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HOTBOT

Striking a Nerve

By Marc Spiegler

Though still a UC Berkeley undergrad, lit major Adrian Tomine has rocketed to prominence among America's young cartoonists with his Optic Nerve comic book series. His strips function on an emotional plane; not much action takes place outside the teen and twenty-something characters' heads.

In 32 Stories - a compilation of the cartoonist's minicomics - you experience the evolutionary arc of Tomine's style. His art progresses from mucky, crude line drawings to deftly rendered character sketches. Similarly traceable is the diminishing role of dialog, and its replacement by the emotional white space that distinguishes the present Optic Nerve. Much as one might examine intermediate car designs to better understand the car's final form, 32 Stories offers a chance to pore over Tomine's fitful, failed experiments and lost tangents. His attempt to reveal superhero comics' influence on Beat icon Jack Kerouac goes nowhere, for instance, as do several of his more adolescent autobiographical episodes. In these narratives, we see a keen, expanding intelligence at work (and play), untempered by compromise or the perspective of adulthood.

32 Stories, by Adrian Tomine: US\$9.95.
 Drawn & Quarterly Publications: +1 (514) 279 2221.

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