

REFLECTIONS

Climate-inspired Drawing: How I Enjoy Amateur Art

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Coincidence of necessity and advances in computational resources have inevitably turned many climate scientists, including myself, into pseudo-programmers; some have been fully swept away by the “big data” wave. As a result, on a daily basis, my mind is trapped in many “DOs and IFs,” and the exhaustion propagates even into the after-work hours. At one point, I felt the need for something to break me out of these loops, at least during my personal time. But for various reasons, I had never invested in hobbies that I could use as an immediate solution, when needed. I first thought it would be easier to start with something related to my expertise, such as climate data sonification. I consequently bought a keyboard—fortunately an inexpensive one. But soon I realized that learning music from scratch would require a level of dedication that I did not have! The next stop was visual arts. For some time, I had this idea to transform the climatic features into some forms of human-like objects. But I was always intimidated to pursue it due to my lack of art skills. That intimidation may be attributed to the fact that scientists are trained to be perfectionists, perhaps partly due to the often harsh peer reviews. So we are usually hesitant to try creating something outside our expertise. Finally, one day I overcame those discouraging feelings, went to an art supply store, bought some drawing materials, drove to Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, sat across from downtown, and started drawing Mr.



FIG. 1. Mr. Hadley Cell



Amin Dezfuli

Hadley Cell, who has a mustache (Fig. 1)! I tried to incorporate the equatorial convective cells, rainfall, and soil wetness, as well as the meridional circulation and westerly jets. At the time, I was a postdoc in Prof. Zaitchik’s Lab at Johns Hopkins University. At the beginning of our group meetings I would show my latest drawing and have everyone guess what climatic feature they thought it resembled. It was a fun experience. Since then, I have continued this endeavor sporadically, and along the way I have been inspired with personal life events. For example, when my daughter was born last year, a stroller instantly became a new component of our daily life. And tropical convective systems

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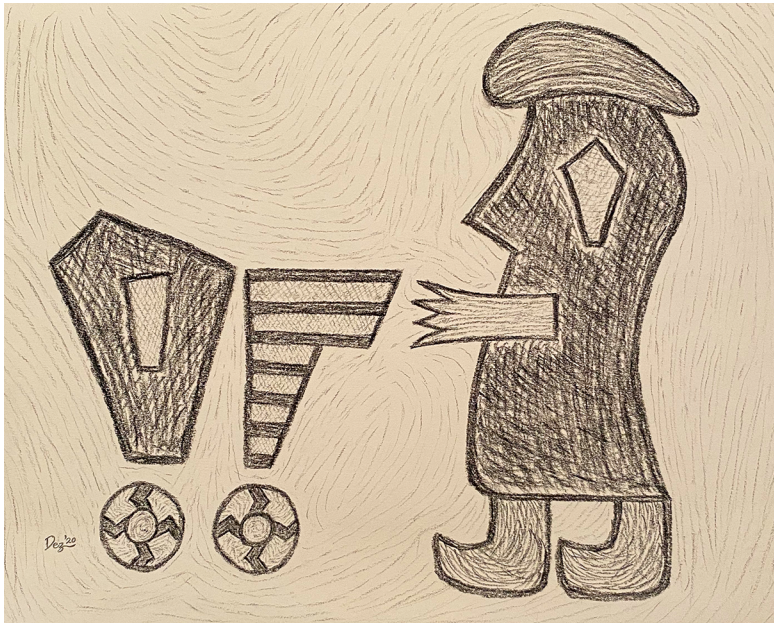


FIG. 2. Convective Stroller

I would probably need to focus strongly on technical details at the expense of enjoying it less and yet adding a new thing that would need so much technical care. Of course, the lack of skills hampers my ability to express my ideas. But for now, I have chosen to compromise the latter, and I advocate for other scientists to be an “imperfect artist.” ●

have always been a part of my research interests. Combining these two emerged into the idea of Fig. 2, which shows a negative/positive vertical shear associated with an easterly jet and cold pool resulting from a mature convective cell. Such features can be seen in the West African monsoon system. There are a few other components that I will let you guess, and you can email me your response at amin.dezfuli@nasa.gov. The first correct answer will receive an original drawing! I should emphasize that these sketches are not meant to be schematic, so various components may be distorted and not to scale.

I started this effort with no training or prior painting experience beyond that of elementary and middle schools—I’m sure it is not hard to tell! I have resisted formal training because the main point of doing this was to find something to enjoy in my free time. If I pursued this professionally,

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