Chris Ware: Reinventing Comics [C1]

Nei suoi fumetti e romanzi grafici, l'innovativo artista esplora temi come l'isolamento sociale, il consumismo e la complessità della vita quotidiana.

Chris Ware is an influential American **cartoonist** known for his innovative approach to comics and graphic novels. Born in 1967 in Omaha, Nebraska and a long-time resident of Chicago, Illinois, he has received numerous awards and his work has been exhibited in major art institutions. Ware's style is unique and his stories introspective and emotional. Among the themes of his comic books are social isolation, racism, consumerism and the **bitter-sweet intricacies** of everyday existence.

THE NEW YORKER

Ware is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, where he studied painting and **printmaking**. His early work appeared in The Daily Texan, after which he began experimenting with comic forms. Since 1994, Ware has contributed to his own comic book series Acme Novelty Library and produced award-winning graphic novels, including Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth (2000), Building Stories (2012), and Rusty Brown (2019).

PERSONAL STYLE

Ware developed a style inspired by early American comic artists such as Winsor McCay, George Herriman and Frank King. His meticulous, detailed artwork, vivid colour palette and elaborate design elements are reminiscent of early 20th-century art, and since 1993 he has contributed cover art to historic publication The New Yorker. Ware continues to influence both the comics medium and visual storytelling. He frequently experiments with page **layouts** and compositions that integrate text and image, and develops characters of psychological depth.

POLITICS AND LIFE

To find out more, Speak Up attended a press conference at Barcelona's Centre de Cultura Contemporània where a retrospective of Ware's work is **on display** through the summer months. As Ware explained, comics first **arose** out of the **childish** desire to laugh at other people. As the genre matured, empathy and compassion **seeped in**. Chris Ware (American accent): Comics started out as a **means** of making people laugh from images on paper. A picture on paper that you can look at safely and get a joke or a laugh out of is the simplest human interaction. It's essentially pointing and laughing at someone, which is what we do as children. And then we start to learn, "Well, maybe that's not so nice to do." And with Charles Schulz's work, Peanuts, he was the first **cartoonist** to figure out that **you can go past** that. You can actually go into the paper, into the drawings on paper, and come back out, and then you can actually feel for the little drawings on paper, which I did as a kid. His work actually made me very sad and feel sorry for the people on paper. And I think that that's... that, really, to me, is the greatest advancement in the cartoon language, aside from trying to expand the possibilities of various human emotions. But what's most important is to get past that point of just pointing at people and either laughing or saying, "You've got something that I want, and I'm going to take it!", which is what the American President, I'm **embarrassed** to say, my American President, is doing. And I'm **ashamed** and humiliated by that.

A HUMBLE THING

As Ware explains, the simplicity and honesty of the medium **means** good comic books instantly connect with readers, while bad ones don't. Chris Ware: It's a **humble** thing. It's something you hold in your **lap**, you look at, you can put down and go do something else and come back to. I've said a million times that if you go to a museum and you see a painting and you don't understand that painting, you're likely **to blame** your own ignorance of art history or of art. But if you read a comic book and you don't understand it, you just assume the **cartoonist** is an idiot. There's an honest relationship there between the reader and the writer or artist that I really think is very, very important. And so transferring that to a museum circumstance is really

kind of wonderful because you can make it three-dimensional in a space you walk into, but also something that's hopefully welcoming and warm.

COMPLEX EMOTIONS

And comic books and graphic novels provide the structure to express and share complex emotions, says Ware. Chris Ware: There's something about the way that our minds are structured. They're governed by language, and if you allow that to happen on the page, within the medium itself, which is actually writing in pictures themselves, because we think and remember in pictures, something happens on the page structurally that I think reflects the way that our memories and our lives are structured, or we structure them, I guess. And I try to make it as clear and as honest and emotionally **resonant** as I can, sometimes with limited results, but that's the **aim** I want to try to do something that communicates "Yes, I felt the same things you did, and this is what happened." Because at the lowest points in my life, that's all that I ever looked for in art, whether painting or novels or anything.

SENSE OF THREAT

Ware is interested in how politics infiltrates daily life, affecting our own behaviour. Ware talks more about how this is happening in America today. Chris Ware: Yes, definitely the political situation in America has been affecting my **mood** and my wife's **mood**... She teaches in a Chicago public school and I think 80 per cent of her students are Central or South American. She knows many who are undocumented, family members who are undocumented, and they're personally afraid of having their families **broken apart** and deported just as **poster children** for the efficacy of the dominance of the Trump administration. So she's talked to students **one-on-one** about this. There's been instruction in her classes by her **principals** about how to deal with immigrations and **customs** if they come to the door, how to lock the door and not let them in. These things certainly have an effect on you. She explains these things to me, and I realise, like, what's, you know, actually happening outside my door and the horrible things that are going on aside from what I'm reading in the news.

END OF FREEDOM

The US has long **branded itself** as a place of incomparable freedom. However, its wealth has often come at the expense of other countries as well as vast numbers of its own citizens. What's more, says Ware, America may be finally confronting the end of its famous optimism. Chris Ware: The **core** thing that is important to art is a sense of freedom, and I think America has had this **unearned** freedom for several decades at this point, actuall,. This sense that anything is possible. It's informed the citizenry, **for lack of** a less pretentious way of putting it, but it's come out especially in Hollywood movies in the sense that somehow we're technological innovators or something like that. But it's at its end at this point. It's **eroding**, it's going away... And without that, there's nothing left, really. I mean, that's been sort of the **core** engine of America, this promise that anything is possible or the lie that you can continue your youth into your middle age or something. It's kind of embarrassing but now it's justly at its end.

Glossary

- **aim** = obiettivo
- **mood** = umore
- **core** = principale
- **for lack of** = in assenza di
- **to blame** = incolpare
- **resonant** = rilevante
- **bitter-sweet** = agrodolce
- **humble** = umile
- **one-on-one** = faccia a faccia
- **cartoonist** = fumettista
- **poster children** = simboli
- **on display** = esposto
- **seeped in** = infiltrarsi
- **means** = mezzo
- **unearned** = immeritato
- **eroding** = erodere, deteriorarsi
- **printmaking** = incisione
- **arose** = sorgere
- **ashamed** = imbarazzato
- **principals** = dirigenti scolastici
- **intricacies** = complessità
- **childish** = infantile
- **broken apart** = distruggere
- **branded itself** = presentarsi come
- **embarrassed** = mortificato
- **lap** = grembo
- **customs** = dogana
- **layouts** = impaginazioni
- **you can go past** = superare