

TRACKS OF MY FEARS: ON THE ASCENT OF ART  
The Origins of our Image Making Compulsion

Alexandra Kraeler Corbin  
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Alexandra Corbin's stimulating study of the origins of image-making in our species is an admirable synthesis of a daunting variety of fields, of which the twenty Key Words listed on the back cover are a representative but not exhaustive catalog. A naïve reader who approaches the book with a personal interest in its subject ("Why do people make art?") might feel intimidated. However, as an author who has myself spent over fifty years addressing the same subject, I must say that all the fields provide important insights and are relevant to this misleadingly simple question.

Artmaking and the motives behind it do not lend themselves to a linear, straightforward narrative and so must be approached from many directions—evolutionary, philosophical, neuroscientific, paleo-archaeological, semiotic . . . the list goes on. One might fear that the little three-letter word, "art," will have disappeared after all these searchlights have been trained on it.

However, Corbin is a practicing artist who knows "art," and her chapters are well worth careful perusal. Although academic writers on serious topics often maintain a distance ("objectivity") between themselves and their subject, every page of Corbin's book bespeaks a knowledgeable and creative mind that has thought intelligently, personally, and passionately for a lifetime about its subject.

I recommend the book to readers who like nothing more than to steep themselves in a stew of new information, original and stimulating ideas, surprising syntheses, and an original authorial voice. Although one will not come away with a tidy, air-tight hypothesis, lovers of art who are interested in its origins will be enriched by joining Corbin as she follows the tracks of art ascending.

