

## Chapter 2

# Doodles—From the Beginning

*Demonic frenzy, moping melancholy, and moon-struck madness*

(Milton: *Paradise Lost*- a remarkably apt and succinct description of manic depression)

The beginning for me was the year 1998 when, during an episode of severe depression, I began to doodle, which I had previously never done, as I thought. I just took to my bed in a catatonic “trance” that overwhelms one in depression. Sporadic indulgence in art during a scientific career, apart, this is when art became much more meaningful for me as a regular activity to help with depressive phases, and subsequently as a preventive measure.

Within a few weeks, this doodling had become a habit and a focus that started to get me “out of myself”—that dark den into which one retreats when depressed, shunning the world and lacking any motivation to do anything, see anyone, and accomplish even the most trivial task.

Manic-depression distorts moods and thoughts, incites dreadful behaviours, destroys the basis of rational thought, and too often erodes the desire and will to live.

(Kay Redfield Jamison; *An unquiet mind*)

I start with a collection of these early doodles. In the years since that time, it was not unusual that a bigger work of art began to take shape from a doodle, even if it always started from just a continuous squiggle on a blank page. Doodling requires nothing other than a sheet of paper and a pencil or pen. It requires no training, and the interesting thing is that the outcome is mostly unpredictable. It develops rather than tries to capture a specific image that one has retained in the mind, as many a professional artist would do. This, in its simple way, begins to help in unravelling some of the agitation, confusion and conflicts existing in the mind of the depressed person.

I mentioned in the Prologue that I had done very little art throughout my career, except for a series of drawings and paintings done between 1968 and 1970 in the USA. In reviewing some of the anatomical drawings I had done at college, a small piece of green graph paper (as was used in 1959) fell out, and I was quite astonished to see that it was a doodle, no doubt done during a lecture. It was entitled “Writer’s world” (the doodle below), but I cannot remember doing it or having any reason for

this subject. This was not followed up until 1998, and I cannot say that I was usually an avid doodler during lectures, or when, for example, having a long conversation of the telephone. But there was a beginning, and in college I had two manic episodes and two depressions every year. At that time I struggled through the depressions and tried to hide my condition, making up for my poor performance during depression by furiously working during the manic phases, only to exacerbate the cycle until later I had to receive clinical treatment in my twenties.

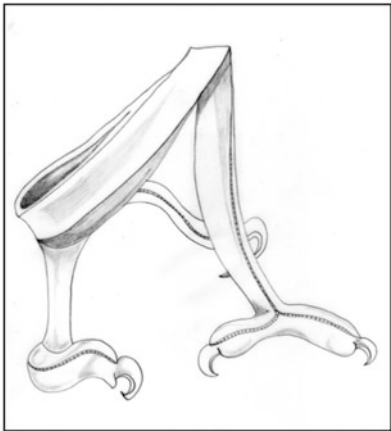


I started to doodle in November 1998, and I must have completed 40 doodles in a period of 2–3 months of depression during the winter of 1998–1999. Most were simple doodles, drawn in perhaps 15 minutes, sometimes with a vague object in mind as the first lines were drawn that soon took on a semblance of some real image, and definitely so in the next picture (with its remark at the top revealing my condition).

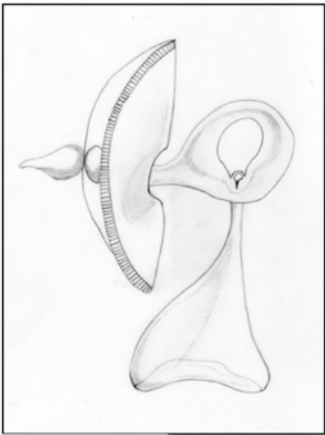
The next eight pictures in pencil each fit neatly on A4 pages. The first six were done in the depression of winter 1998. More often after a few random lines that started a doodle, it would begin to suggest something vaguely recognizable that I had no preconceived, such as a skirt or an old table leg, although the “finished product” was seldom a familiar object. Few of them were scribbled doodles; they are mostly

tidy, usually with clear outline forms with quite sparse shading. This contrasts with how I later set about doodling (as demonstrated in the next chapter), especially more recently (2010/2011) in producing those found at the end of Chapter 4.

From the start, I have had the habit of giving each doodle a title that indicated the object or mood it seemed to resemble.



Grip stand



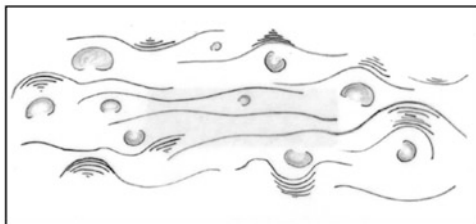
Glassy eardrop



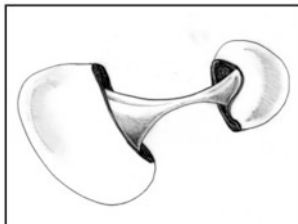
Vase/skirt



Draped urn

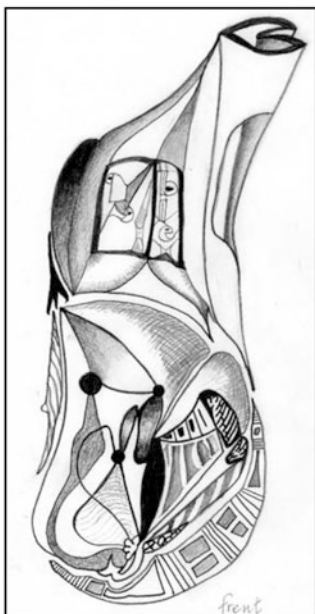


Follow the flow

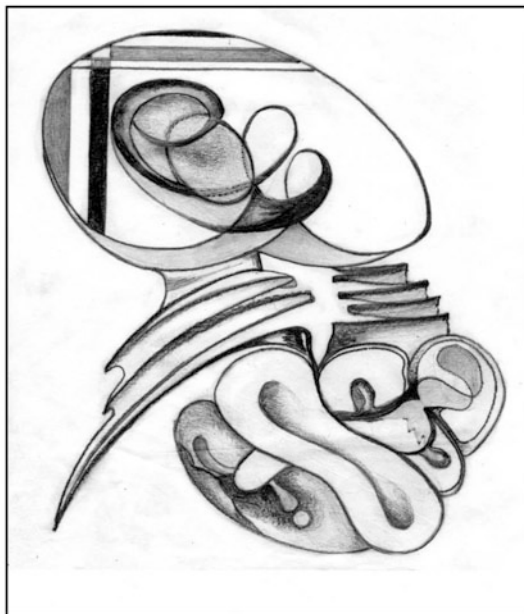


Full swivel

Later, the “doodles” remained relatively small, but were done less hurriedly. These have little or no recognizable overall form or subject, but include hints of recognizable objects, with people having quite different ideas about what they might represent. These started to be drawn at least 2 years after those above. The names can be as bizarre as the doodles themselves, and I often pondered for some time over them to find ones that were catchy; indeed, some have been given names that I have invented, e.g. Frent.



**Frent**  
Pencil  
January 2011  
9 x 14



**Clot**  
Pencil  
December 2006  
12 x 13



**Factory fancy**  
Pencil  
December 2004  
10 x 16



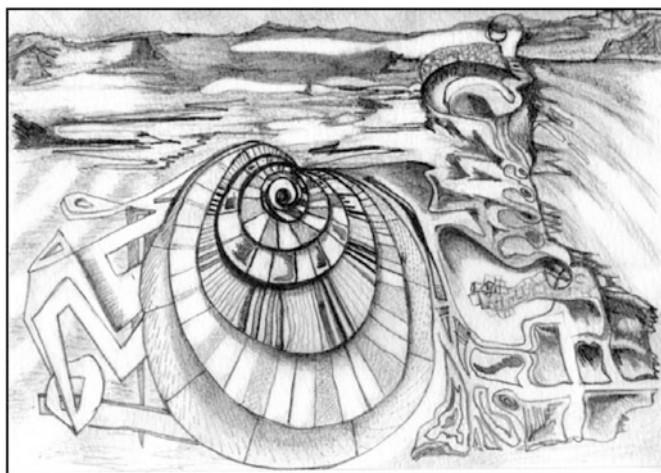
**Exogenesis**  
Pencil  
October 2010  
11 x 11

Soon drawings started to become larger and took longer still than 15 minutes, sometimes a day or more, on and off; but these are nothing compared with the bigger doodles that came later.

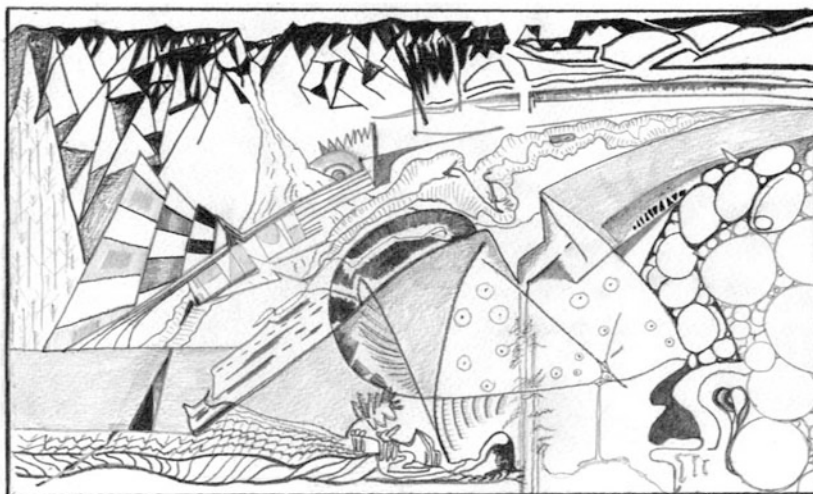


**Beach forms**  
Pencil  
November 2004  
17 x 16

The one above has the sea as a background, and oddly this is another recurrent theme has turned up many times over the years of dooddling, as the next picture indicates, here with mountains.



**Beach scene**  
Pencil  
January 2006  
16 x 26



**Old Esplanade**  
Pencil  
February 2005  
24 x 15

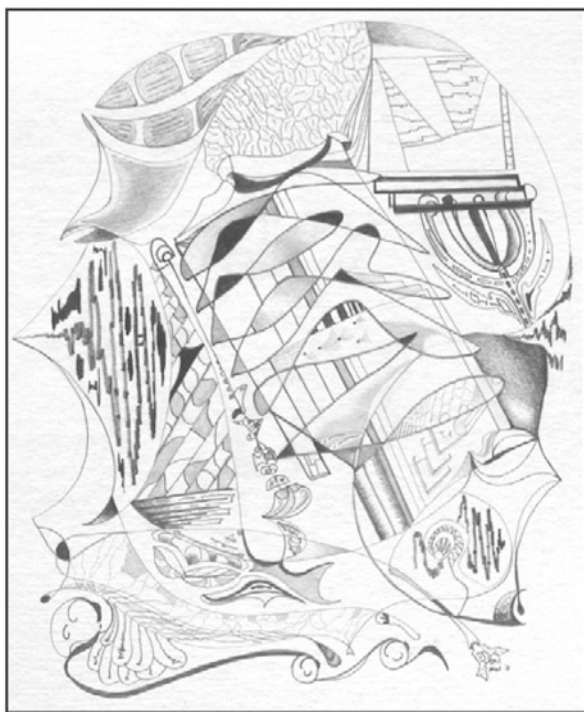


**Bankok**  
Pencil  
October 2005  
11 x 16



**Ice-man**  
December 2006  
Pencil  
12 x 13

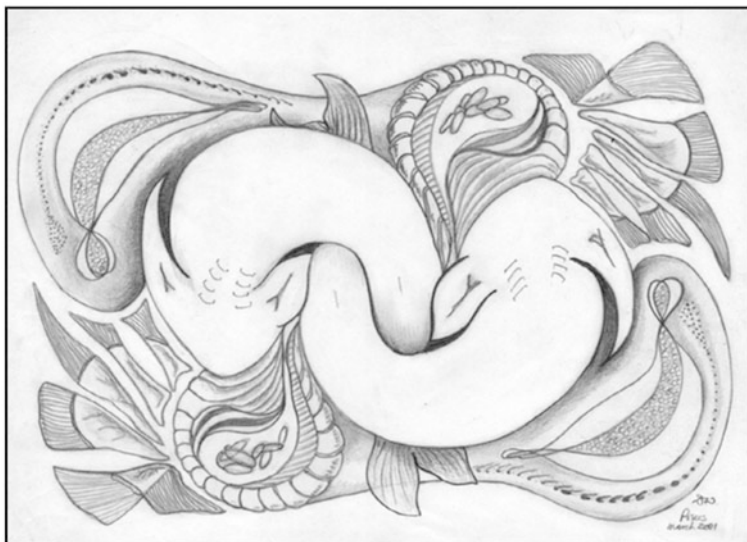
Many of the doodles started to get that they would not fit easily on to A4 sheets, on which most previous images had been drawn.



**Headache**  
**Pencil**  
**March 2011**  
**21 x 24**

It is odd that the doodle below developed into a very formal evocation of the motif of the two fishes representing Pisces. Once it had got to this stage, it had to be done for my grandson, who, like me, is a Piscean. It is ironic that the yin-yang of Pisces is the sign of the Zodiac that accords with my own bipolar temperament. Some might see this as “destiny”, not without meaning in realms of which we may currently have no knowledge; but I just see it simply as a coincidence. The second image is a play on the yin-yang motif, which would also make an apt logo for BP. But it also harps back to a doodle earlier in this chapter at the top of page 12.





**Pisces**  
**March 2001**  
**Pencil**  
**28 x 19**



**Core yin-yang**  
**Pencil**  
**January 2006**  
**10 x 12**

BipolART

Art and Bipolar Disorder: A Personal Perspective

Wheatley, D.N.

2012, XII, 128 p. 127 illus., 42 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-007-4871-2