



## HORROR HOSTS IN THE NEWS

The following Washington Post article about a group of artists that were so inspired by DC hosts 'Count Gore De Vol' and 'Captain 20' (both played by the same person) that they named themselves "Capt. 20's Children," convinced "Captain 20" to make his first public appearance in almost 20 years on the last day of the exhibition; below, he is being interviewed by another one of "his children" – Virginia horror host, "Dr. Sarcofiguy."



**ART TOGETHER NOW:  
A Collective Consciousness**  
By Jessica Dawson  
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Contrary to myth, artists can and will work together -- so long as group goals prove beneficial. Collectives, the buzzword of '60s-era counterculture, were embraced by artists intent on political activism, subversion of the art market, or inspiration through interaction.

And now, as in the '60s, conditions favor assembly. Disillusionment with the ka-ching of Chelsea cash registers and its vacuous art stars, combined with anxiety about impending war and economic downturn, are fueling the collective impulse. Across North America, in towns like Chicago, Winnipeg and Washington, collectives have mushroomed.

Today's collectivista is likely to be in her twenties or thirties, eager for a sense of community and keen on shaking up her artistic practice. She's willing to enter the collective's ego-free zone -- at least for a while. And chances are, the group she joins will boast a mission as quirky as its name.

Three shows up now in Washington offer as many examples of working en masse. Artists may work anonymously, in pairs sharing creative control, or participate in weekly meetings for creative refueling. DC's newest collective, **Captain 20s Children**, refuses to identify its membership. At the group's debut last Saturday night at Logan Circle's Transformer, only the masked "Majestic Ape" stepped forward to welcome visitors.

The group's six other contributors refused to say who they were. According to ringleader "Jackie Magik," working anonymously counters uncontrolled egos.

"The problem with things right now is that it's all about 'This is what I do,' " Magik says, "and then they stick their wax ball on the wall."

To avoid such preciousness, Captain 20s Children insist they don't make art at all. Instead, they've engineered a secret society-cum-cult named for the afternoon TV emcee Captain 20. He, along with his alter ego **Count Gore De Vol**, entertained the artists back when they were latchkey kids watching cartoons in the Washington suburbs. Now those jaded grade school kids are grown-up, jaded artists intent on returning creative freedom to a stilted art scene.

"This city has become literal, very straight," Magik tells me. To re-mystify the scene, the Children concocted a near-impenetrable mythology. They claim some members aren't aware they belong to the group.

"You're not supposed to know," Magik says. "You'll find out when you find out."

Cross Zen, psychologist C.G. Jung's collective unconscious and the Super Friends, and you might grasp the essence of Captain 20s Children. The group's one-room installation at Transformer, their "recruitment center," mimics an after-school clubhouse. Members hung paintings with scenes of dudes strumming guitars and kids making trouble, painted in matte colors heavy in '70s-era brown and green -- something like the colors of a Scooby-Doo cartoon.

They keep a groovy red light on in the "recruitment center." Felt banners of the kind fabricated in sixth-grade art class, depicting castles or video game screens, hang from the ceiling. Their handbook encourages members to drink grape soda and ward off "comas," the shut-down "mental parasites" lurking among them. No doubt that implicates parents and teachers -- and the art world.

Washington's other brand-new collective, District of Ladies, came together to support, not defy. The women-only collective, which has about a dozen core members, met last year while organizing the multidisciplinary Ladyfest DC. Bringing together young women with liberal politics, the group emphasizes "a connection to each other as people and as women," according to member Allyson Kapin.

Their debut show, "Lady Brain Space Mind-Meld," on view at MOCA-DC, presents the results of a project aimed at enhancing individual art practice through group interaction. The Ladies paired members working in a variety of disciplines. Some paint, sculpt, some fabricate metal, some make films. Each team was invited to make an artwork together. Artist 1 created the first draft -- a painting or photographs or a quilt square -- and then handed it off to Artist 2, who tweaked it to her liking and declared it done.

The point of the exercise, according to member Vida Russell, was "to open up the door to how much randomness and chance play into the final work." The results are uneven. But process, not product, is the point. Vanessa Kamp turned Lani Iacovelli's wire-framed sculpture of a shirt into something like a shirt-shaped wastepaper basket attached to a curtain of duct tape. They called the piece "Undershirt/Untitled." Despite Kamp's radical alteration of her work, Iacovelli got what she needed from the exercise: "Working with another person forced me to think outside what I've previously known," she says. "I learned about new directions I'd like to go in."

For Marcel Dzama, a member of Winnipeg-based Royal Art Lodge, weekly dips in the collective creative well have enhanced his solo practice. During regular drawing sessions in member homes, Dzama and fellow Lodgers work in a neo-surrealist style. One begins a drawing and then passes it on to the next. Pieces end up awful or great, as witnessed in the current Lodge exhibition at New York's Drawing Center. More important, individual members jump-start their own creativity. According to Wayne Baerwaldt, director of Toronto art gallery The Power Plant and co-curator of the Drawing Center exhibition, "The collective drawing process begins a verbal and physical exchange. That's where solo works develop from."

Hanging here in Washington's Corcoran Biennial through this weekend are 174 drawings by Dzama. Each bears a resemblance to his collective's output, but the style remains distinctly his.

If even solo work can be enhanced by cooperative endeavor, we'll likely see more such groups cropping up around town and across the country. Bye-bye artist hero. Hello Groupthink.