

Art Seen: Spoken Word's Christopher Johnson

If you follow poetry and know anything about spoken word and the art's local action and inertia, you should know Christopher Johnson's name. To say that Chris Johnson is a colorful and interesting guy is less than an understatement. He is energized, mysteriously humorous and a walking billboard for where the spoken word performance art thing has taken us. Poet-warrior and provocateur, he is a wordsmith, a tinker-thinker and a friend of the first order. I think he is brilliant even when he is just sitting around talking.



We met a few years ago at the end of a short musical set I was performing at the Brooklyn Coffee and Tea House. As Tony, the owner, was about to pull the evening plug, Chris Johnson approached the mic and introduced one of his *psychological landscapes* of verse and human emotions: "The Rain." With guitar case firmly in hand and a transfixed gaze, I joined everyone else in the shop in frozen time as the incredible Mr. Johnson took us into the sky so we could look down at a collage of his childhood experiences, all carefully cascading through lucid and pulsating mental images, cross-references and criticisms. It was all so very breathtaking and may have been one of the best things I have borne witness to.

Chris and I locked stares and sparked into a spontaneous human combustion of thought, spirit and soul-art — a connection of real friendship. We have been good to each other and share multiple layers of verbiage whenever the wormhole lets us tumble into the same plane of reality for a few fine moments, with java. Chris often performs at my exhibition openings or important social gatherings and I like referring him to school gigs and such to perform his spoken word art form of the first order. Because nothing can be closer to all people's origins than spoken word.

Originally from many places, he more or less resides here as a home base among other home bases. A teacher, writer, speaker, artist-performer, thinker and soul-mate, Chris is one of the finer people on my friendship A-list and for all the right reasons. He gives much, asks for little, and is always great to see, hear or laugh with. I guess that's the joy of real friends, crazy creative artists on the surge. I bet they will never find the DNA that makes that happen. Hey — that's a rap.

Chris Johnson writes about spoken word for Motif. See some of that work here.