



*"The sole difference between myself and a madman is the fact
that I am not mad."*

—Salvador Dalí

What is an Exquisite Corpse?

Before the surrealists in France came up with the beguiling phrase "Exquisite Corpse" to represent collaborative drawings they made, history tells us of a parlor game known as *Consequences*, where players took turns writing text on paper to form a story, folding the paper over new additions to hide information while leaving some ending amount exposed for the next player to add a logically connecting part. The phrase "Exquisite Corpse" was allegedly selected after one night's activities produced the sentence "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau." ("The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine.") Later on the surrealists used the same approach in collaborative drawing where body parts (the head, torso, legs and feet) substituted for text, retaining the original process of covering up new additions while leaving some amount of visual information for the next contributor to work with. BROMG started producing Exquisite Corpse (EC) posters in the early 1990s, creating new work at the rate of two or three posters a week, usually on a Friday night during a festive atmosphere similar to a group of men gathering to drink beer and watch football on TV. Replacing the TV with music by Johann Sebastian Bach and the beer with screwdrivers (orange juice and vodka) gets closer to describing a weekly art making ritual taking place in a converted garage.

After a normally brutal work week featuring lots of stress and pressure, and for some lack of enough sleep, BROMG artists created an intense energy field powering a rapid application of ink with pens squeaking across paper surfaces. At the heart of surrealism is a mandate to surprise, shock, and reject conformity; to focus on freeing a part of the mind that is hidden and lurking: the unconscious. For example, in automatic writing, a surrealist writes the first things coming to mind and without any editing.

Being rebels in art making can earn you pariah status quickly. One notable example is Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase no. 2* (1912) described by one frowny critic of the time as "an explosion in a shingle factory." Depicting a woman coming down the stairs, the painting was rejected for inclusion in the Paris Salon des Independants (1912) however the following year the work made a huge impact at the 1913 Armory Show in New York City.

BROMG never concerns itself with mainstream acceptance. Operating in a microcosm, they strive to confront each other

with wild ideas, leading to some fantastic juxtapositions. The opposite can be said for when an EC (Exquisite Corpse) has two parts that appear so similar you are not sure where one artist finished and the other started. Venturing into the avant-garde can mean taking on risk since surrealism aims to surprise and bewilder with illogical scenes. Some find this discomforting and that is understandable.

Most BROMG ECs are 22 inches wide by 28 inches tall. The paper is a thick stock with one side somewhat glossy and friendlier to ink. Also handy are half-sheets of paper that are attached midway to hide the first half in a two-part EC (with some amount exposed). The pens include highlighters for books, black Sharpie markers, and of course the big favorite, Mr. Sketch, with fragrances in the ink, because smelling your art while creating it definitely makes sense. Having good pen quality where the ink flows smoothly and consistently is best. Other pens of unknown origin come and go. There may be some pencil involved. All EC illustrations in this book have two contributors. (Some drawings exist with more than two participants.)



Dog in Wheelchair
1996

One important component in a 2-part EC is the area where the two halves meet. Over time the BROMG artists benefited from exposure to completed drawings by becoming familiar with how each artist liked to connect one part to the next. The traditional approach showing a top half and a bottom half of a person (more or less) led to a much broader interpretation of what could be considered for the two halves. The original recipe is intact for the most part, with some imaginative ideas substituting for body parts. Included are auxiliary objects not necessarily related to anything. Later ECs exhibit fully rendered

backgrounds requiring more labor. BROMG EC posters have evolved from goofy party entertainment into serious tomfoolery. In a good way. The passion behind art movements Dada and Surrealism are present: the absurd, the defiant, shocking. The high energy level in the room necessitated drawing rapidly to capture the energy and embed it into the paper. In many cases, the characters appearing in BROMG ECs look like they are also surprised to be existing at all. A strong driving force seen in BROMG output is the constant need to amuse and startle the other artists.

Dada and Surrealism

The Dada art movement began in Europe around 1916 as a reaction to World War I (1914-1918) to include rejection of repressive social structures and unquestioning conformity in how you were supposed to think. New and innovative ways for making art including chance-based processes using unexplored materials helped capture visions of irrational worlds filled with unexpected and sometimes shocking imagery, in the words of Dadaist Jean Arp, "to destroy the hoaxes of reason and to discover an unreasoned order." How ideas were represented mattered less than the ideas themselves. It was about unmasking the world. Poet Hugo Ball said, "For us, art is not an end in itself, but it is an opportunity for the true perception and criticism of the times we live in." The origin of the word Dada is ambiguous, perfectly illustrating the difficulty in pinning down meaning when interpreting Dada work. The word might be a random selection from a dictionary, the first word of a child learning to speak, or have no meaning at all.

Surrealism as a movement superseded Dada with a broader mindset focusing on the mind and the unconscious, though both movements favored depicting the absurd and

the irrational. One articulated a passionate reaction to war and so-called bourgeois capitalism, the other how dreams and reality can blend to form new worlds. Look at any Dalí painting to see mind-bending imagery you suspect is fueled by drugs. In response to this Dalí underscores the power of the imagination: "I don't take drugs, I am the drug." Dalí and Magritte (including Modernist Giorgio de Chirico) excelled in painting the strange and bewildering. The human brain naturally gravitates to a mysterious scenario requiring a closer inspection. Puzzles need to be solved. Finding no path to a logical conclusion is the surrealist's goal: to confound and confuse the viewer. BROMG delivers in the same way by offering up a cast of zany characters in unclear situations mocking comic strips, advertising, nightmares, and American culture. The Dadaists hated war and this feeling crops up in some BROMG pieces. Dada feels more fragile than Surrealism. The hurt that comes from war and exploitation of labor by businesses more concerned about profits than workers can be felt in BROMG posters showing soldiers wounded in battle, men bundled up in straitjackets, a flunky office worker, and in one case a restaurant waiter ripping the top of his head off.

Undecided
1995



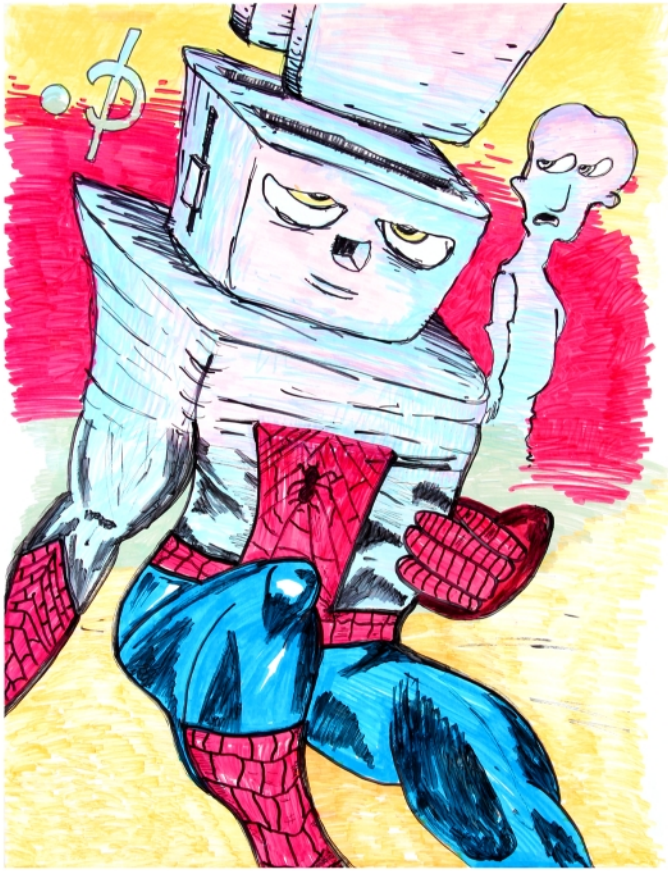
For BROMG collaborative drawing means belonging to a group of like-minded people who think like you and can express themselves artistically like you. In the bigger picture, collaborative drawing can tap into other energy fields unseen and unheard but present nonetheless, allowing for sharing of intent on levels undetected by the conscious mind. In a way this also emphasizes surrealism's grasp for the dream state kept down by the stronger awake-brain. BROMG mostly strives to enchant and entertain with odd scenes and unusual characters. Displaying two or more components not usually seen together in the real world in close proximity helps confront viewers with startling new and illogical combinations. Poet Pierre Reverdy referred to this as

"a juxtaposition of two or more less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be—the greater its emotional power and poetic reality." Surrealists talk about freeing people from "false rationality and restrictive customs and structures." BROMG is interested in being silly, playful, or conversely, disturbing but in a thought-provoking way. Much art prepared for mainstream consumption veers toward the safe and comfortable. Images selected for this book ignore issues of acceptance, choosing authentic representation of BROMG output over any kind of compromise. Works produced by BROMG feature many surrealistic markers such as illogical scenarios, unnerving inhabitants, startling

juxtaposition, ridiculous exaggeration, and incongruous association. The first surrealists in Europe of the 1920s saw themselves as rebels against a conforming and restrictive mainstream, using the phrase "social revolution" frequently. In a similar way BROMG hopes to shake things up. Maybe surprise you. Maybe shock you. Looking over their shoulder at Dada, they recognize the fragility in all life, expressed in something's-not-right faces and abnormal body positions. The ambiguity present in BROMG output allows for creative interpretation of the roles each character inhabits. Displays of emotion help determine dysfunction or innocence, hostility or tranquility. Added visual components not agreeing in nature with the composition as a whole creates tension for viewers seeking logical connections. It is this fruitless search for closure on associations seen in EC posters that BROMG hopes to achieve. There is nothing more fun than a good mystery. The brain is naturally designed to engage with details presented, looking for

rational and logical connections. It won't find any. Dada is about anti-art, the rejection of mainstream ideas in favor of the nonsensical and chaotic, not caring much for aesthetics and daring to be offensive.

Surrealists like André Breton and his ilk talked about "resolv[ing] the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality." They created techniques for allowing the unconscious mind to express itself, as in automatic writing. Breton's inner circle of participating artists included Marcel Duhamel, Jacques Prévert, Yves Tanguy and Benjamin Péret, meeting regularly at an old house in Montparnasse in the south of Paris, France. For those thinking Surrealism was brand new overlooked pioneers in the field like Hieronymus Bosch, who in the 16th century painted surreal scenes with sometimes disturbing images filled with fantastic creatures and human suffering.



Spidey-Toaster Guy
1995

Another early figure is Alfred Jarry, whose scandalous 1896 French play *Ubu Roi* (King Ubu) introduced "Pataphysics...the science of imaginary solutions." Somewhere in the middle 1920s Dada moved aside for Surrealism, with more emphasis on the unconscious mind and also absorbing earlier styles like preclassical. Usually trying to confuse the viewer, there is often a certain psychological awareness or paranoia concerning the surrounding environment. If the root of Surrealism is Dada, that might explain the ongoing expression of some amount of anxiety in surreal art. We read about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and

how it afflicted veterans after World War I. This feeling carries into Dada art: the horror of war so unimaginable only by expressing it using the most extreme terms can we grasp its true essence.

A good EC includes not only a competent level of drawing skill, but an illustration of new ideas presenting the unfamiliar or unusual. BROMG's work ethic is at home with the surrealists' attempts to access the unconscious. Higher brain functions kept busy with the mechanics of fast-paced drawing allows the unguarded unconscious to express the strange and naked.