



# Illustrators in Conversation

## Jayde Perkin and David McMillan

Portrait of David McMillan by Jayde Perkin

**David McMillan and I met many years ago now, studying illustration at UWE in Bristol, in the UK. We were students, house-mates, best friends and somewhere along the line became a couple; we have been together ever since. We've had many adventures together in both Bristol and Berlin. But less of me, over to David...**



**Jayde: Tell me a bit about you and your background: where are you from/ where did you study? Are you still Jenny from the Block?**

David: I grew up in a little town called Ballynahinch in County Down, Northern Ireland (though it's always easier to say you're from Belfast). I am definitely no J-Lo, for one I don't have the bum, but I've always had this want to move away and be somewhere else. When I visited Bristol for my university interview I fell in love with the place and knew that's where I wanted to study and live. The same happened when you and I visited Berlin for the first time. It just kind of clicked. These cities have felt like the right places to be, though I am now temporarily back home in Northern Ireland.



David McMillan for WIRED

**Have you always wanted to be an illustrator? When you started working 'professionally' how did you develop your distinctive visual language which we see in your work today?**

Apart from the few years I wanted to be a professional wrestler (before realising there is no money in it), I've always wanted to do something in the fast-paced and opulent world of the creative industries. I grew up on cartoons and The Simpsons, then my brother introduced me to alternative comics when I was a teenager and it cemented this idea of being able to draw for a living. Originally I had wanted to go into animation, but when I was rejected by my university choices in England, I ended up staying in Belfast for my arts foundation year and discovering this whole new side of art and design that I had no idea about. All the history, painting, graphic design, typography and illustration... That year really changed my life. A few months in I thought, 'Why do 24 drawings for every second when I can make one drawing to tell a whole story'. Once I went to Bristol I don't think I finally figured out 'my style' until the final few months. I'd been starting to simplify my characters, but one project in the last year meant I had to create a lot of final pieces in a short space of time. Suddenly everything clicked and I realised I could make work quickly, with just the right amount of detail and be happy with it. I didn't have time to faff and over-complicate things and I liked the results.

**What is a day in the life of David McMillan like? For me, also as a freelancer, routine and being strict with myself is very important. Tell me about your daily routine.**

You've definitely made me think more about my daily routine, and how I'm sometimes not very good at having one. I've always tried, and am definitely doing better since moving back to Belfast. If I didn't have my routine here I think I'd go mad. I get up, have breakfast, get a lift or bus into Belfast (I'm usually in the studio most morning by 9.30 which I'm happy about), I make some coffee, check the internet (Twitter, news websites etc.) then just crack on with whatever I need to do that day, be it admin or making some work. I've recently started swimming too. I definitely exercised more in Berlin (at least inadvertently by walking around the city so much) so needed something to keep that up; it's also a really nice way to start the working day.



USFOLK  
ILLUSTRATE



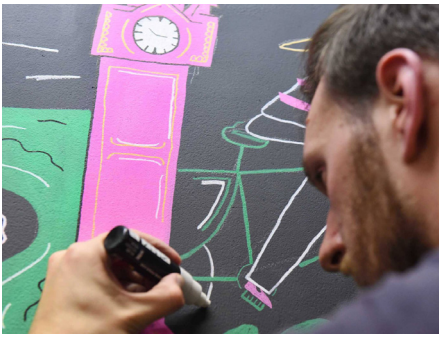
**You've recently moved from Berlin back to Northern Ireland, and joined illustration agency UsFolk - tell me more, tell me more.**

At the start of the year I was contacted by Mel and Paul at UsFolk in Belfast. They were a brand new illustration agency which would also be the first in Northern Ireland. It was good to hear that a scene was growing here. Knowing we'd be leaving Berlin, it was nice to have that to go back to. We'd been spoilt in Germany and Bristol with the amazing illustrators we'd met there, so having an active community of people and a desk space to work from was perfect. I've been working in their shared studio since April, going to drink and draws, occasional meetups, and helping out with some of the exhibition side of the agency. They're a great bunch of lads.



**I see you've been organising events and exhibitions. It looks as though you are helping to generate a 'creative scene' in Belfast at the moment. Do you feel that bringing people together in this way is an important part of your illustration practice? Has this been an important factor in every city you've lived?**

I think I just like meeting people. Once you go to art school and meet all these similar minded people with the same passion for making stuff as you have, it's just like 'Yes! These are my people'. I don't think I've ever met an illustrator who is an asshole, and of course you admire all these people's work so you want to collaborate with them in any way, even if that's just meeting up every now and again for a good chat and a pint. I definitely think it's an important part of my practice; it inspires me and helps me push myself, and get excited about being an illustrator. Exhibitions can be stressful to organise as we both know, but that reward of seeing all this amazing work come out of it at the end is so satisfying.



**Your work is generally made using chunky pencil crayons and thick pencils... Tell me about your recent mural in the UsFolk studio; was it a challenge using Posca markers? And what about working on such a massive canvas?**

The mural was actually pretty fun. It's always nice to think of how you can translate your work in different ways and challenge yourself to use other mediums. I'd wanted to make a mural for a while so when I got the opportunity it was a little like, 'well, guess I better figure out how to draw this big'. It's nice when it does still feel like 'your work' even when it's not on a screen. I'm really fascinated by fabrics and especially folk art quilts so I'd love to try and translate my work into something tangible like that.

**Your mark-making and style works perfectly for prints as well, and you've recently made some risographs, screenprints, and lino cuts. Have you always been interested in print-making? What draws you to the medium of print? Do you have any more future print-based projects in the pipeline?**

I really love the tactile nature of printmaking, and it's such an immediately rewarding process. You make an image and then you get to physically bring it to life right there in front of you. Seeing colours go down and overlays build up gives me an exceptional amount of joy. A lot of my introductions to illustration were through printmakers; Toulouse-Lautrec, Jay Ryan's band posters, and the colour and quality of Nobrow books. We were lucky to have Jon McNaught be a print technician at UWE so learning old print techniques like lithography still felt like they had a contemporary use.

**I love your Berlin drawings, for example your Waschcenter piece is so beautifully bold, yet mundane and everyday, but encapsulates a feeling of Berlin perfectly. How did Berlin inspire these pieces? Do you feel that the city you live in influences what you make?**

I think Berlin, more than any place, has really inspired and changed my work. It's a city whose history of art and design links so much with my own interests and outlook. To suddenly go to this city with constant exhibitions of German Surrealist, Dadaist, and Expressionist art, not to mention the influence of the Bauhaus, it's incredibly inspiring. The Berlinische Galerie and Brücke Museum were definite favourites.

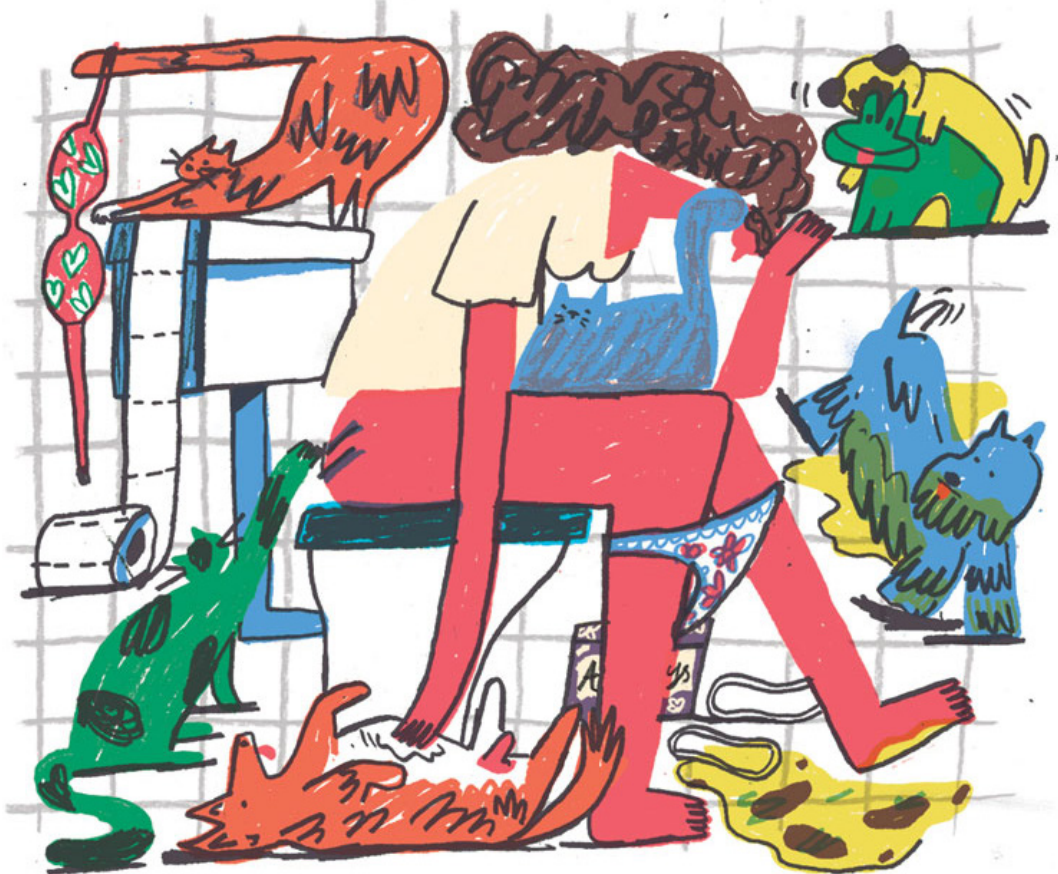
But also the culture and the people inspire you, especially when you move somewhere so completely new and different. The old guys sitting outside the Turkish bars, shitty Imbiss signage, the architecture of old apartment buildings, it's all fascinating. I've not had the same feeling with being back in Belfast. The people, the places, they don't inspire me in the same way. I know it already - there's nothing new to inspire me here.





**Your sketchbooks are beautiful, always full of sketches, notes, lists, rough ideas, mark making, colour tests, funny characters. Do you ever look back over them and find any gems to use in current/ future projects? How key is the sketchbook to your process? Tell me about how your sketches form into the final artwork we see.**

I love my sketchbooks. I've now settled on one from Modulor as my go to for life. I do go back through them a lot. I have some set projects I've never finished but now instead span over several sketchbooks. I will finish them one day dammit! I haven't done it as much since being back home, but I loved doing observational drawing and almost making a database of odd-shaped, interesting characters I would see around the city. Little poses or situations I would find funny that I could then look back on and make something out of. My Döner Platz illustration is a combination of a lot of sketches and observations of characters and buildings from around where we lived in Wedding. So the sketchbooks are really important to my work. At the minute though, I am mostly just redrawing and redrawing compositions and ideas for commissions.



David McMillan for Portland Mercury

**I love your recent piece for Portland Mercury. It's a bit naughty! Is there something that attracts you to drawing bums, wee and phallic things? Is it because you're a cheeky chappy? Are you a creep? Is it a Freudian thing? Are you not getting enough?**

In past year or so I've really been thinking about the kind of work I want to be producing - about what it should be saying. I really admire your work because you're able to tell these personal and sometimes sad stories in a really beautiful way because it's what you know. I've always struggled with what I want to say and what's personal to me in my work, which I think is why I like editorial illustration so much. You get to read something and react to it. You learn something new, but the information is all there for you to react to. It doesn't need to come from as personal a place (though it is always good to have a personal take on it). I feel I'm harking back to my teenage days making comics and writing sketches and stories with my friends - I'm just wanting to be funny with my work again. I feel like the shapes and lack of facial expression of my characters allow for them to be more physically expressive and in that they can be funnier. Like silent comedians. Although it is also because of all the reasons you've listed above, and who can complain when you get paid to draw a bum in a prestigious American University's magazine. Livin' the dream!

**What social media platforms do you use, and do you feel social media is very important to your practice?**

I'm on Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram. I don't like the idea of Facebook pages, and I'm sure there are lots of platforms people use that I don't think I'll ever want to be on, but yeah... Instagram is maybe my favourite. It's nice to be able to share work and your life and see that response. (mostly lack of response to any actual life things). As much as people complain about us all using social media too much, I think it's bloody brilliant. When we moved to Berlin having Twitter meant we could connect and make friends in a city where we didn't know anyone or even the language. We found lovely illustrators in the city like Judith [founder of Illustrators Illustrated] and Beth Walrond, and knew where all the cool, hip exhibitions were happening. And once people knew we were there, we made even more connections when anyone visited. We got to meet people whom we admired for a few beers because they knew us on Twitter. It would've been a very isolating city without those connections made online.



**You've designed a few beer labels now, what is it like marrying two of your favourite things (drawing and beer)? While you are an illustrator, you are clearly very design-minded, and this shows particularly when it comes to your beer labels and your posters/ flyers for Speakeasy and The Crofters Rights in Bristol. Do you find that this eye for design influences the way you create compositions?**

I do love a wee cheeky beer, and a good bit of design, so it is nice to combine the two. I looked at stuff like Keith Shore's work for Mikkeller or Alec Doherty's work for Partizan and thought that would be a dream job so I tried to make those opportunities happen. I worked in a bar and we suggested making a beer to a local brewery and I was all like, 'and I want to design the label!'. That led to working with Brewbot in Belfast and then to another self-initiated label design for the UsFolk launch beer, also with Brewbot. In no way do I consider myself a designer! That side scares me, but I do feel anyone who has studied art has a good concept of how things should look or when something is badly designed, so I just try to take that into my work. Colour, shapes, scale all has to work together perfectly, especially with a format like a label and I love figuring that stuff out and making it all come together. You described my work like a jigsaw puzzle, with all the characters and pieces having to seamlessly slot together. I like that analogy. Every illustration is like a game of Tetris.

**And finally, how did you find being the muse and inspiration to my comic Doner Days?**

I am very honoured! I like that my bad eating habits had some good come from them. You made those stories of gluttony much sweeter than they really were.

## Cheers Dave! Cheers Jayde!

Read an interview with Jayde Perkin on Illustrators Illustrated! [illustratorsillustrated.com](http://illustratorsillustrated.com)

See more of Jayde and Dave's great work at: [jaydeperkin.com](http://jaydeperkin.com) and [davidjmcmillan.co.uk](http://davidjmcmillan.co.uk)