

I have never been able to explain my own art to other people and, in some ways, to myself. It would be impossible for me to articulate a suitable story or reasoning for why I make what I make. For me, this sculpture is my articulation of something else; it is the only language I know to communicate the points that lurk in my mind.

My realization in the possibility of researching and understanding my own subconscious was sparked by German psychologist Carl Jung. I was specifically intrigued by Jung's book where he recorded his experiences during a period of three years when he would daily and religiously evoke a fantasy in his waking state and record it in the format of a story and images that would make up *The Red Book*. After reading portions of *The Red Book* I was interested in how I make my own art.

After conducting research, I began trying to decipher and translate my drawings into verbal language, even though I know I will never be able to fully explain or convert my thoughts into something other than drawings. My sculpture is another manifestation of my exploration into my subconscious. This sculpture came from one of my drawings. I tried to stay true to what I drew, because it is one of the drawings that were automatic, that came from a partially subconscious place of art making. Each aspect of this sculpture has representational meaning to me; the symbols I use to express come through into this more lifelike sculpture, and it is as if the viewer has a better glimpse of where I go in my mind when I am creating. One of the most interesting parts of looking at myself through the drawings is that I have a whole view of myself, one in which I am forced to strip my ego away to know what really is going on inside of my mind.

Megan

Stagnation, Discomfort, and Restlessness

Meghan



I have never been able to explain my own art to other people and in some ways to myself. In an intuitive way I know exactly why I draw and sculpt the characters and scenarios I create but it gives me incredible anxiety when a skeptical person asks me what a piece is about because it would be impossible for me to articulate a suitable story or reasoning. For me the piece itself was my articulation of something else, it is the only language I know to communicate the points I need to that lurk in my mind. They are articulations of the stories hidden from me in my own mind- a place of subconscious awareness that my conscious mind cannot access. This makes an interesting mystery of my own mind, how I can think I know my motivations or feelings but then I make a drawing that articulates these feelings perfectly. These indescribable, unarticulable feelings are not communicable in standard language. This is equally the most fascinating and frustrating part of my art making. I have always thought that it is probably easier from the outside to connect the themes and symbols in between each of my pieces but I am interesting in understanding for myself what these symbols mean and how I can use that information to better myself.

Carl Jung is a German psychologist whose book, *The Red Book, Liber Novus* has been a very influential in wanting to understand my own psyche or subconscious (although Jung used the term unconscious to describe it). This book is an elaborate story, taking place over three years when Jung would daily and religiously evoke a fantasy in his waking state and enter it as a drama. He states that the concentrated time in which he produced this amount of material was enough for multiple life times while his life consisted of, “elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream and threatened to break me.” He recorded his experiences in the format of a story and images that make up *The Red Book*. Looking back at this time, Jung said his scientific question was to see what happened when he deliberately switched off his conscious mind. He remembers these three years as the most important time in his life, that everything past this was only a “scientific elaboration and integration into life”. Some people considered him mad or gone into a state of psychosis, but I guess people would think that of any person who goes deep inside of themselves, to the places in his mind many people won't encounter in their lifetime.

Beyond the personal experiences of Carl Jung, wisdom and a better understanding of these concepts can be found in his developed ideas in psychology about the conscious and subconscious. He is a believer in being able to uncover your subconscious completely, even if it is by evolution and takes place over eternities, “Man has developed consciousness slowly and laboriously, in a process that took untold ages to reach the civilized state. And this evolution is far from complete for large areas of the human mind are still shrouded in darkness.” This is an interesting look into the past of humans, how consciousness has been present through all of life, but conscious awareness is a relatively modern topic. It is obvious how mainstream interest has shifted to looking into the conscious as a whole and dissecting it through the intellectual and artistic movements surrounding the subconscious, dreams and psychedelics. Carl Jung makes sure to separate himself from the dream interpreters though, with his focus on active imagination, for which he also used the terms fantasies and visions. The difference between the two methods of illuminating the subconscious is in the deliberation of active imagination. A person must be receptive and active in, “encountering and confronting various unconscious archetypal elements within his or her psyche.” It is important to understand for Jung archetypes are something that cannot be perceived directly, although their existence can be recognized only through the images or symbols that arise from them. Jung speaks about archetypes as a part of the universal collective unconscious. Although I do not agree so much with the collective unconscious that

Jung theorized, I do take my own perspective on the concept of personal archetypes, or recurring symbols. These archetypes make up the personal unconscious, which Jung describes, “There are certain events of which we have not consciously taken note; they have remained, so to speak, below the threshold of consciousness. They have happened, but they have been absorbed subliminally.” It has not been made clear the process of coming to this receptive state, but some might say one can achieve this state through any creative activity whether that is gardening, drawing or painting. This is a state that some might describe as the ‘flow’ or a spiritual practice of sorts.

Sigmund Freud’s study of the subconscious mind and his theories on it of course left a huge impression on psychology as whole and influenced and informed experts to come, but I am more interested in what impact his work at the time left on the art following his idea’s fame. Following the writings of Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists (an intellectual, literary and artistic movement) took to the idea of tapping into the ideas behind the rational or conscious mind. Freud was obsessed with uncovering what the unconscious mind held because as he said, “Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.” Using the same techniques that Freud had developed to bring the subconscious out- like word association, the surrealists strove to access the creativity that comes from a person’s subconscious. This creativity was held in a much higher regard as an art because of it’s authenticity and trueness to the artist. In a scientific psychological sense ‘automatis’ means involuntary actions, which arise and are controlled by the subconscious like breathing and dreaming. In the surrealist movement automatism took shape in spontaneous or free association art pieces through drawing, writing, and painting.



Miró: The Beautiful Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers, 1941

An example of the works created during this time through automasis is the painting by Miró, The Beautiful Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers. Automatic drawing has taken many different forms and gone through different philosophical changes as skepticism arose about its efficiency in letting the subconscious flow. Some artists like the French-Canadian group of artists called Les Automatistes completely eliminated the representation in their drawings, allowing their hand to move seemingly randomly on the paper, creating abstract pieces. The theory here is because there is no conscious effort in creating these body movements the art is free of rational or conscious control. Because of the representational outcomes of some of the work (of objects, human form, etc.) it was concluded that automatic drawing is not the subconsciously purely represented in these drawings, but a marriage of the conscious (drawing representationally) and the subconscious (the automatic part of the drawing process). This

realization hit for most surrealist artists, "...Masson admitted that his 'automatic' imagery involved a twofold process of unconscious and conscious activity..." (The Surrealists: Revolutionaries in art & writing 1919–1935, Jemma Montagu, page 15). This 'flow' between the conscious and subconscious has been described and sought after by many people looking to deepen their creativity. By looking to automatic drawing, painting, writing, etc. a person can take down the barrier in between the conscious and subconscious mind, and like Jung describes, illuminate a part of the shadow that is buried in a person's subconscious. Jung believes in how important it is to examine this part of oneself in order to not only to live freely from your own fears as he puts it, "A man who is possessed by his shadow is always standing in his own light and falling into his own traps ... living below his own level" and also for the artist to be free of their own filters he theorised that, "in spite of its function as a reservoir for human darkness—or perhaps because of this—the shadow is the seat of creativity" (Jung, *Archetypes* p. 123).

After reading portions of *The Red Book* I was interested in how I make my own art because of how I was inspired by Carl Jung's paintings based on his subconscious exploration. I related to the information from and about Carl Jung in my own art making and thinking. I too believe in the subconscious and active imagination. I believe I can access some of my own subconscious through exploring my own drawings that I do without too much conscious decision-making. After conducting my research, I have begun trying to decipher and translate my drawings into verbal language, even though I know I will never be able to fully explain or convert my thoughts into something other than the drawings.

Dream interpretation is one way of receiving information from your subconscious but to me it is more complex and hard to understand, making for faulty or arbitrary interpretations of them. That being said, dreams are incredibly important and can be informative especially going along with trying to interpret drawings, for example. There one dream I remember from about three or four years ago. It is not a recurring dream but it's one I can't forget about and it reenters my memory, triggered by various things. I remember just a clip of it, a part of a journey, a search for a final destination. This dream and its symbols and their connection have influenced my drawings more than anything else. Although I view it as less of an inspiration that I draw from, and more of another manifestation and connection to and extension of the art I make. The small flash of the dream I remember took place in a humid and comfortably warm hallway within a cave. The walls were soft and sturdy earth; the bottoms of my feet touched the weathered and round edged wooden planks. This narrow area was lit by a warm intangible light. Accompanying me was my big golden dog Peter and my brother Patrick who died when I was five years old by an accident. I'm not sure how we got there or why we were there but I was taken up with a sense of peace and easiness that I will not forget. I cannot know what this dream meant, if it even meant anything but it is so urgently important and sacred to me. These two figures (my dog and brother) are heavily present in my drawings as I try to understand my connection between the them (since they were never alive at the same time). My brother doesn't come about in direct and obvious ways in my life, but I think of him often and therefore he comes through in my artmaking. The protectiveness I feel for this dream and my drawings comes from the same connectedness I feel for other humans and for my relationship to them. Wherever this dream came from is where I know I tap into when drawing because of the same sort of perfect understanding and confusion at the same time.

Sometimes I draw because I think it's funny or silly and I seem to dismiss those as being apart of this conversation about my subconscious, but I think it's important to understand my wholeness and that I don't think the subconscious is just a place for the most important repressed

memories. This is one of the most interesting parts of looking at myself through these drawings that I produce because I have a whole view of myself, where I'm forced to begin to strip my ego away so I know what really is going on inside of my mind including my silliness and irrationality and all my other contradictory feelings and traits.

Through my research I have confirmed that my drawings are coming from a place of subconscious because they are not conscious choices, I don't think of something and then draw it, nor is it an arbitrary choice because of the connection I know I feel to it and how it so pointedly describes something I don't have the ability to articulate. I think interpreting my drawings instead of my dreams is a simpler and more personal way to try to look into my own subconscious because I know how it felt to make those characters or places therefore can better tell if in interpretation is closer to the 'truth'. It is interesting to attempt to translate something inarticulate that until now has been its own understood language that I solely knew. As a disclaimer before I layout the symbols and themes in my drawings and their meanings will fall short in articulating them because the meaning to me runs so deep to me.

There are specific personal archetypes that are constantly repetitive in almost all my art pieces. The symbols hold true to me throughout each of my separate pieces but when these different figures are compiled into one drawing or into different scenes or scenarios the meaning or feeling changes completely. These characters feel like my friends, like me and like enemies, but they all together tell a story of me that I couldn't tell any other way.

The first figure is the dog. I have a few theories on what this recurring dog may mean or what it represents. One of my theories is that it represents innocence, the part of me that keeps going back to childhood. The dog is easily abused, many times appearing being cut open or stood on which I think goes with the idea of innocence and having to trust another person. The dog is never a leader, always a follower or companion and doesn't have any opposition to it. Childhood is an important concept to me because of the way I viewed life as a child: in a beautifully simple yet confusing way because of unexplained emotions. I now begin to have anxiety when I feel unsafe or out of control because there is no one else to look to for help, for example when I am in a new place and there is fog and I am the 'leader' (if I am driving or the default guide of a group) I develop in incredible amount of anxiety, feeling so out of control as if I was as a child. The dog also strongly relates to my real dog, Peter who has been my best friend since 4th grade. He now feels like an extension of myself because of the way we know each other, how he knows when I'm going to turn left and I know when he's about to run away to the neighbor's house. The dogs in my drawings are always synced up with another person, as if they share the same mind the same way I feel Peter and I do.

Another symbol that carries from drawing to drawing are my nude humanoids. Their nakedness comes from vulnerability, not necessarily a comfortable vulnerability, but sometimes a fearful and exposed vulnerability. These characters are extensions of myself in different aspects and of other people who I interact and have relationships with. Sometimes these characters represent situations that have happened that take on their own characteristics that I can translate into a person. Greed, cheating, peacefulness, ignorance, and connivery are among the situations and characteristics portrayed through these figures. I find this indirect way of talking about things that happened or people more effective than trying to explain them through words. Sometimes as I try to explain a situation to a friend, I realize it is much easier just to draw it or point out one of my drawings that explain it perfectly. This works because of how people relate to each other's feelings, if I have felt something another person somewhere has had the same exact experience.

I do go through other phases of using different symbols such as balloons with happy faces on them and some without, flames and fire, and party hats. I find it interesting to see where these changing things come up in my drawings. For example many times the balloons come into my drawings when one of the human figures are being lifted up by them. It is as if the balloon is protecting these people from an unknown drop and these people trust the balloon to save their lives. I think these balloons to me represent the part of my mind that protects me from the negative or inconvenient thoughts and parts of me.

I have been able to better understand my own art through this process of outside research including Carl Jung's personal research and the art movement of the surrealists. I better understand how my mind works and how to decipher it more effectively. I will continue to try to reach the parts of me that are seemingly hidden in order to better understand mine and other's motivations. Along the way one of the most interesting parts of my outside research was talking to people about what I was doing and them being so excited to share their own profound stories and knowledge on the subject. They shared with me their own personal journeys either not understanding what their art is about or the steps they took to better know themselves, which usually resulted in a beautiful narrative that itself I consider art. I urge to continue these conversations and my own personal exploration of my subconscious beyond this time because I will not forget what stories and interesting experiences I've had while looking into my subconscious.

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