Susan Kare – Creative Mind Behind Apple's Design

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Susan Kare, one of the Apple's most creative minds, received an AIGA medal for her remarkable work. Kare, suitably known as the „the woman who gave the Macintosh a smile,“ designed revolutionary icons and fonts for the original Mac, creating the modern Mac's personality as we know it today.

"If the Mac turned out to be such a revolutionary object—a pet instead of a home appliance, a spark for the imagination instead of a mere work tool—it is thanks to Susan's fonts and icons, which gave it voice, personality, style, and even a sense of humor. Cherry bomb, anyone?" joked Paola Antonelli, the senior curator of architecture and design at the Museum of Modern Art, reflecting on Kare's work.

The medal, also awarded to design icons such as Paul Rand, Charles and Ray Eames, Milton Glaser and Saul Steinberg, celebrates Susan's pursuit and accomplishment of perfect design equilibrium – the balance between simplicity and abstraction, often the single element distinguishing a good design from a bad one.

The tools used back in her early days at Apple were, in the least, basic.

"It's easy to forget how rudimentary the tools were. When I got to Apple at first I was still working on paper. If I got some graph paper I could make small images out of the squares and transfer those onto the computer screen."

"Andy Herzfeld wrote an icon editor and that let you see magnified what you were working on and also as you turned the bits on and off you could see it real size. It was a huge asset that it automatically generated the hex values because before that I was taught how to look at each group of four pixels and write down each of those hexadecimal numbers."

On the importance of simplicity and attention to detail, Susan reflects:

"Simple images can communicate with wide audiences over time. Icon design is like solving a puzzle, trying to marry an image and idea that, ideally, will be easy for people to understand and remember."

*"When something's really realistic, it looks like somebody in particular who's **not you**. When you take all the detail away, everyone can project **themselves** on to something simple. The fewer details, the more universal something is. That was actually an asset of having to work within 32x32 pixels and monochrome."*

"I learned a lot about the cumulative value of attention to detail from Steve [Jobs], and about pushing the limits of a medium. I still think about his philosophy of not showing too much information at once and the value of simplicity in visual messaging."

Susan created the iconic smiley face in an attempt to make the design 'friendly and humane'.

"The happy Mac came from my love at 14 years old of those buttons with the smiley face. We had permission to be friendly. That was part of the brief. I love to make things friendly and humane — I find that so pleasurable."

After her work for Apple, Susan, now sixty-four, continued working as a designer for Microsoft and Facebook, now being a creative director for Pinterest. Her revolutionary steps were part of the now ever-growing trend of visual communication which undoubtedly makes our online lives easy, pleasurable and fun.

Sources: uxdesign.cc, newyorker.com

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