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Inside the Sketchbooks of the World's Great Graphic Designers
Steven Heller & Lita Talarico

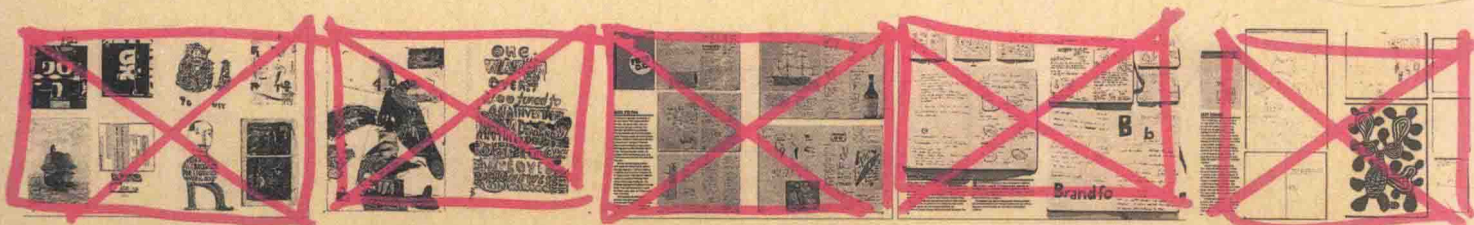
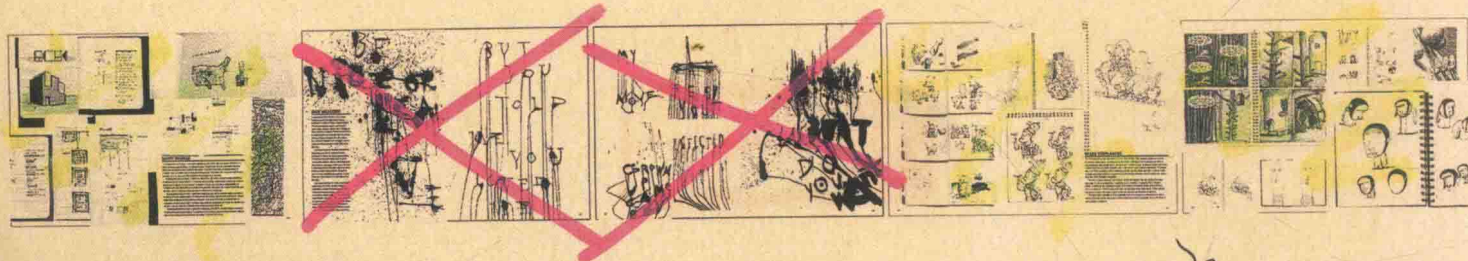
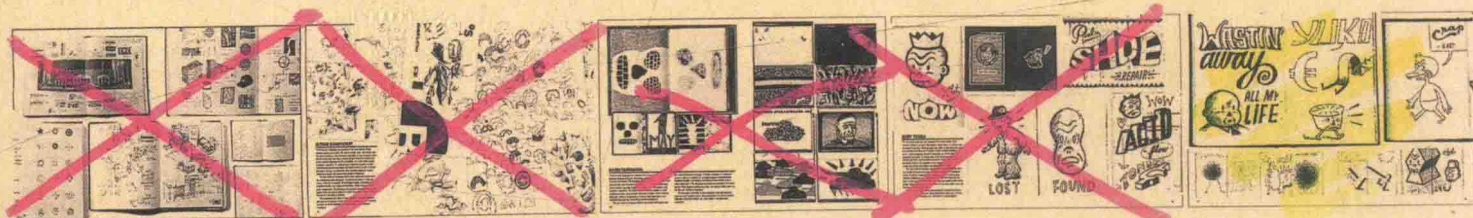
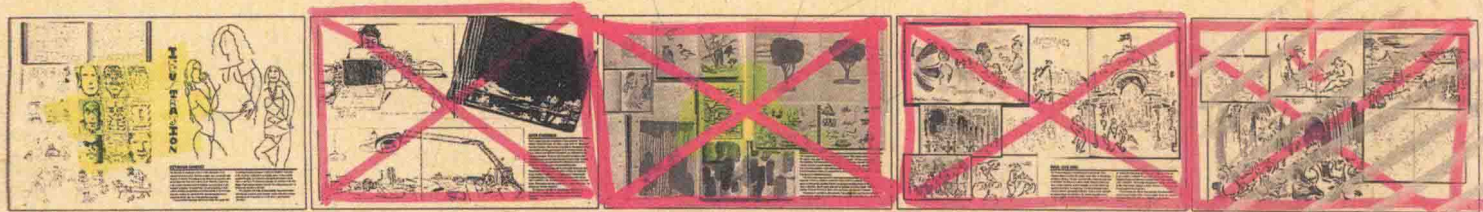
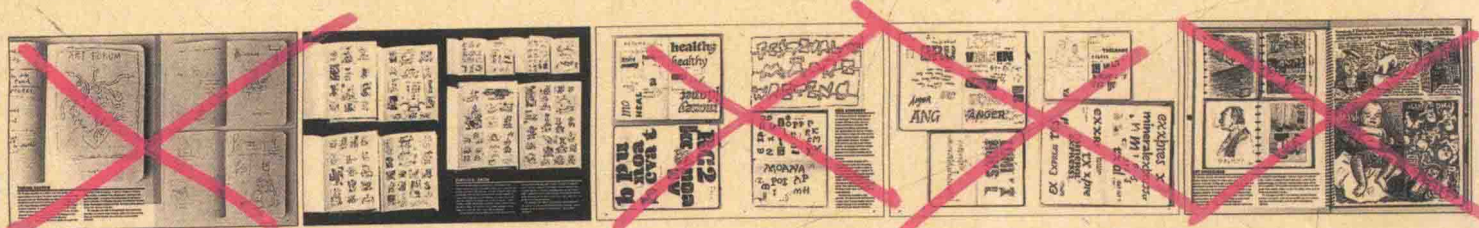
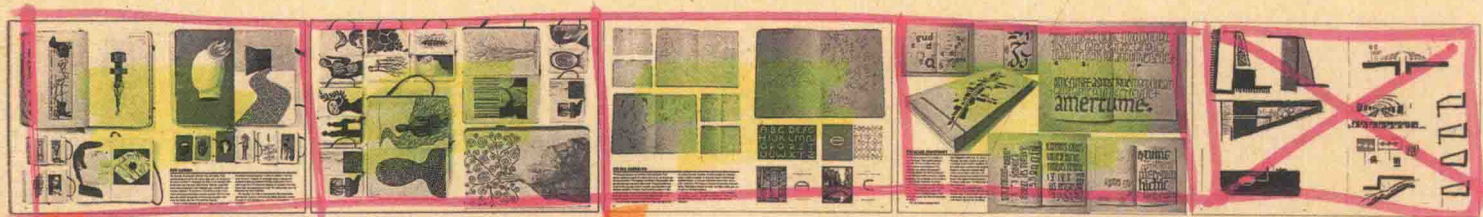
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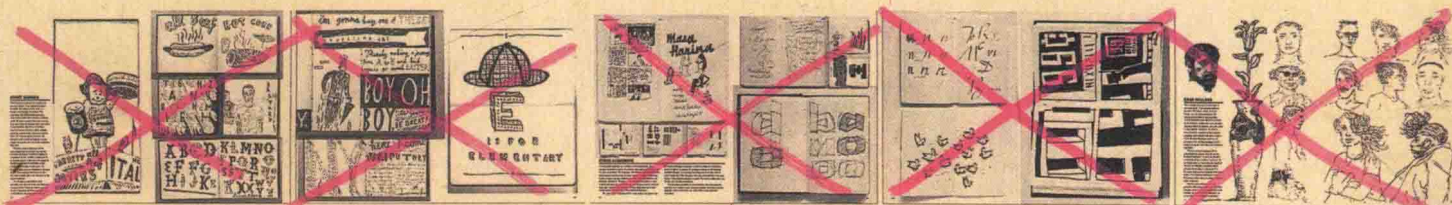
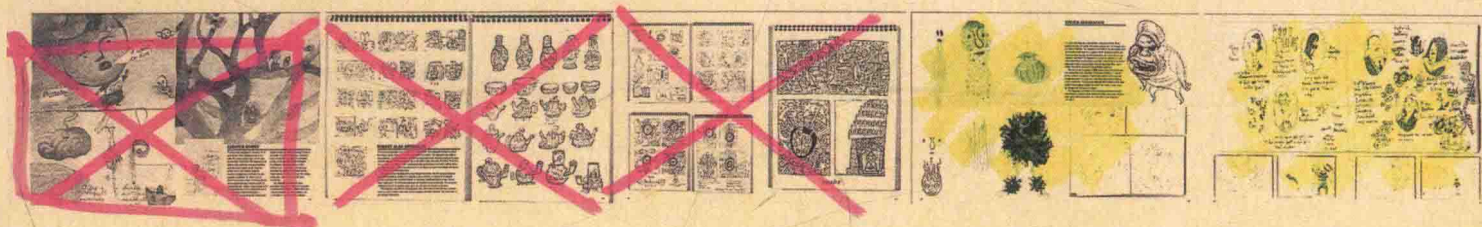
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Inside the Sketchbooks of the World's Great Graphic Designers

Steven Heller & Lita Talarico

With 922 illustrations, 654 in color



Contents.

		6	7	Introduction: Sketchbook Appeal			92	93	Seymour Chwast		
		8	9	Majid Abbasi			94	95	Josh Cochran		
		10	11	Christoph Abbrederis			96	97	Paul Cox <i>France</i>		
12	13	14	15	Sean Adams			98	99	Paul Cox <i>UK</i>		
16	17	18	19	Conrado Almada	100	101	102	103	Michael Patrick Cronan		
20	21	22	23	Antoine + Manuel			104	105	John Cuneo		
24	25	26	27	Marshall Arisman	106	107	108	109	Henrik Drescher		
		28	29	Dana Arnett			110	111	Jordi Duró		
		30	31	Tarek Atrissi			112	113	Stasys Eidrigevicius		
32	33	34	35	Marian Bantjes			114	115	Graham Elliott		
36	37	38	39	Noma Bar			116	117	Marc English		
		40	41	Gary Baseman		118	119	120	121	Oded Ezer	
		42	43	Donovan Beery		122	123	124	125	Sara Fanelli	
		44	45	John Bielenberg	126	127	128	129	130	131	Ed Fella
46	47	48	49	Michael Bierut			132	133	Nicholas Felton		
50	51	52	53	Peter Blegvad			134	135	Kevin Finn		
54	55	56	57	Barry Blitt			136	137	Jeffrey Fisher		
		58	59	Irma Boom		138	139	140	141	Nathan Fox	
		60	61	Bruno Bressolin		142	143	144	145	Amy Franceschini	
62	63	64	65	Stefan Bucher		146	147	148	149	Craig Frazier	
		66	67	Paul Buckley			150	151	John Gall		
68	69	70	71	Philip Burke		152	153	154	155	Peter Girardi	
72	73	74	75	Mikey Burton	156	157	158	159	160	161	Milton Glaser
		76	77	Chris Capuozzo		162	163	164	165	Keith Godard	
78	79	80	81	Ken Carbone			166	167	Carolyn Gowdy		
82	83	84	85	Pep Carrió		168	169	170	171	Rodney Alan Greenblat	
		86	87	Celina Carvalho		172	173	174	175	Steven Guarnaccia	
88	89	90	91	François Chastanet		176	177	178	179	Jonny Hannah	

	180	181	182	183	Cyrus Highsmith			270	271	Tim Robinson		
			184	185	Brad Holland		272	273	274	275	Paul Rogers	
			186	187	Nigel Holmes				276	277	Laurie Rosenwald	
188	189	190	191	192	193	Mirko Ilić		278	279	280	281	Stefan Sagmeister
			194	195	Enric Jardí				282	283	Paul Sahre	
	196	197	198	199	James Jean		284	285	286	287	Zina Saunders	
	200	201	202	203	Jeff Johnson				288	289	Stephen Savage	
			204	205	Michael Johnson		290	291	292	293	Jeff Scher	
	206	207	208	209	Viktor Koen				294	295	Tamara Shopsin	
	210	211	212	213	Bill Lacy				296	297	Elwood H. Smith	
214	215	216	217	218	219	Tim Lane		298	299	300	301	Kris Sowersby
			220	221	John Langdon	302	303	304	305	306	307	Art Spiegelman
			222	223	Jacob Joonhee Lee			308	309	310	311	Barron Storey
			224	225	Uwe Loesch			312	313	314	315	Scott Stowell
			226	227	Ross MacDonald				316	317	István Szugyiczky	
228	229	230	231	232	233	Kerry McElroy			318	319	David Tartakover	
	232	233	234	235	David McLimans		320	321	322	323	Gary Taxali	
			236	237	Bruce Mau				324	325	Scott Thomas	
			238	239	Chaz Maviyane-Davies		326	327	328	329	Rick Valicenti	
240	241	242	243	244	245	Rebeca Méndez			330	331	Bob van Dijk	
	244	245	246	247	Rick Meyerowitz		332	333	334	335	Klaas Verplancke	
			248	249	Christoph Niemann				336	337	James Victore	
			250	251	Neil Numberman				338	339	Tucker Viemeister	
252	253	254	255	256	257	Shogo Ota		340	341	342	343	Khoi Vinh
	256	257	258	259	Everett Peck				344	345	Nate Voss	
260	261	262	263	264	265	Daniel Pelavin			346	347	Wang Xu	
			264	265	Clive Piercy				348	349	Mauro Zennaro	
266	267	268	269			Dan Reisinger			350	351	Websites	

Sketch- book Appeal.

Steven Heller
& Lita Talarico

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hat is it about sketchbooks that makes them so appealing to touch and smell? Why are illustrators, designers, and others hypnotically drawn to them in their pristine, fallow state? Is it the size, shape, color? Or perhaps the heft, or lack thereof. Is it the brand? In recent years, Moleskine has made filling sketchbooks as popular a pastime as sports and as common a practice as thinking. Perhaps the blank pages are what beckon most of all? The invitation to fill those pages with one's own scribbling is an irresistible force.

The sketchbook is a portal into a world where anything can happen: another dimension beyond that of space and time, a veritable twilight zone, where innermost thoughts, ideas, and feelings can be expressed freely. The sight of those blank pages is enough to set hearts and minds racing in some, yet can trigger uncontrollable seizures in others. A sketchbook is a *tabula rasa* and, therefore, a creative double-edged sword. Those empty sheets say freedom, but they can also be chains that enslave. While the sketchbook is the least judgmental and most forgiving of any communications medium, for the creatively insecure it may be just too free – too *rasa*.

Some designers use sketchbooks as repositories for random ideas, both grand and minor; others throw everything of value into them. For the latter, sketchbooks are major works, at least inadvertently (like Leonardo's famous books, which feature his extraordinarily prescient inventions). In this case the book is not an indulgence but a sanctified reliquary of precious artifacts. These sacred books are, however, no more nor less significant than those containing simple, unpretentious notations.

A sketchbook cannot be measured by the same standards as a finished work. Nonetheless, some are more ambitious than others – although, granted, ambition is a relative distinction. There are those who are driven by concept (say, the concept of one landscape rendered for each day of the year, or a single word placed neatly on each page every hour). Yet most books are more ad hoc. The discipline imposed is simply to maintain the book in the first place. Some are ambitious by virtue of their brevity and economy, while others are ambitious because they are filled with layer upon layer of remarkable material. But ambition is not the only yardstick for judging a sketchbook. Sometimes the most obsessive is the least compelling, just as a cluttered attic is less impressive than a well-ordered library (or, at the very least, a well-organized second-hand bookstore). There must be a balance between the everything-including-the-kitchen-sink and the excessively studied sketchbook; usually this is the book where not every page is pristine, but neither is it unappealingly chaotic.

Of course, this might suggest that there is a right or wrong way to work a sketchbook; yet nothing is further from the truth. A sketchbook is, first and foremost, a means, not an end. It is the result of the natural urge of artists and designers to make marks on paper, to explore, analyze, and refine ideas and notions.

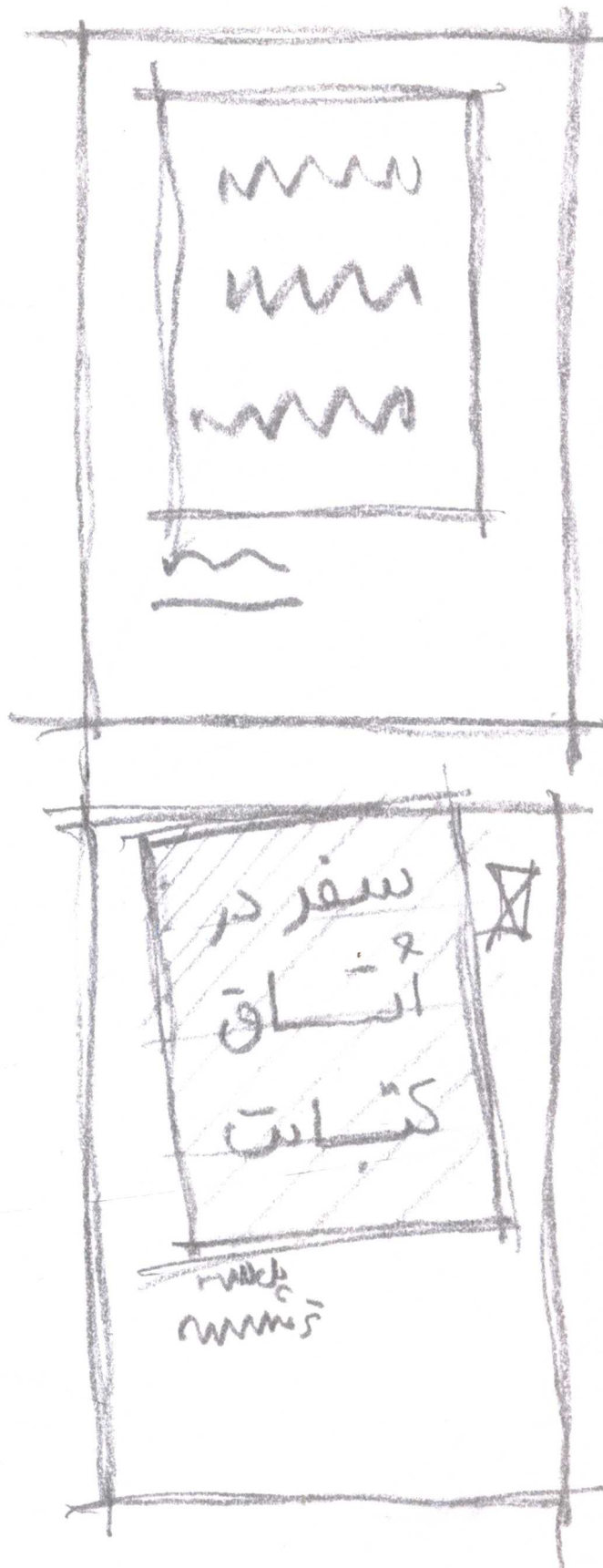
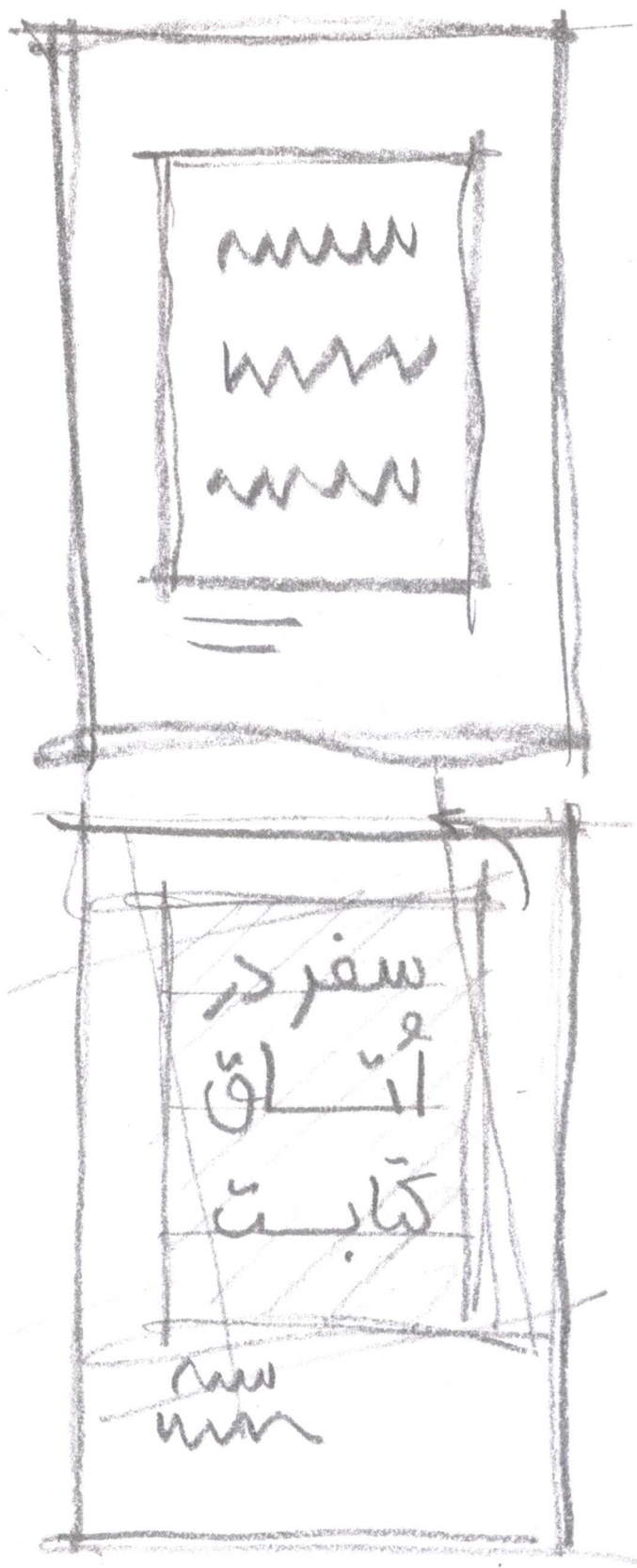
There are sketching classes in art schools, but despite the fad in scrapbooks and “scrapbooking,” there is no such thing as a sketchbook class. How can a teacher impose a method of making a sketchbook? It is like imposing a protocol for pure creativity. A sketchbook is a physical manifestation of unfettered thought. What is imagined is converted into a graphic idea and recorded. Governments, religions, and political parties may have attempted to control minds, but the sketchbook should never be subject to such influence. By virtue of being unfiltered, it should be free from stricture.

So how were the sketchbooks selected for this book? If freedom is the watchword, what was the standard for inclusion? The answer is simple: each was judged on its own merit and context. First, the artists and designers were invited to submit what they wanted to see published. Surprisingly, some

of the most prolific do not keep and never kept sketchbooks. Some keep only small notebooks with notations so spare that they are not visually interesting. As this is a visual book, visuality was the primary determinant. But not all visuals are created equal. Some books are indeed elaborate, filled with color or fragments of cultural material; others are decidedly economical, with fewer inclusions, but are no less interesting to look at (and to read).

The object is to survey how illustrators and designers see themselves, informally, through the lens of their sketchbooks, and this was accomplished by recruiting a range of known and lesser-known keepers of the book. The selection of which pages to present was more intuitive, and was based almost entirely on the graphic impact of each piece. It might be argued that one page of a sketchbook is as good as the next, but that is simply not the case. Some days are better than others, in the same way that some works have greater impact. Although a sketchbook may not be a continuous narrative, it is still an entity; excerpting pages is not necessarily the most effective means of showing it. However, given the constraints of this format, it will have to do.

What overall impression will this book produce? In other words, why is a book about sketchbooks meaningful or useful? As an anthology, it may be compared with a collection of short stories or poems. Each page or assortment of pages tells one or more tales about the maker. Some are probably more revealing than others – some may be more profound. But in the final analysis the sketchbooks provide insight into individuals who, as illustrators and designers, are usually known only by their formal commercial endeavors and not by their purely expressive ideas. That is sketchbook appeal.



MAJID ABBASI

Majid Abbasi, Tehran-based creative director of Did Graphics, admits that many of his sketches are digital, not drawn: "Normally I do my designs using graphic software on my computer, and sometimes I file these scribbles in folders labeled 'Practices' for different projects." These roughs, he adds, "remind me of the process I have undergone to attain results." Since most are done on the computer, the sketches are similar to the finished works, "except for the details," he notes.

Sometimes the method and the design are influenced by an occasion or a special work. For instance, in designing the cover of Paul Auster's novel *Travels in the Scriptorium* (in 2008; shown here), "I was inspired by a romantic message." Abbasi keeps "a load of sketches" in small notebooks, as well as single sheets of A4 paper and "several folders on my computer." The pieces here are recent, but the books themselves span nearly fifteen years – "though all are few and far between."

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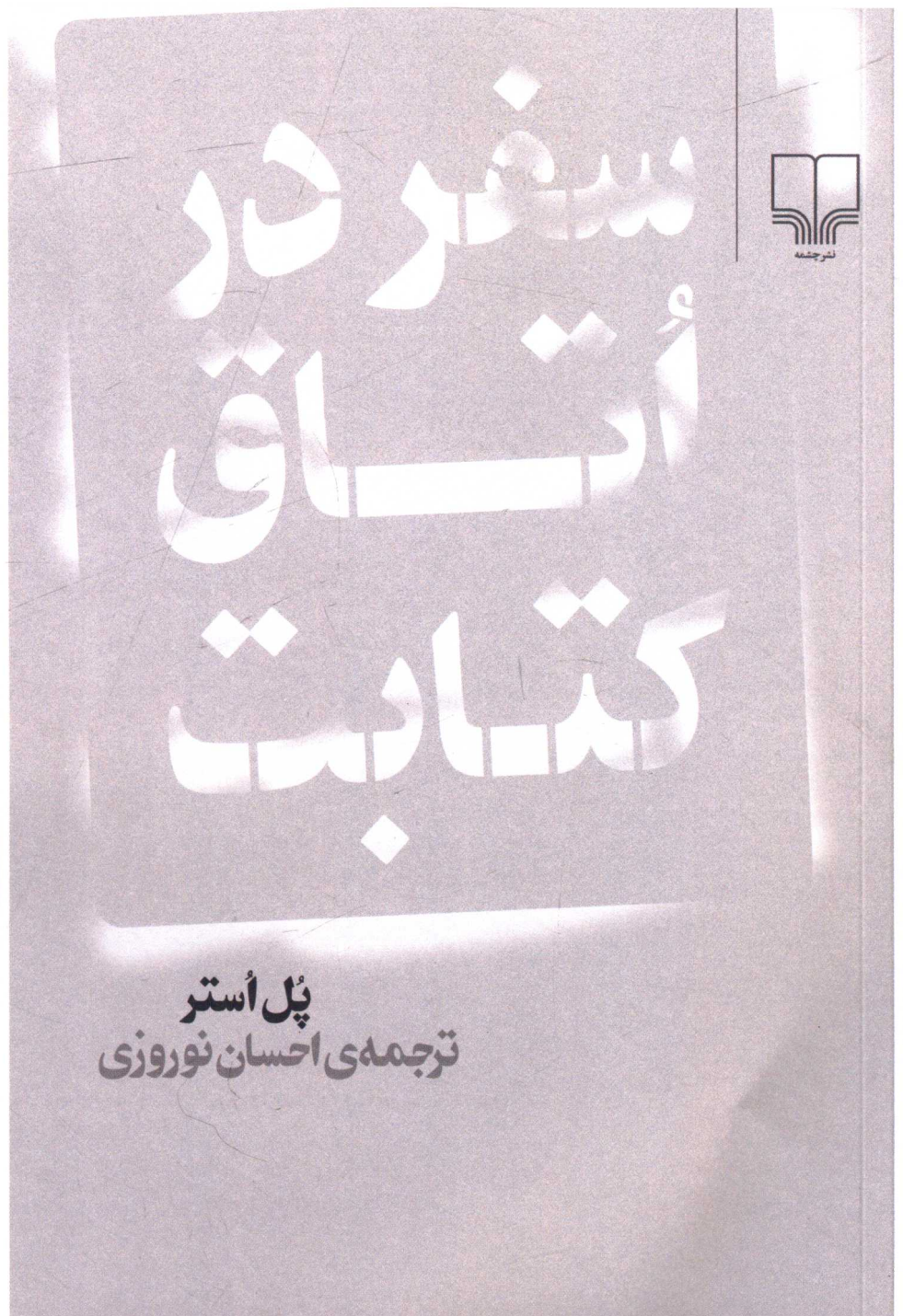
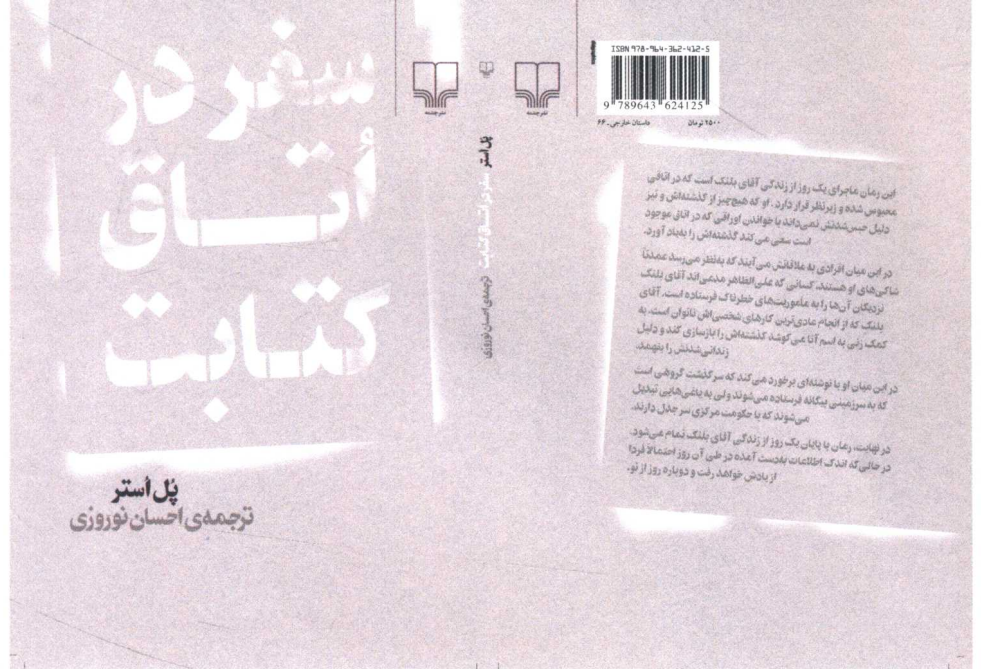
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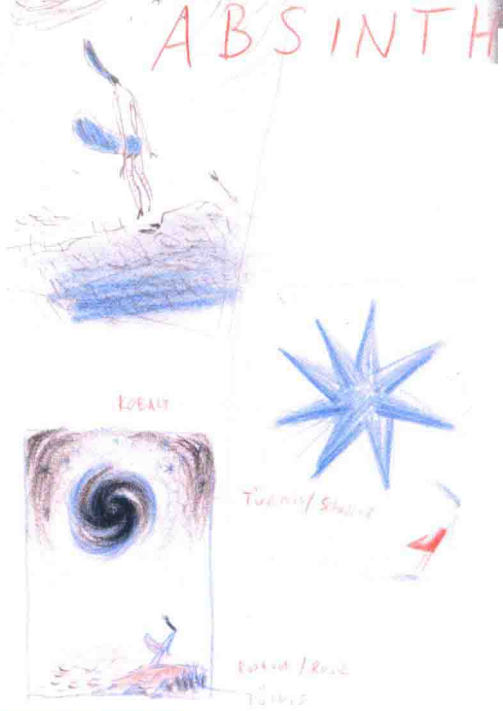
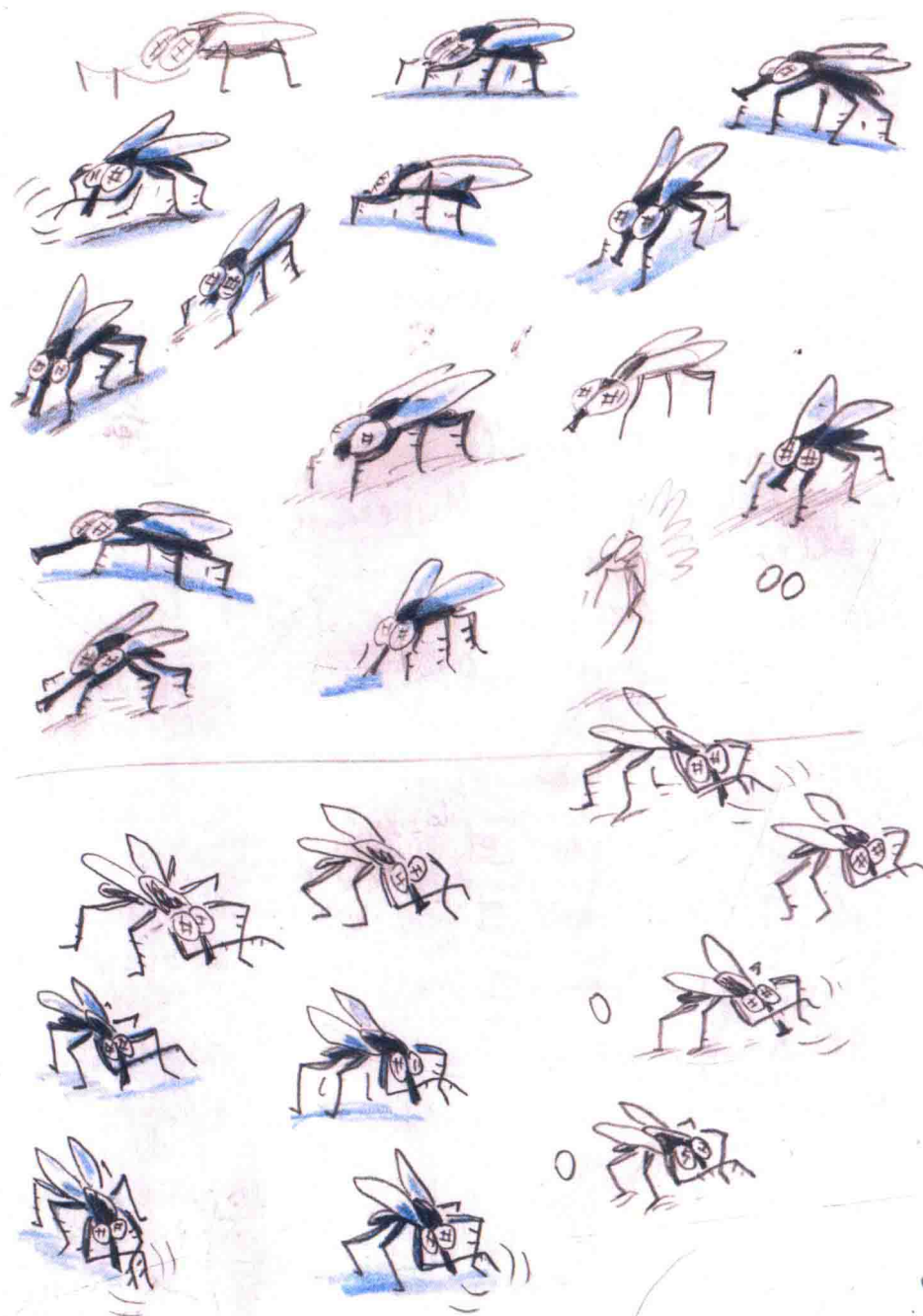
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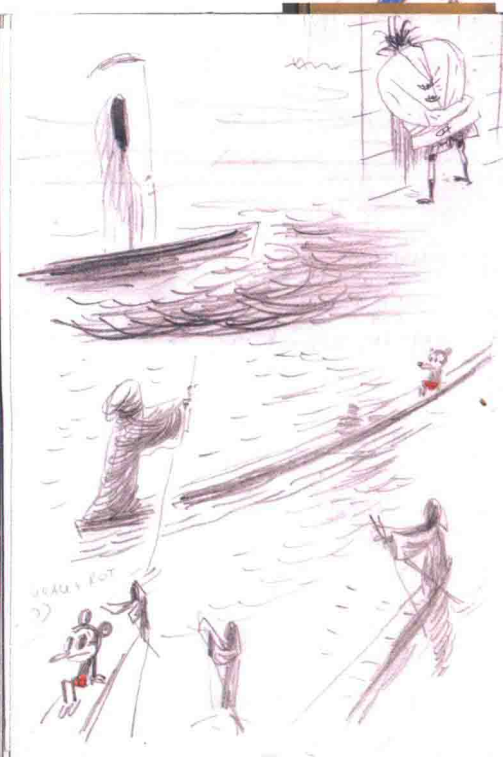
CHRISTOPH ABBREDERIS

For the past twenty-five years, Christoph Abbredederis, an Austrian illustrator and designer who spent many years living in Spain, has kept sketchbooks to help him “develop creative ideas while I’m resting after lunch.” Now, that is a fine way to pass the siesta. “I make sketches about things that come to my mind while in the satisfied haze. I call these books ‘siesta books’.”

There is a critical distinction, however, between these sketches and his professional work because “in these ‘siesta books’ I allow my mind to associate freely, and I find that the ideas flow easier than when I am working on a project for a client.” Visualizing Abbredederis lounging and sketching after a fine meal is almost as satisfying as seeing the sketchbooks themselves.

“Sometimes those sketches contain a special wit or catch a certain situation in a way I can never, ever reproduce,” he confides. And although there might be thematic recurrences, Abbredederis feels that these are “less important than the ideas that emerge.”

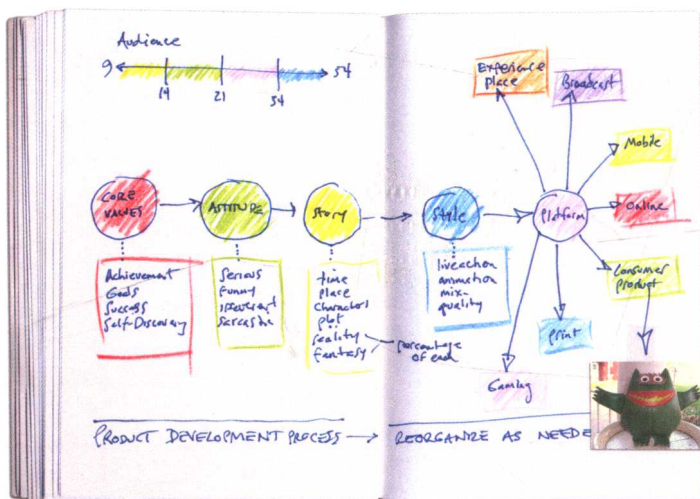
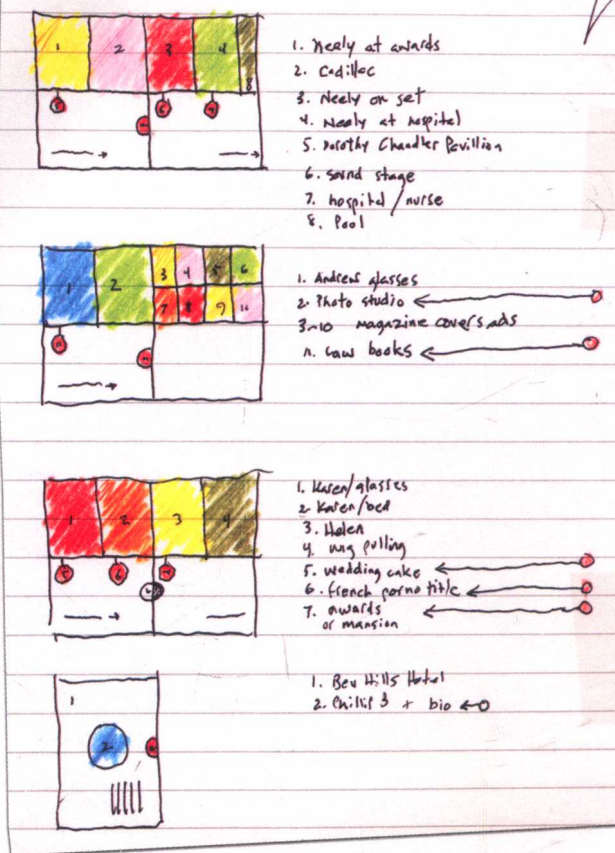
In addition to his “siesta sketchbook,” from which images created in 2008–9 are shown here, Abbredederis has “a ‘while I watch television book,’ a ‘travel sketchbook,’ a book for stories and comics and a little booklet I take with me wherever I go to make notes.” For professional work he keeps the sketches and binds them, depending on the project, into different booklets.



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SEAN ADAMS

Sean Adams, co-founder of AdamsMorioka in Beverly Hills, California, has kept a sketchbook since his first day at CalArts in 1982. The purpose is "to help my quickly fading memory," Adams admits. "I'll have what seems to be a good idea and write it down, or come across an object and tape it into the book. I'll find a wonderful color palette in a strange place, such as Mary Blair's for the movie *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and simply shoot the screen, print out the images and attach matching Pantone® colors. I also use them in meetings. I'm terrible at taking notes about important issues like deliverables, but good at doing strange charts that diagram the client's business."

Keeping the sketchbooks is a discipline for Adams: "When I look at them as a whole, the common theme of the notebooks is popular culture combined with a Surrealist process. Sounds fancy, but there is often no premeditation of the objects or images selected. For example, the spread with a product narrative diagram was created for a global entertainment brand. I cannot remember what prompted me to attach a Nauga Monster to the page. But the final identity for the client did incorporate some of the attitude that George Lois used for the Naugahyde Nauga Monster advertisements. There is no rational association beyond family connection and memory."

