A Life in Pictures Revisited

*Marcel Duchamp: A Life in Pictures*by Jennifer Gough-Cooper & Jacques Caumont,Translated by Antony Melville,Illustrations by André Raffray,Atlas Press, 1999. (UK 5.99 USA $8.95) 26 pages

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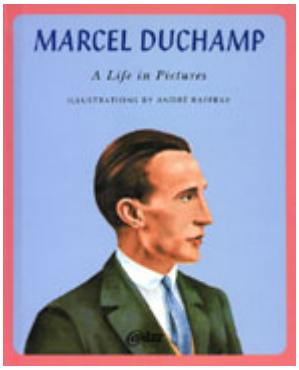

Cover for *Marcel Duchamp*
A life in Pictures, 1999
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See Marcel. See Marcel pun. See Marcel's toys: Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy is Lego. The *Box-in-a-Valise* is a Matchbox dinky car suitcase. *Given* is a Bar bie StrippedBare By Her Kens, Even. I was hoping that Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont's new kid-focused biography, *Marcel Duchamp: A Life in Pictures*, would really exploit the silly, outrageous possibilities of M.D.'s work. Just as the *Box-in-a-Valise* enchantingly opens, then unfolds and even slides into place, I was looking for a little bit of innovation here: pop-up features, scratch-n-sniff illustrations, interactive text, maybe even one or two pull-out posters. But this compact biography, the first English translation of the 1977 work *La Vie illustrée de Marcel Duchamp*, though indeed elegant and informative, seems more geared for the art world set than for the sandbox crowd. It makes Duchamp, and his work, appear quite adult-serious, even.

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Marcel Duchamp at the window
of the Gamelin chocolate shop
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What the biography does well is cover eighty-one years of a fairly event-filled life. In less than thirty, compact pages we follow M.D. from his early days in Blainville, to his rebuff at the hands of the jury of the Salon des Indépendants, to his revelatory viewing of Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* and finally to his lionization in New York. The writing, though occasionally a touch technical, is never condescending: "Far from being oppressed by the event he found that fate had arranged things quite well, and the symmetry of the cracks looked rather intentional; instead of being disfigured the work was actually embellished." And the book's general shape may appeal to some young readers as it physically resembles the classic Golden nursery book: small and colorful with glossy pages and a hardcover. André Raffray's vivid illustrations, however, so replete with Duchampian allusions (note the brides, bachelors and fresh widows hinted at in his chocolate grinder picture) seem, again, more adult than kiddy-ready.

The idea of a Duchamp-bio for children is very cool and it may be just the infinitely amusing potential of such an idea that renders *A Life in Pictures* merely satisfactory. I imagine – if only for Raffray's intriguing pictures – that most Duchampions will want to check out this little volume but I can't see too

many others, especially the juniors, squealing about either the text or the art. So for now, I suppose, it’s back to the Playstations, the Furbys, and the Easy Bake ovens.See Marcel. See him frown.