images in which his audience can collectively confront and project its fears and desires.

In comparison to previous work, the drawings in this exhibition are more detailed, and the figures are involved in more complex compositions. In addition, Dzama introduces a group of small figurative paintings, in which his quintessential characters are even more isolated against their backgrounds than the characters from his drawings. The sense of loneliness, experienced by these smallish figures placed against the vast and lushly painted backgrounds, permeates these compositions. The narrative, or vague suggestion thereof, is even more mysterious in these paintings, and it is as if their protagonists are subject to a sublime force of nature. Whereas the drawings offer a world of characters that inhabit their space, the paintings have characters that are defined by it.

Jockum Nordström (born 1963) lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden. This will be his third solo show with the gallery. Most recently, his work was included in *Poetic Justice*, the 8th

International Istanbul Biennial, and in *International Paper*, at the UCLA Hammer Museum, in Los Angeles.

Jockum Nordström's pencil drawings and collages read like storyboards, with everything taking place simultaneously in a single frozen frame. Nordström says "A single picture of mine may often be based on a multiple of originals. I am constantly looking at my immediate surroundings as well as books." Art, photographs, people, plants, architecture, patterns, textiles, and history all play an important role in his compositions. Like many artists, Nordström absorbs the world around him, and then turns to his work to stake out his place in it.

Nordström's work can be traced to a great variety of sources. Lucas Cranach and James Ensor are longstanding influences, as are folk art and Surrealism. The influence of music (both classical and Jazz) is apparent in all his work. Within his drawings and collages there is a palpable sense of improvisation and spontaneity. As the artist says, "It is through the choices one makes in combination with chance occurrences that compositions and narratives arise." Nordström is a bass guitarist.

At times it is difficult to tell whether the imaginative scenes in Nordström's works represent suppressed fantasies fighting their way into the consciousnesses of the flattened-out figures, or if they are coping mechanisms for the commonplaces of daily life.

Nordström's work explores the subject of modern-day alienation, and through the artist's imaginative world it is vigorously translated to paper. In Nordström's view, fantasy is less for escape than for sustenance. The world is flawed, Nordström seems to be saying, but it is negotiable on account of our fantasies. Fantasy has the power to transform banal, alienating tasks into moments that shimmer with humor and poignancy.

For further information and visuals please contact the gallery or visit us online at www.davidzwirner.com