

The wonder of children's art

A new book of pictures and drawings is an attempt to help adults recall what the world looks like to a child.

By Tom Gatti



Child's-eye view: a 1930s painting by 12-year-old Tony Bonada, featured in *A Gift*. Courtesy of the Permanent Collection of Children's Museum of the Arts

Two summers ago, I was in the west of Ireland with my family, feeling very lucky that [Covid](#) travel rules had allowed our trip. At one point in our fortnight away, my six-year-old daughter had taken exception to some unreasonable adult demand. She retreated to her bedroom and soon a sign appeared on the door: "I'm ANGRY! Please do not enter without my permission." Amused as much by her orthographic accuracy (line-breaks hyphenated; a stray capital corrected) as the sentiment, I took a photo and tweeted it with the caption: "The holiday is going well." My daughter's small act of protest caught the eye of the publisher Julian Rothenstein, and ended up in a book he has edited titled *A Gift*: a collection of images, poems and notes from under-13s around the globe.

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The book is an attempt to help adults recall what the world looks like to a child. As you might expect, the qualities of curiosity and wonder shine through, but what's particularly enchanting is the way in which moments of magic and high drama coexist with the quotidian. "MOM," reads a note by one child: "I'm going to run away tomorrow at 9:30 when you and Dad are sleeping. Be sure to say goodbye forever." "DEAR GOD," goes another: "Thank you for the baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy." A felt-tipped figure with a circle around it is captioned by its six-year-old artist, "boy inside a hard-boiled egg". A photo of a craft project shows a loo roll transformed into an octopus with a hypnotically human face and head of hair.

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There are magnificent colourful paintings of American cities and Zimbabwean landscapes; quirky photographs; moving reflections on the immigrant experience. And everywhere there are reminders that children have, like Rothenstein, the sharpest of magpie eyes. As one seven-year-old poet puts it: "I don't choose to collect these things/They just jump into my head."