

Excerpts from the script of the traveling exhibition: “Jim Henson’s Fantastic World.”

TEXT PANEL

I’ve always been most intrigued by what can be done with the visual image. I feel that is what is strongest about the work I do . . . the visual image.
—Jim Henson

VISUAL THINKER

Jim Henson thought in images. His fertile mind continuously generated wondrous creatures and fantastic characters to inhabit his stories and songs. As a child, he drew cartoons and pictures, built mobiles, took photographs, and imagined new worlds. As an adult, he channeled these talents and more into his art.

Jim was fascinated by the many ways our minds form and process ideas, whether through words, music, or the visual image. He relentlessly explored new ways to share his optimistic view of the world.

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GRAPHIC PANEL

Still from *Time Piece*

Still from the movie *Time Piece*, 1965

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LABEL 1.1

Abstract doodles, 1960
Ink on paper

“I don’t know exactly where ideas come from. . . . It’s just a matter of us figuring out how to receive the ideas waiting to be heard.”
—Jim Henson

Jim made this page of doodles during a puppet festival in Detroit. His habitual doodling filled his sketch pads and meeting notes with potentially useful ideas, and even appeared on his personal correspondence.

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LABEL 1.2

Moss-Gathering Rolling Stone, 1963
Ink on paper

In Jim's imagination, rolling stones actually did gather moss, and new animal species evolved daily. In Jim's sketches, inanimate objects dance, sing, and gobble each other up.

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LABEL 1.3

Monkipus-Chimprutipus-Orangarat, 1963
Unrealized puppet design for the Chrysler Pavilion of the New York World's Fair
Ink on paper

"Jim didn't think in terms of boundaries at all the way the rest of us do. There are always these fences we build around ourselves and our ideas. Jim seemed to have no fences."—Jon Stone, *Sesame Street* producer and director

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LABEL 1.4

Watermelon's I Don't Know, 1960
Photo collage and crayon on board

This fanciful image of Kermit was made for an unpublished book about a voracious creature named Yorick and his taste for watermelon. The style mimics Jim's use of animation over a filmed image to express a character's thoughts. Jim's obvious misspelling of "watermelon" remains a mystery.

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LABEL 1.5

"Visual Thinking" script and publicity photograph for *Sam and Friends* television show, c. 1960
Facsimile

Jim's first regular television show (with future wife Jane Nebel) presented opportunities for him to experiment with various ways of communicating his ideas. In "Visual Thinking" (on monitor), Kermit's thoughts are expressed through animated images superimposed on film.

**VIDEO KIOSK A
KIOSK LABEL A**

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You are watching:

“Visual Thinking” from the show *Sam and Friends*, WRC-TV,
Washington, D.C., c. 1960

Drill Team Puppets performed by Jim Henson and Jerry Juhl at the
U.S. Food Fair in Hamburg, Germany, 1961

Henson family home movie excerpts by Jim Henson: *Christmas
1960* and *Family Trip 1963*

Cat and Mouse, animated film by Jim Henson, early 1960s

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LABEL 1.6

Design for one of Jim’s earliest mechanical puppets, 1961
Pencil on paper

Jim’s innovative design allowed two puppeteers to manipulate a
whole battalion of soldiers at once. This experimentation laid the
groundwork for the internal mechanisms that control the Muppets’
facial expressions. Eventually, Jim and his colleagues developed
an award-winning, computer-controlled system of movement that
set the industry standard for animatronic techniques.

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**GRAPHIC PANEL
GP-1.2**

Jim and Jerry performing Drill Team
puppet

Jim Henson (*right*) and Jerry Juhl, performing Drill Team puppet,
1961

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**FLOOR CASE 1
LABEL FC-1**

Kermit the Frog, early 1970s
Built by Caroly Wilcox from patterns developed by
Don Sahlin
Fleece fabric and polyurethane foam

Unlike Jim's first puppets, which were made of relatively stiff materials like plasticwood, Kermit was soft and hollow. With no stuffing in the head, every finger movement produced a subtle change of facial expression. As Jim explained, "He's one of the simplest kinds of puppets you can make, and he's very flexible because of that... Your hand has a lot of flexibility to it, and what you want to do is to build a puppet that can reflect all that flexibility." The original Kermit puppet was made in 1955 from Jim's mother's old spring coat and a ping-pong ball.

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For more information about "Jim Henson's Fantastic World," please contact the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

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