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Monmouth University/Department of Art and Design

Daniel Johnston: I am a Baby in My Universe II

DiMattio Gallery, September 14 – December 15, 2026

Opening Reception: Thursday, October 22, from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Monmouth University, Department of Art & Design, in collaboration with Deborah Colton, OUTPOST NYC DCG, and Parlor Gallery are pleased to present, **Daniel Johnston: I am a Baby in My Universe II.**

Welcome to the world, of Daniel Johnston.

Daniel Johnston, a singer-songwriter and visual artist whose childlike, haunted songs brought him acclaim as one of America's most gifted outsiders. Throughout his life, Johnston suffered from mental illness, yet in the spirit of hope, this helped his work become even more profound in his continuing artistic journey throughout his lifetime. In a career filled with stops and starts, Mr. Johnston became something of a man-child celebrity of the artistic underground, earning the admiration of rock stars like Kurt Cobain and Tom Waits as well as comparisons to William Blake. Johnston became known by fellow musicians and the music press with songs, like "Speeding Motorcycle" and "Don't Play Cards with Satan," that had a poignant clarity yet showed glimpses of a fractured mind. Well-known for his strange, cartoonish art that decorated his tapes and were featured in his visual art works, Johnston repeated various images often that were always etched in his mind. One, "Hi, How Are You," featured a froglike alien; the image became his signature. Winning acclaim for both his music and visual art, his cartoon drawings were even included in the Whitney Biennial exhibition in 2006 at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Yet, Mr. Johnston was dogged by mental health problems that stunted his career and occasionally hospitalized him. In more recent years he had largely been confined to his family's home; in 2017, he went on a farewell tour backed by members of the bands Fugazi, Wilco and Built to Spill. With a boyish voice and a gift for pure melody – his biggest inspiration was the Beatles – Mr. Johnston sang candidly and sometimes disturbingly about his demons. "Despair came knocking at my door, and I let her in for a while," he sang on "Despair Came Knocking," from "Hi, How Are You." "She sat on the couch and began smoking. She said nothing."

Climbing the rungs of the indie-rock world, Mr. Johnston was featured on MTV in 1985, and three years later went to New York, where he mixed with the bands Sonic Youth and Galaxie 500..... then

also went on to Europe. Mr. Johnston's songs became indie-rock standards. "Speeding Motorcycle" ... capturing the thrill and fear of passion – "Speeding motorcycle, don't you drive recklessly/Speeding motorcycle of my heart" – was covered by Yo La Tengo, the Pastels, Mary Lou Lord.....in fact, Johnston has been featured in the NY Times, the New Yorker and countless other magazines worldwide.

In the 2000s, even as Daniel Johnston seemed to disappear from public life, his reputation as a singular artist was growing. On a 2004 compilation album, "The Late Great Daniel Johnston: Discovered Covered," his songs were performed by Mr. Waits, TV on the Radio and Death Cab for Cutie. The next year, Jeff Feuerzeig's film "The Devil and Daniel Johnston" won the documentary directing award at the Sundance Film Festival. Mr. Johnston in concert at a festival in Bourges, France, in 2010. As Mr. Johnston's mental problems mounted – he suffered from manic depression and schizophrenia – he largely withdrew from performing and remained at his family home. Yet, he never stopped writing and drawing. This was a compulsive passion he had to continue to create and never give up. He always had HOPE and LOVE for the future, despite his health.

"I believe in the work of Daniel Johnston in so many ways. He broke barriers and paved the way with light and hope to others who suffered from mental illness, whether it be just depression or something more serious. At a time when people did not talk as much about such things, he gave people an inside few of his struggle and brilliance, his gifts and tribulations. This has helped so many people throughout the years. Today, with social media and so many influences depressing and causing alienation and loneliness in our population and youth, it's now even more important to look at what Daniel Johnston achieved, despite all obstacles, and that some of his challenges helped make him shine and bring positivity to others, worldwide." Deborah Colton

This exhibition is the most comprehensive ever created of his work and is curated by his beloved sister who was his caretaker and art collaborator in later years, Marjory Johnston. The exhibition was created and debuted at Deborah Colton Gallery in Houston, Texas in 2024, a gallery who has been representing Daniel Johnston's works since 2011. Last year a film series and select works were shown at Anthology Film Archives in NYC. A selection of Johnston works was also exhibited at Parlor Gallery, Asbury Park, New Jersey in 2025.

Free and open to the public

Gallery Hours: Monday – Friday 10 – 5.

For additional Information please contact Gallery Director Scott Knauer at: 732-923-4786 or by email at: sknauer@monmouth.edu or visit Monmouth.edu/MCA