The movie began. The Japanese characters started speaking, without subtitles, and suddenly, in a Loews in Lincoln Square, surrounded by a sea of Americans inhaling corgi-sized tubs of popcorn, I was hearing voices from home. They were neither incoherent nor flat. “Isle of Dogs” is profoundly interested in the humor and fallibility of translation. This is established early, by the title card: “The humans in this film speak only in their native tongue (occasionally...
The film invites a kinship with a viewer who will find these banalities familiar, and lets these moments flow by, unnoticed, for those who do not. This is not to assert the primacy of my own experience with the film. The film’s graphic designer, Erica Dorn, explains: “The world of Isle of Dogs is kind of an alternative reality. It looks and feels like Japan, but it’s a slightly dreamier version, a slightly more Wes Anderson version.” And we’re 100% here for Anderson’s take on a semi-fictional Japan full of dogs. Because it’s probably the most fun politically themed film in recent memory. There’s a lot to unpack in Isle of Dogs. And depending on how deep you want to go, it can be interpreted many ways. ‘Isle of Dogs’ will be released in theaters on March 23. For more on Japanese cinema, read up on Akira Kurasawa’s ‘Seven Samurai.’ Subscribe.