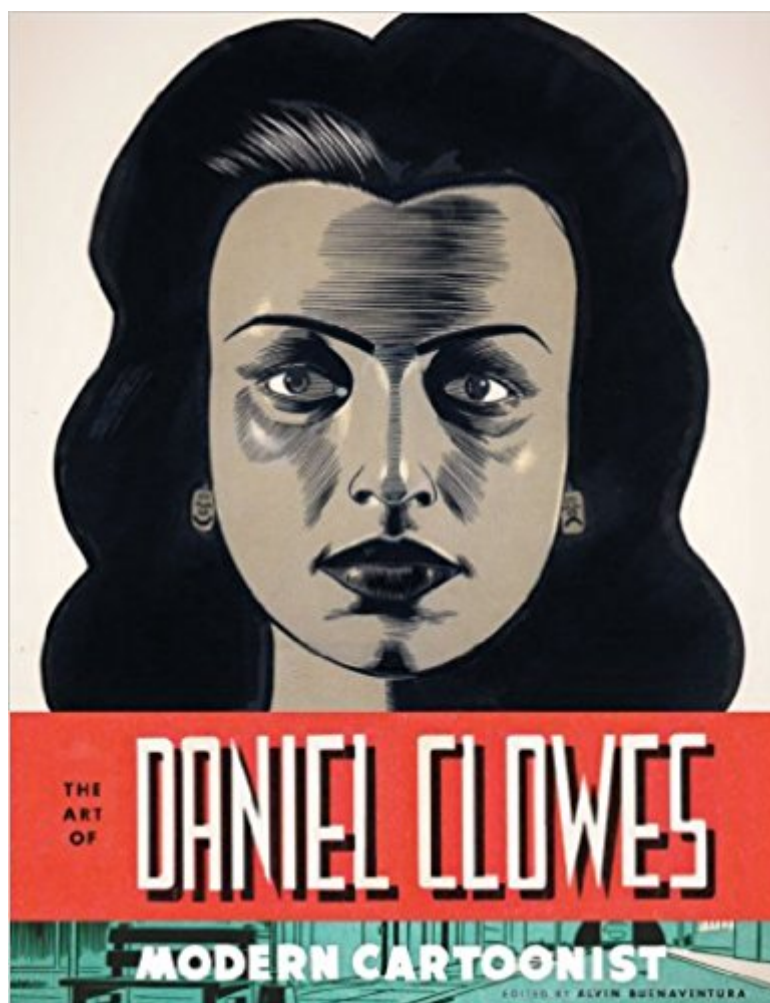


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# The Art Of Daniel Clowes: Modern Cartoonist



## Synopsis

Throughout his 25-year career, alternative cartoonist/screenwriter Daniel Clowes has always been ahead of artistic and cultural movements. In the late 1980s his groundbreaking comic book series *Eightball* defined indie culture with wit, venom, and even a little sympathy. With each successive graphic novel (*Ghost World*, *David Boring*, *Ice Haven*, *Wilson*, *Mister Wonderful*), Clowes has been praised for his emotionally compelling narratives that reimagine the ways that stories can be told in comics. *The Art of Daniel Clowes: Modern Cartoonist* is the first monograph on this award-winning, *New York Times* "bestselling creator, compiled with his complete cooperation. It includes all of Clowes's best-known illustrations as well as rare and previously unpublished work, all reproduced from the original art, and also includes essays by noted contributors such as designer Chip Kidd and cartoonist Chris Ware. Praise for *The Art of Daniel Clowes*: "Even if you're not an avid reader of [Clowes's] books and strips (your loss), this volume will entice and entertain." • "The Atlantic" "The real selling point of *Modern Cartoonist* is the art . . . some of which [has] been little-seen even by die-hard Clowes fans." • "A.V. Club" • "This excellent retrospective of his work from the late 1980s onward, edited by Alvin Buenaventura, showcases his visual gifts and always evolving style; his beautiful early stuff looks nothing like his beautiful later stuff." • "Newsday" • "A perfect introduction." • "NPR.org" • "One of the greatest cartoonists of the past several decades finally gets his due." • "The Washington Post"

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## Customer Reviews

Went to Barnes and Noble and decided to see if they had the new Love and Rockets...after wading past the ubiquitous half dozen teenagers lounging on the floor reading Manga and X-Men, my eyes fell on this gem. This book is long overdue. Clowes is probably the greatest cartoonist of our time, and I'm proud to have been a follower from the beginning. I have to say that I've fallen away the past several years...Mr. Wonderful and Wilson kind of left me cold, seemed like he's trying too hard to be the comic equivalent of the low key Wes Anderson type indie films, which I love, but I miss Clowes earlier, quirkier, pop and trash culture tinged work. That being said, this book is full of that kind of stuff. Being a big fan of 50s comics, his Ugly Family caught my eye back in the 80s...it reminded me of Krigstein meets the Munsters. Soon after he started doing Lloyd Llewellyn, and then 8ball. This book is chock full of art and ephemera from that period...unused ideas, original art, unseen art, and photos of the actual knick nacks and gee-gaws that inspired stuff like the Worry Bird, pipe smoking girl and the Laughin' Spittin Man (stuff I still keep my eyes peeled for when shopping thrift and antique stores). I'm sure Clowes has grown as an artist and his new work has a lot more cultural relevance, and not to sound like an old crank...I do appreciate what he's doing now, I just think this book is awesome because it has so many treasures from his early period which I miss. There are even a lot of photos and reproductions of his childhood art and inspirations. Clowes artwork and stories are so amazingly haunting...Velvet Glove and Ghost World were masterpieces, and the Llewellyn film-noirish story Hound's Blood is one of my favorite comics of all time. His Crumb inspired rants are in my opinion way better than what Crumb did. His 8ball story 1966 had me pegged to a T for better or worse. What an awesome tribute to Clowes body of work. Now to buy it at prices rather than Barnes and Nobles prices.

This should have been great, an amazing overview of the man's career. And for about 20% of the book, it *IS* great. The D.Clowes interview itself is almost worth the purchase price - although short, it is full of brutally honest observation and insight into both his career and the world around us. Thereafter, things get disappointing VERY quickly. Where is all the unreleased artwork? Other than the odd sketch and a few greeting-cards (created for his wife), we're left wanting. What the book DOES provide is plenty of cover reprints, strip reprints, panel details.... items that fans are already familiar-with and items that are still readily available for purchase in their original form. The original/unreleased/rare artwork we *are* treated to is scant and - when we are treated to a genuine rarity - it is often so very tiny that detail is totally lost. Ever wanted to see one of the rare "girly-ties" that Clowes would paint you for \$100 back in the early 90's? Well get your your magnifying glass because there's a picture of one here. Barely. I am lucky enough to have very good vision, and

even still felt I was straining just to make-out any level of detail on most of the "rare" artwork we're treated to here. I won't elaborate on the disappointing nature of the writing - another reviewer here has done a much better job than I ever could. To sum up - I would have GLADLY seen an exchange whereby these 'articles' were substituted with rarely seen Artwork. The "Cracked" art. The National Lampoon "Pogeybait" strips. Unreleased sketches. ANYTHING!! This is just such a wasted opportunity and - as has been eloquently mentioned by another reviewer - we're not likely to see such an overview again anytime soon. If this book had been released with the option to also buy "DANEIL CLOWES: UNSEEN WORKS" or any other such volume, then I would be more than pleased with this slight overview. But as it stands, it's seriously lacking and, frankly, kind of upsetting.

Modern Cartoonist is a book filled with Daniel Clowes' work, a good amount of which has never been published before, as well as a great interview that covers in detail his personal life from the beginning until now. For those two points alone, it's absolutely worth buying. If you're a fan of Clowes, there's no reason why you shouldn't own this book. That said, the book isn't perfect. In many ways it's actually quite disappointing and occasionally it's unforgivably poor. For the most part, for me at least, it feels like a hugely wasted opportunity. Before receiving this book I had many ideas about what it might contain. Even as I flicked through it I was still not quite sure of what it came to. Having read it now though, I would describe the book like so: images are scattered throughout in a seemingly random order and with no commentary. If you're a fan of Clowes to the point that you've done a Google Image Search and looked at the results you will have seen most of these images before. Some though, certainly, you won't have seen before. With the written content there's a great interview that will raise your hopes as to what the rest of the book might be. And then there's five articles, all of which were written without Clowes' involvement. Excluding Chris Ware's piece, these fall on the side of either utterly forgettable or complete drivel. There's also a short introduction, a one-page summation of 'Eightball' and a sketchy timeline spread over two pages that doesn't list when each issue of Eightball was released, only the first issue, but does find the space to list the year when each book collection was released. And that's the whole book. That's The Art of Daniel Clowes: Modern Cartoonist. Modern Cartoonist was made with the co-operation of Clowes, who allowed the authors complete access to his archives. Despite this access, the book at no point gives any real feeling of seeing behind the scenes and into Clowes' studio or of authors who had access to even a year's worth of work let alone a lifetime's. How that is, I don't know. You hear that the authors had such access, and you hear they spent two to three years going through Clowes'

closets, and you imagine a book overflowing with work you've never seen before but this is far from the reality of the book in hand. 50 - 60% of what's shown is material widely available already (covers and panels scanned directly from issues of Eightball and Lloyd Llewellyn, covers for The New Yorker, etc, etc). And 20 - 30% is work that's been published but which you might have to go to some effort to track down (an illustration for a 1993 issue of Spin magazine, for example). Within the limited space that remains then you have the rest, material from Clowes' archives that until now had never been published. In this you have sketchbook pages, childhood drawings, holiday cards, unused art, drafts and original art. In addition to that, there's a small selection of photo references taken by Clowes and images/items that inspired characters and work (a novelty towel image that became 'The Happy Fisherman,' for example), as well as twenty or so personal photos of Clowes through the years. There's a good amount there, and what's there is great, but it makes up a very small part of the book overall and on so many pages takes the backseat to material that I have to imagine most readers will have seen many times before and/or own. The favor is undeniably elsewhere. I understand that the book is not meant to be an archive of unseen work, that there's a need to show known and published work for which the subject made his name, but the amount of panels and scans from Eightball covers and such (not original art but scans of the actual books easily available to all) just strikes me as baffling and in some cases completely senseless. Many of the image decisions, both what is included and the attention they receive (whether a full page or a thumbnail, etc), I honestly find bizarre. As well, with the access the authors had it seems to me not unreasonable to expect that they might at least put the material to some sort of enlightening end, something more than just filling pages with it. Perhaps they show the design of a cover from the initial doodle to the alternative compositions considered to the sketch, etc, all the way through to the finished image? Or maybe they use images to walk through Clowes' work process? No, there's none of that... The furthest they go is showing the first draft of 'Caricature' (16 pages reduced to fit on a single page), followed by the second draft (select pages shown larger and spread over two pages), and then the original art for the first page of the story. You see that done just once. Beyond that, a good number of times a finished sketch is shown in small alongside the finished work. And a handful of times photo references are shown beside finished work. That though is the extent of it. Hoping for the same sort of insight and understanding as given in the special edition of 'Ghost World'? This book is not even a touch on that. Interested in seeing Clowes' studio or what he works with each day? In Abram's 'The Art of Jaime Hernandez' the author has the sense to show that for its subject but here the best you get is two distant photographs of Clowes' studio. What's more, images in the book are presented in no discernible order for the most part, with little to no context or

explanation. There's no attempt to form a narrative with the images, to show evolution or even to categorize for convenience. The cover for Eightball #1 might be shown on one page and then fifty pages later you'll find the original art for Eightball #1. Or a double-page spread of nothing but OK Soda imagery might lead you to believe that's all the OK Soda material included until twenty pages later you find another OK Soda image randomly placed in amongst other work. It reads overall like the authors at one time had a plan but then, before they were even a quarter of the way through, were suddenly told that they had to finish in an hour and so ended up throwing everything else down randomly. On a positive note now, the book design I find very nice. I particularly like the cover under the dust jacket, the endpapers and the pages leading to the introduction. As well, it's worth noting while we're talking about the image side, the following comics are reprinted in the book in full: 'Gross is Great' (original art) - two-page story from Cracked, 1987 'The Stroll' - Eightball #3, 1990 'Color TV' - short strip from the Village Voice, 1991 'Needle\_\_\_\_\_' (color code) - Eightball #7, 1991 'Untitled New Yorker Strip' - 2001 'The Darlington Sundays' - four page story from McSweeney's #13, 2004 'Sawdust' - Kramers Ergot #7, 2008 'The Christian Astronauts,' - McSweeney's #33, 2009 'Wilson in day 16,412,' - two-page story from the New Yorker, 2010 To the written content, the interview is, as said, great. It's difficult to imagine a better interview and reading it I'm left thinking the book, forgetting issues with the images, would've been approaching perfection had they lengthened the interview and used it alone to cover everything, discarding all other writing. Five articles follow the interview. Of these, only one, Chris Ware's, holds any lasting interest, and the other four are at best completely throwaway. Each of these four, including Chip Kidd's, read like people writing for no reason other than to reach a word count. Two are simply forgettable magazine-type articles (Kidd's and Ray Pride's) and the other two are out-and-out rubbish (Susan Miller's and Ken Parille's). However, these articles, with one exception, can be forgiven and forgotten not only because they're short but also because they include on the same pages work by Clowes, work not published elsewhere. The sole exception to this is Ken Parille's insane 28-page (!) pile of words. Not only does Parille write undeniably the worst and most meritless article, just go-nowhere blithering pedantry, but also the longest and, on top of that, the only one that confines its pages to nothing but panels from widely available books (with just two exceptions: a piece of original art from Ice Haven and a character sketch). For 28-pages it's nothing but Parille pressing his face against a keyboard, alongside the occasional panel from Clowes' most recent books. Its inclusion here is undeniably a decision based on vanity and self-interest, come to only through Parille's role as co-editor on the book. Absolutely no one else on earth working on a Daniel Clowes book would've even entertained the idea of giving so much space to someone with so little to add, of

earmarking 28-pages in a 224-page Clowes retrospective book for this good-for-nothing nonsense he writes. To think of all else that could've been in that space! The thought here really seems to be that Parille is as interesting to readers as Clowes himself. Its inclusion is just shocking. I can see my thoughts on the image choices as being a matter of taste and differing aims/views, but on this Parille article I say it's pure insanity - this is just an insane inclusion that should not have been and is far and away the book's greatest negative. And this book, too, is not something we're going to see again anytime soon, that's what makes Parille's article (and to a lesser extent some of the others) most offensive. We're not going to see another book like this on Clowes for a long time. This sort of career-spanning book doesn't appear every year let alone every decade, and so to use so many pages for pure filler, to set aside so much space for no other reason than for just purely pedantic, self-serving nonsense, for your personal pleasure and kudos, writing that's absolutely more about yourself than it is the subject, it just astounds me. A book could've been made that stood equal to anything Clowes has done, that does for Clowes overall what the special edition of *Ghost World* does for that work, that people would look back on and hold up as being equally important and notable in the scheme of his work, a book with ongoing/lasting value and interest, but instead the authors turned in something that reads overall like an in-flight magazine's feature article, something put together with the expectation that it'll be read one day and thrown away the next. For that reason, too, the entire book overall is rather depressing. We're not going to see a book on Clowes again any time soon and this book is what they come up with? Not only that, the authors had every advantage going for them. They had access to Clowes' archives and Clowes is a man who says he keeps everything and yet still this is what they come up with? It seems like close to the absolute bare minimum of what could've been done, this truly has to be down in the bottom of what was possible. Still, all that said, I believe the book is worth buying. As a book overall I feel it's a failure but in between that failure you still have a fine collection of work from Clowes that you can't see elsewhere, there's the wonderful interview, and there's the article from Chris Ware. If I was to lose the book today I'd definitely buy it again. I was originally planning to give the book five stars for the images alone but as I started getting into my complaints more, and as I go over the book now, I feel the negatives are such that they drag the whole thing down, they can't be so easily dismissed or ignored. If you were to completely erase certain things, wipe out about 70 pages, I might say five stars, but looking at the entire book now as it is I say three stars feels right to me.

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