

I AM CERTAIN OF NOTHING

"I am certain of nothing ... but the truth of imagination." Keats wrote that. How simple. How clever. The facts are always a muddle, chaotic, full of disorder. Its imagination that gives them shape, which finds the truth that is hidden. I'm sure I've always known this instinctively, but reading those words the other day was a revelation. The economy of a genius poet to sum up the creative process in such a profound way. Imagination is so mysterious, it happens at random moments taking us by surprise. It pounces when we least expect it. When we are doing something else, and vanishes as suddenly if we take no notice. It defies discipline and will not take orders. It is cousin to our instinct. And it is instinct that makes each of us who we are. Something which cannot be corrupted and which never betrays us. Irrational and primitive. Logic and reason can only take us part of the way on any journey. But when we are on the edge of the unknown we must invent other maps. And it is this mapping of terra incognita that the creative process is about. We don't know where we are going, but we leave a trail of information behind - notes, sketches, pictures, words, half-thought thoughts. I'm careful with this litter. I gather it up and put it away. It's not easy to sort the important from the trivial when one is too close to it. There's time, later, for reflection. A more detached view.

I love simplicity. To make the complicated easy to grasp is difficult, whereas to make simple truths unintelligible is a game many play.

Every now and then we all have moments of revelation when the scales drop off our eyes and something which has tied our mind in knots for years suddenly is clear. I had one recently when I found a definition for composition. It is finding the link between things which apparently have nothing in common. It works for painting and writing and dance and music. In fact anything that you make from imagination. The more unlikely the marriage, the cleverer you have to be to force the liaison. And the greater the reward. And having arranged one marriage of unlikely partners, you need another and another to make a painting.

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