

The Origin of the Doodles

We were mapping at scale, which meant that the detail had to be as fine as the resolution of the published map. A 'stock' Paache AB airbrush is capable of fine detail, but not this fine. We had to customize the brushes and fine grind the needles that carried the ink into the air stream in order to accomplish this. Even grinding the needles was an art, not many could do it. I was working at the U.S. Geological Survey making maps in support of NASA missions. There are probably few activities which demand such intense focus of attention as mapping planetary surfaces with an airbrush. The brushes would need frequent adjusting, cleaning or other attention and after each of these actions the brush's performance would need to be tested before resuming work on the map.

We kept a piece of chronaflex next to the map to test the brush and after a while a tapestry of random splotches, dots, lines and markings grew on these test sheets. As I worked, a mark or group of markings might suggest something -- a face, a crater. I would add to these shapes until the test sheet became covered with a hodge-podge of random and sometimes bizarre imagery; done without plan, with a free and unselfconscious spirit. Working with images of the Moon or other planets often suggested science-fiction or off-worldly motifs. An alien, a spacecraft, an asteroid would emerge among the dots, splatters and squiggles. Sometimes the splotch would suggest an anatomical feature around which would grow a fantastic creature. And so these doodles were born and grew as if by themselves.

The computer came more and more to dominate the mapping techniques we used, and gradually the use of the airbrush was abandoned. I saved several of these test sheets though, because the tiny unintentional drawings had a unique life and humor of their own. I present here a collection of these spontaneous images. At a much later time I made up the little poems that accompany them but for myself the images are little poems in their own right; poems for the eye. They do not represent any artistic style or direction, merely by-products of a period of intense and serious work. They flowed forth from mind and spirit as naturally as breath flows from my body. I have enjoyed them, I thought you might like them too.

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