Mars in Full Color

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“There is a vast and cool silence on Mars, sometimes broken by the sound of a boulder perched at the rim of an ancient impact crater? formed long before the Code of Hammurabi or Plato’s tale of Atlantis? giving way to inexorable gravity, finally rolling down a slope before coming to a stop and continuing its vigil. Somewhere at the Martian poles, warmed by weak but still potent heat from the sun, ice cracks on a cliff, sending material plummeting below, raising dust clouds that linger and slowly disappear. The wind works relentlessly, yes, its echo everywhere across sculpted rocks, but mostly, this is a quiet world.”

So begins what the authors of a new book call an armchair exploration of the Red Planet: Chock-full of stunning images taken with the most powerful camera ever sent to another planet and weighing in at nearly 8 pounds, "Mars: The Pristine Beauty of the Red Planet" features close to 200 carefully selected photographs taken by the UA-led High Resolution Imaging Science Experiment, which has been orbiting Mars on NASA’s Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter [1] since 2006.

"Except," the introduction written by HiRISE outreach coordinator Ari Espinoza continues, "no one would have believed that this eerie silence would be broken by a new sound, a screaming coming across the sky, the alien noise of machines sent from another planet. Yet these are not war machines sent on a missionary enterprise; they are machines of exploration, of intellectual and scientific curiosity, whose important data are pored over by keen eyes, adding new layers of knowledge about a planet that has captured our imagination for so long. Ironically, our machines may be lasting testaments to those who sent them, whether on the ground or in orbit, as instruments of peace and discovery, even if a human foot never takes the next giant leap there."

The result is a visual journey across the surface of Mars taken by what the HiRISE team calls "the people’s camera at Mars." With artistic glimpses at actively eroding slopes, impact craters, strange polar landscapes, avalanches and even spectacular pictures capturing the Phoenix Lander and the Curiosity Rover descending on their parachutes, the reader gets to see what researchers and scientists are seeing.

Click here [2] to see a gallery of images from the book.

Arranged into chapters that guide the reader from familiar features such as sand dunes to more alien landscapes one cannot glimpse on our own planet, the photos and accompanying captions amount to 425 pages compiled by UA HiRISE scientists.

"Mars: The Pristine Beauty of the Red Planet" is authored by Alfred McEwen, professor of planetary geology and principal investigator of HiRISE, deputy principle investigator Candice Hansen-Koharcheck, who is a senior scientist at the Planetary Science Institute, and Espinoza. The book was just published by the University of Arizona Press and is available at
bookstores and online [3] for $75.

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