

The Golden Record is what Carl Sagan and his collaborators called the collection of sounds, greetings, images, and music that they sent into space mounted on the Voyager spacecrafts in August and September of 1977. The record itself is made out of gold-plated copper and is covered by an aluminum seal electroplated with uranium-238. The seal has coded visual information that tells how to play the record and where to find the planet Earth. The bulk of the record is made up of music and pictures—118 images, an audio collage of Earth sounds, and 27 musical tracks—but it opens up with words. The record contains audio greetings in 55 different languages, the living and the dead, all of which roughly translate to “Hello, out there, from here.” There are also 15 a-bit-more-substantial messages recorded by delegates from the UN Outer Space Committee, a spoken message from the Secretary-General of the UN, a typed list of U.S. House and Senate members, a letter from the President of the United States, and one recorded whalesong.

Before the Golden Record there was the Pioneer plaque, attached to Pioneers 10 and 11 and sent into space about five years before Voyager. The message about humanity contained on the Pioneer plaque is a simple line illustration of a naked man and a naked woman standing next to each other.

The two figures take up about a third of the plaque's 6 x 9 inches. They stand in front of a rendering of the Pioneer craft, for scale. The man is holding up his hand as if he's waving "hello." But he isn't waving his hand to say "hello." The plaque's designers—Carl Sagan, his then-wife Linda Salzman, and astronomer Frank Drake—assumed that any aliens who find the plaque won't know that this gesture means "hello." The man was drawn holding up his hand to display his opposable thumb and the flexibility of his limbs. This was done so the aliens will understand that we have parts that move. The aliens won't see the image and assume that we are as rigid in being as we are in representation, hard lines on metal traveling through space. The man and the woman are not holding hands so the aliens won't assume that we are a conjoined, duplex being. The only hair on their bodies is on their eyebrows and their heads. The woman kind of rests her weight on one hip, chillin'. In the original sketch she had a vulva, but NASA had it erased.

The public reacted badly.

People said NASA was sending porn into space. They said the woman looked too passive, maybe even subordinate to the man. How come she wasn't waving her hand? She and the man next to her were obviously white. Or they were not.

Because of this controversy, the Voyager record does not include a photograph of a naked man and a naked woman among its 118 images.

© 2016 Rose Metal Press. No reproduction permitted.

Though really when I say Golden Record I mean Golden Records, since there are two. There are also two Voyagers, even though people usually only talk about Voyager 1. Because it's moving away faster.

© 2016 Rose Metal Press. No reproduction permitted.

The 55 greetings begin with Sumerian. Which makes sense: so did writing.

© 2016 Rose Metal Press. No reproduction permitted.

An attempt at something like David Markson's *bricolage*. Which might look and feel uneven when appropriated scientific specs are juxtaposed next to, let's say, a joke, but taken as a whole, it forms an operatic unity. Which is exactly what the Golden Record was about.