



Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell (New York Review Books Classics)

By Charles Simic

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In *Dime-Store Alchemy*, poet Charles Simic reflects on the life and work of Joseph Cornell, the maverick surrealist who is one of America's great artists. Simic's spare prose is as enchanting and luminous as the mysterious boxes of found objects for which Cornell is justly renowned.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

It's hard to do justice to the charm and power of Joseph Cornell's boxes. His reliance on collage, indifference to technical display, and Surrealist mining of private obsession make him very much a modern artist, yet his work also brings to mind bourgeois parlors, the tidy vitrines of collectors, and the odds and ends children carry around for comfort and distraction. It is an art at once hermetic and matter-of-fact, sophisticated and simple. Appropriately, this study is neither a straightforward critical account of Cornell's art nor a merely literary embellishment of it, but rather a parallel text: written by Simic (*Hotel Insomnia*), one of our best poets, it includes his own poems and reminiscences, as well as quotations from a variety of other writers. Simic mingles biography and critical discussion with selections of writings from the artist's notebooks. The book emerges as a piece of writing constructed along the enigmatic lines of Cornell's art. And that art, as Simic sees it, gathers from the scattered pieces of the American past a new, redeeming reality; at heart, this art is a religious practice. Only seemingly random, Simic's approach develops both the plain detail of Cornell's life and illuminates the nature of his work. Illustrations.

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Review

"*Dime-Store Alchemy*...is the most sustained literary response this far to Cornell's boxes, montages, and films...incisive, freewheeling, dramatic—a mixture of evocation and observation, as lucid and shadowy as the imagination it celebrates...*Dime-Store Alchemy* is a meeting of kindred spirits that is itself a work of art."
—Edward Hirsch, *The New Yorker*

"A beautiful book that evokes Cornell's artistic spirit." —*Harper's Bazaar*

"*Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell*, [is] a fascinating long-out-of-print book that explores the eccentric genius of the artist through the insightful and often obsessive lens of the poet Charles Simic, who examines eight of Cornell's most remarkable boxes. It is, more than anything, a meditation on beauty and the art of imagination. Simic's writing itself is a metaphor for Cornell's thoughtful collages, stitching together elements of texts by some of the artist's favorite poets and authors....What makes *Dime-Store Alchemy* most exceptional is the elegant parallel between the poetry of Cornell's work and that of Simic's narrative interpretation of it, at once an embodiment of and commentary on the power of remix in creation." -- *The Atlantic*

About the Author

Charles Simic is a poet, essayist and translator. He has published twenty collections of his own poetry, five books of essays, a memoir, and numerous of books of translations. He has received many literary awards for his poems and his translations, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Griffin Prize and the MacArthur Fellowship. *The Voice at 3 A.M.*, his selected later and new poems, was published in 2003 and a new book of poems *My Noiseless Entourage* came out in the spring of 2005. His new ebook from New York Review Books is titled *Confessions of a Poet Laureate*.

Users Review

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Lamont Williams:

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