

Dear Chris Johanson:

I'm writing because I have wanted to send you a package for a while now – a package with the pictures and scribblings I make after I see your work in magazines or in galleries. But you are ever elusive – quite the slippery fish, you, with no permanent address and such fly-by-night wanderings from gallery to gallery.

So I invent you a mailbox here and put this note in it. Some things I would like to say:

1. You are one of my favorite artists. Does this seem big to you? It is big to me. I have been living in New York for one year now. One bruised and tender year. A very good year for trying to figure out what is important

2. Thank you for bringing your mountain to Manhattan Island. On my way to it, a little girl was asking her dad what was mother-of-pearl, anyway. I did not hear her – really hear her – until I had passed them on the street, taken a right into the gallery, and ducked into your cardboard mountain. Your shanty cardboard house of a mountain, dark brown like kids' cupcakes with a whitely painted peak. There were a few quiet drawings inside. One was an ink drawing of a star with lots of jaggy spokes. That was when I really heard her ask him. And I heard another girl then, too, from months before on the A-train coming from St. John's Cathedral, asking her dad another question. She was asking him what was infinity. He did not look up from the newspaper when he told her that was how much he loved her, so he never saw the sideways suspicion she was shooting at the abstractness of his answer. And then I heard myself talking to my own dad, also months before, telling him about the footprints of a *chicken embedded in the sidewalk near my house in Brooklyn. I was trying to explain to him how surreal this seemed – such a rural residue in such a dramatically urban landscape. He said, "stupid chicken."

3. There is a story about a man who left a goodbye note to the world saying he would walk through his city, from his house to the bridge, and if a single person smiled at him or looked him in the eyes, he would not jump

We are implicated in each other's lives. We are responsible for each other's humanity. The delicate rawness of your drawings reminds us that we are each alone in here, right along with everyone else. We can make things go either way. Your work talks about our tendency to arbitrarily divide the world into good or bad, odd or even, streets to park on or not to park on, and it makes us laugh at the ridiculousness of these – our own – ideas. It acknowledges the difference between what we say to each other, and what we know without saying.

4. I read that Chris Ware desires a deadness in his drawings so that the text has real work to do. I wonder if you want something like this, too, and if you would call it a "deadness." There is such an unchecked honesty in your words – in the voice of your text. I remember one scratchy figure, centered on the paper and facing forward. The words said something like "this is any person at any of many crossroads." And the simplicity of the image and the complexity of that idea collided in my head. I know that this is the way the very best cartoons work; the words and image depend on each other for completion in a way that makes the art exist even more in the mind of the viewer than it does on the actual page.

That piece exists and re-exists for me now, like much of your work, as I move around in the city. It exists especially in the places that people go on the train – not their physical destinations, but the alone-in-a-crowd places where their faces fall quiet and their eyes shift from the floor to the nothing just above the floor that happened to them yesterday. It exists in the vapor-thin lady with the tadpole-transparent skin and silver heels sharp as her eye shadow, and also in the European man with dreaming eyes, whose nose is made redder by the darkness of his hair. And in his girlfriend who, just as the doors suck shut, I notice has been noticing me noticing him. It is barely perceptible, in any describable way, but somehow still very much possible to tell who is happy and who is heartsick and who among them is at any of many crossroads.

Thank you for the drawing. I send good feelings to you, too.

George Ferrandi