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Published/Created Date	1911 October
Collection Title	Camera work; a photographic quarterly
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THE UNCONSCIOUS IN ART

A WORK of art that we can understand at sight is mediocre or worse. Genius stirs our ignorance first. That which comes out of the deeps must make its appeal to the deeps. It is the unknown, the indefinable, the thing that "worries" you in Rodin, Whistler, Matisse, Rops that fascinates you. It brings you back again and again, and each time that we know more of them we know less of them. That is the paradox of the Infinite.

Every thought has its corresponding emotion; no thought, no emotion—that is a philosophic axiom. But there are aesthetic emotions for which there are no corresponding thoughts; emotions that awaken the Unconscious alone and that never touch the brain; emotions vague, indefinable, confused; emotions that wake whirlwinds and deep-sea hurricanes.

Before the Beautiful some of us are in danger of aesthetic catalepsy. Thought knows not what to paint on these states of aesthetic subconsciousness. There are no idea-pigments that correspond to these emotions, these nostalgic shadows that never quite come out of their tombs.

Monet, Poe and Blake were three types wherein the Unconscious tried to render itself intelligible. And the world always questions the sanity of this kind of art, but the sanity of the world is the sanity of common sense and common sense in art we can dismiss.

So profoundly is the mind of genius rooted in the Unconscious that it never has a clear idea of just what it is doing. It obeys. From this the idea of "having been chosen" is born in the brain of the great painter, the great sculptor, the great musician. Who knows the exact effect or worth of his precious work? What great artist knows what he is doing at any particular time? He is a tool in the hands of the Unconscious. He brings a message to the world that he himself does not know the import of.

Conscious effort, conscious willing, the open-eyed act is always the *last* of a series, and not the first. It is the flower of preceding incalculable sowings in the Unconscious. Consciousness in art is only the antenna of the blind unknowable Force and intelligence is only its nerve.

Imagination is the dream of the Unconscious. It is the realm of the gorgeous, monstrous hallucinations of the Unconscious. It is the hasheesh of genius. Out of the head of the artist issues all the beauty that is transferred to canvas, but the roots of his imagination lie deeper than his personality.

The soul of the genius is the safety vault of the race, the treasure-pocket of the Unconscious soul of the world. Here age after age the Secretive God stores its dreams. And the product of genius overwhelms us because it has collaborated with the Infinite.

BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.