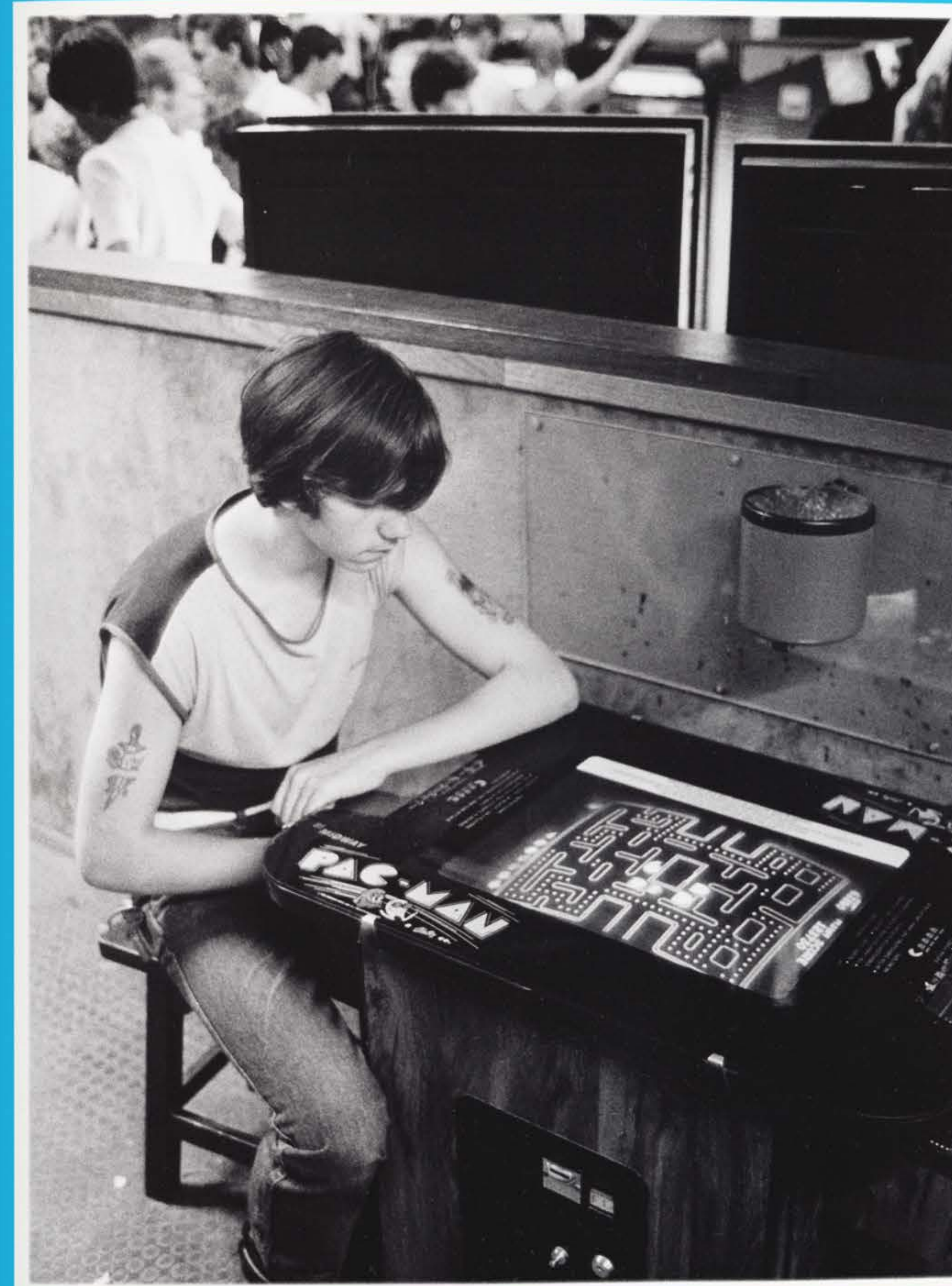




Young girls playing side-by-side at a row of Pac-Man arcade machines at an arcade in Times Square, New York City, June 1, 1982.



A teenager plays a Pac-Man cocktail cabinet in Scheveningen, the Netherlands, in 1985. Pac-Man would continue to be an arcade staple long after the game launched in 1980.

Beautiful Curves

With the game's development at its midpoint, other hands at Namco worked on visual design elements beyond the monitor. The name came first, as Namco's marketing team needed it to brand both the game and character, promoting them on items like sales flyers, advertisements, and the game cabinet itself. Having lived with a chomping character for months, a name wasn't too hard for the team to find: the name came from "an eating sound, as often seen in cartoons, 'Paku Paku,'" Iwatani told an interviewer. "Other options also came up, including 'Pakkuri,'" he said. "We had meetings on this, but the name was finalized as *Puck Man* pretty quickly."⁵⁶

Before Namco's licensing deal with Midway Manufacturing in the United States, *Puck Man* was the game's official name (though that moniker would also remain for some territories beyond Midway's North American licensing agreement, including the UK, West Germany, Italy and other countries). After settling the discussion, the team looked into the name's availability, checking against known trademarks and patents, and found that toy company Tomy had already claimed the title for future use. Iwatani contacted them (as he was personally charged with handling copyright matters for their game in Japan) to negotiate for the right to use the name. After Namco paid Tomy a one-time usage fee, the matter was settled, though they had alternate names at the ready if Tomy had not agreed. "In that case, the game was going to be called *Paku-emon*," Iwatani said. "We would be using the -emon extension used in 'old-fashioned' Japanese, similar to [comic character] Doraemon's name."⁵⁷

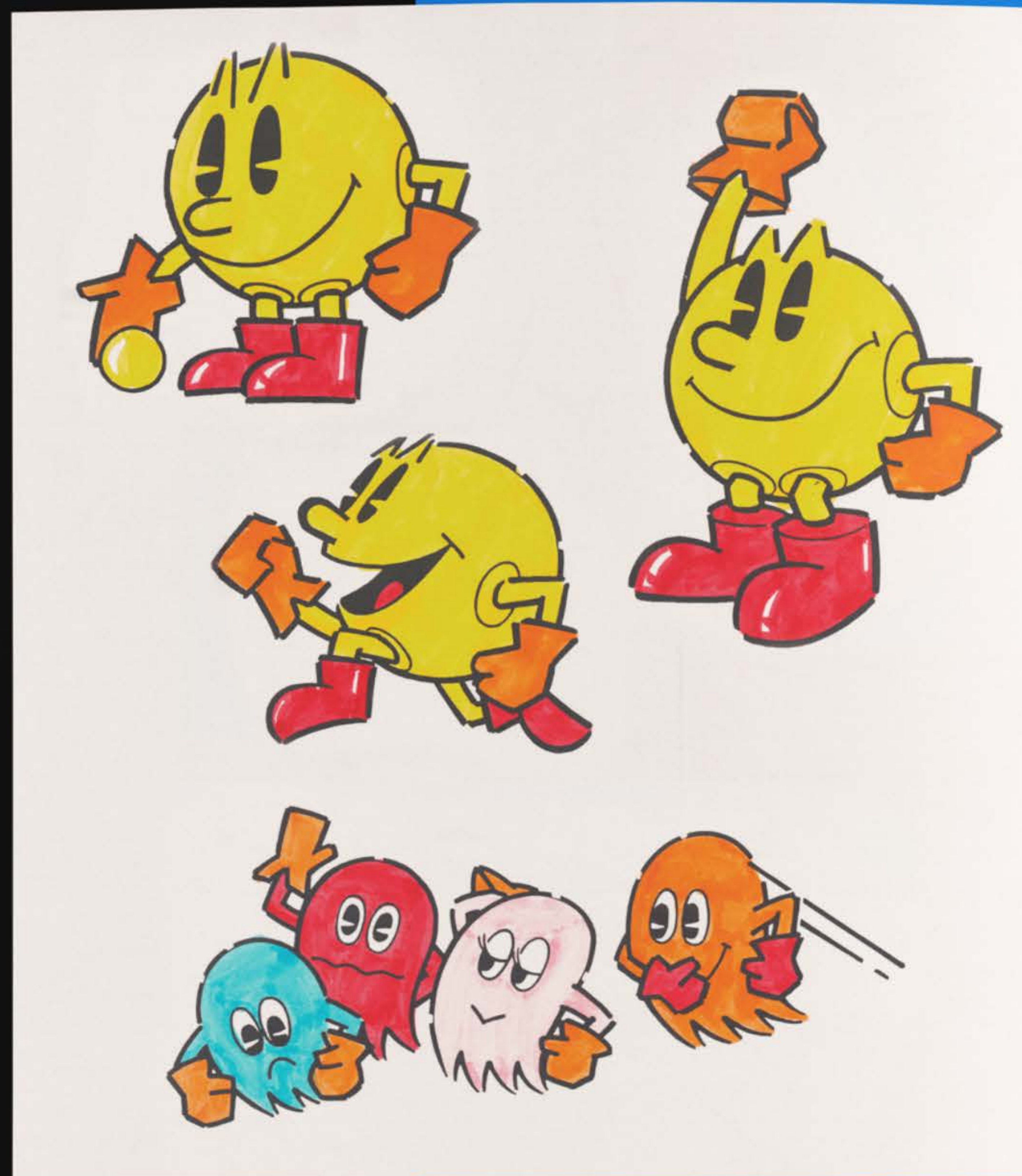


Left page: This promotional sticker highlights Puck Man's dynamism, emphasized by dotted lines Tadashi Yamashita used in the first illustrations of the character.



Right page: The arcade flyer for Namco's *Puck Man* introduced the game's eating theme, not only by illustrating a hungry Puck Man, but also in marketing copy that read "Watch out! Eat the blinking power food!"





Original Pac-Man drawings by Tadashi Yamashita. Yamashita brought a lighthearted personality to the character who was nearly abstract in his on-screen debut.

Namco artist Tadashi Yamashita discussed his Pac-Man illustration work in an interview aired on December 17th, 2020. While Toru Iwatani has served as the public face of the Pac-Man team over the decades, Yamashita was rightfully honored for his significant contributions during the San Diego Comic Con Character Hall of Fame induction of Pac-Man.



DRAWING ON INSPIRATION



Across the decades, Namco artist and designer Tadashi Yamashita quietly created scores of powerful logos and evocative illustrations for some of Namco's most iconic arcade games.

He also had a significant impact on Pac-Man, translating 111 yellow, chomping, on-screen pixels into a grinning, effusive character who took pop culture by storm. Yamashita used his design and illustration skills to bring energy and personality to *Pac-Man*, even without an accompanying narrative or clear background for its title character. Yet, his illustrated version of Puck Man, gracing the sides of the original Japanese arcade cabinet, became the bedrock upon which nearly all other incarnations of the character were built. Yamashita's contribution was not limited to character art, either. He also designed striking logos for a host of early and classic Namco games, including *F-1*, *Shoot Away*, *Gee Bee*, *Galaxian*, *Rally-X*, *Galaga*, *Pole Position*, *Xevious*, and many more.

MAKING HIS MARK

Yamashita joined Namco in 1970 and continued his artistic output there into the late 1980s. His approach to creating logos and typography for such a diverse set of games began by focusing on the games themselves. "When I get an offer to create logos," he said, "I check games with my own eyes. Then, I listen to the game designers, play the games by myself, watch someone else's

gameplay, and get the feel of the world." Those pixelated graphics served as the jumping-off point for Yamashita's initial designs. He began projects by creating rough visual concepts, working through multiple versions until landing on a design he felt was "unique and impressive."

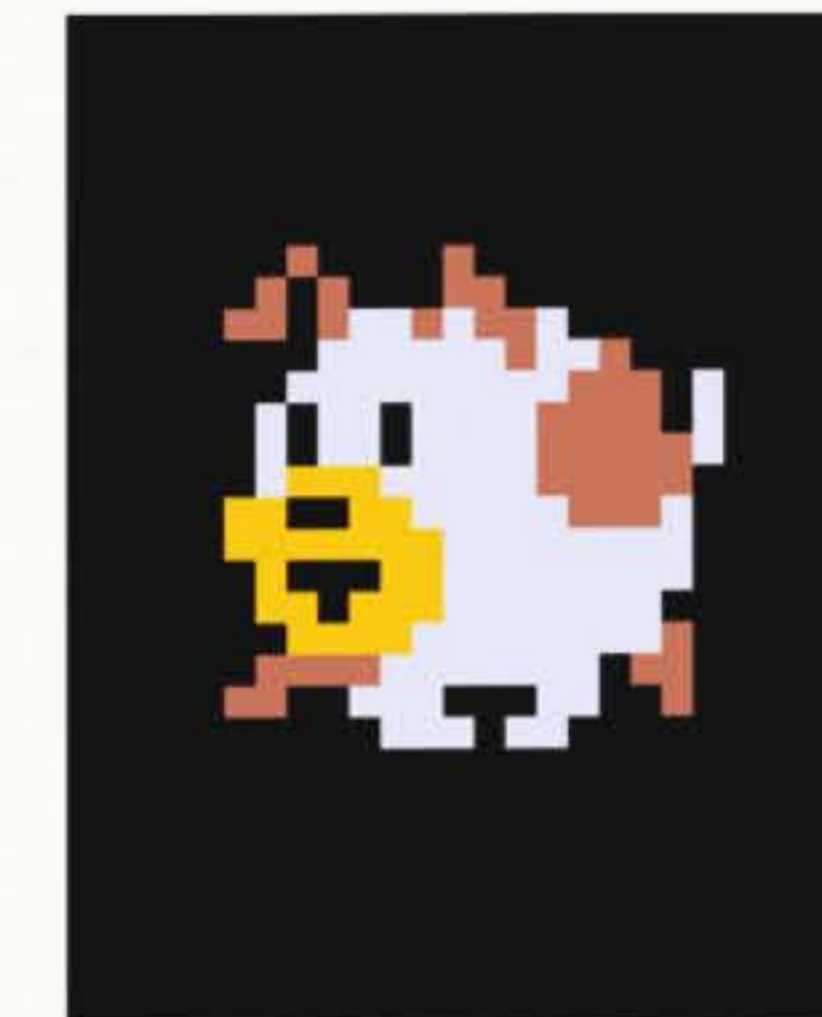
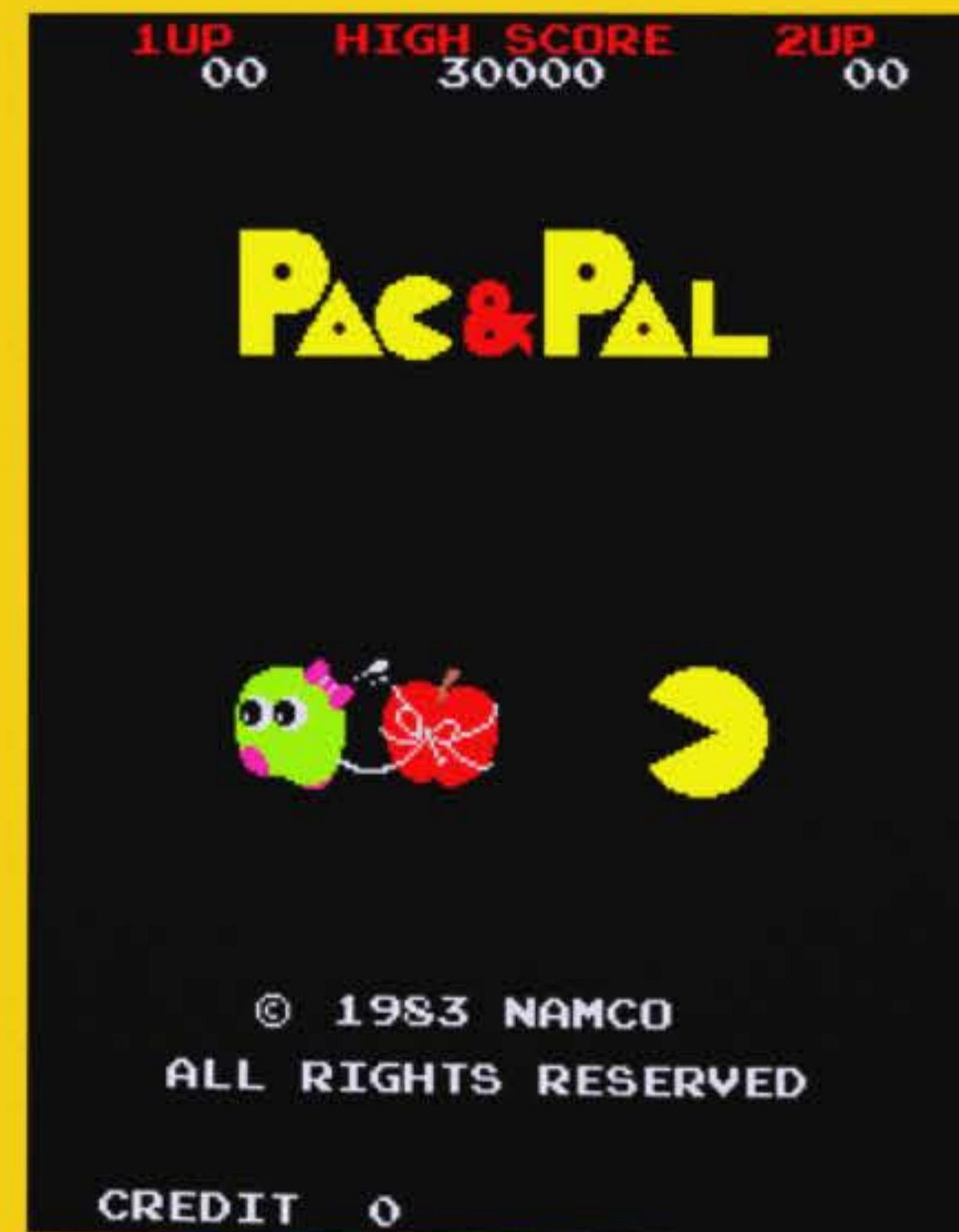
DRAWING ON EXPERIENCE

Yamashita recalled his first encounter with *Puck Man*, and the assignment to depict the character for the arcade cabinet side art. "I was asked to do artwork designs for a new video game," he said. "So I visited Mr. Toru Iwatani, the game designer, to have a look. When I looked at the screen, a yellow circle was moving around, up and down, left and right, running away from enemies or beating them. It was impressive. The element on the screen was simple—a yellow circle."

"I went back to my desk and started designing it," Yamashita recalled, "and the character you see now came to life immediately. There wasn't much time to propose alternatives, but I submitted the design, and it was approved." Though Iwatani, for his part, wasn't immediately charmed by the liberties taken with the game's pixelated character design. "At first, I didn't really like the picture with the arms and legs," he told Japanese researchers in an interview in 2019. "I thought, 'What? That's not right!'"



Pac & Pal was a Namco-made game that introduced a new, helper character named Miru, who collects fruits alongside Pac-Man. She is reportedly another ghost who has defected from the quartet in order to help Pac-Man, though this is not explained in the game itself.



Pac-Man & Chomp Chomp was a localized version of Pac & Pal intended for American audiences, swapping the Japanese Miru character with Pac-Man's dog, Chomp Chomp, who originally appeared in the Pac-Man Saturday morning cartoon. The game was never released in the U.S., but some cabinets were released in Europe.

Pac & Pal (Pac-Man & Chomp Chomp) (July, 1983)

In some ways this game builds on the gameplay changes introduced in Super Pac-Man. Created by Namco in Japan, Pac & Pal employs a similar game mechanic of locking and unlocking maze doors, and power ups that give Pac-Man powers that allow him to stun the ghosts while also simultaneously referencing other games in the Namco library, like Galaga and Rally-X.

A revised version of the game was created for Western markets, planned to be distributed by Midway under the title Pac-Man & Chomp Chomp, but was never released in North America. In this version, (which did see a limited release in Europe), the Pal character, Miru, was replaced with Chomp Chomp, the Pac-family dog from the popular Pac-Man Saturday morning cartoon by Hanna-Barbera.

Jr. Pac-Man (August, 1983)

In an interview on Feb 8, 1982, Stan Jarocki teased, "Sometimes we do sit around kidding each other about a possible 'Son of Pac-Man.'" It wasn't just a lark, either. The GCC team started work on this game in mid-1982, and was originally titled Pac-Baby. Delayed because of legal issues between Namco, Midway, and GCC, it was finally completed and released—with a name change, so as not to be confused with Baby Pac-Man, the pinball/video hybrid game released the previous year.

Jr. Pac-Man was the first Pac-sequel to utilize a multi-screen, scrolling maze—long before it became a feature in modern Pac-Man re-imaginings. The game continued the tradition of "coffee break" storylines, where Junior is delivered by a stork to the Pac-residence, and then later falls in love with the young ghost named Yum-Yum, the daughter of Blinky the ghost. Jr. Pac-Man also introduced the novel idea of "juiced up" dots that slow down the player while yielding extra points. Moving bonus items could also destroy power pellets upon touching them. Even though the game performed well, selling about 30,000 cabinets,¹⁸⁶ it was the last Pac-Man arcade game created by Midway (with the same development team that helped create Ms. Pac-Man), though Midway would still distribute future Namco-created Pac-Man releases.



Artist Hiro Kimura conceived this first version of packaging artwork for Atari's home Pac-Man game. His offbeat take was very different than the character's classic look.

Kimura adapted his approach and created an updated design for Pac-Man, borrowing heavily from the 2600 game's maze style and colors, and depicting the character in a unique way, with more sophisticated pie-eyes and shiny, rubbery limbs and running sneakers. While this version would be shelved at the 11th hour for a more literal rendering of the character (see left), this spherical one was still released on most Pac-Man cartridge labels and other iterations of the box packaging.



While Kimura had already created an approved version of Pac-Man art that was more spherical and true to the 2600 game (facing page), Atari management asked him to revise it again. This final version of Pac-Man artwork was created with the idea that audiences might prefer a more literal, one-dimensional version of the character. This iteration was used for many advertisements and packaging of the game.

This new artwork featured Pac-Man in a lighter shade of yellow (to better match the game graphics), with a more spherical shape and subtle airbrush shading. The updated Pac-Man still wore sneakers and bore shiny, elastic limbs like in vintage cartoons. The ghosts had their own shared, pale pink color, and the dots were flattened, looking more like ice cream bars, after being transformed into "video wafers" to echo the 2600's blocky playfield graphics. This rendition of Pac-Man was used on cartridge labels, catalogs, advertising, sell sheets, and most boxes—becoming a familiar sight, tied to the best-selling game cartridge.

But still another change would be made. Late in the production process, a marketing executive at Atari felt that the box needed a more literal interpretation of Pac-Man, and the spherical character was replaced somewhat awkwardly by a two-dimensional depiction more closely resembling the game icon on-screen. This version of the box was produced alongside the previous one, with consumers receiving one variant or the other depending on game bundles, location, and sales outlet.

Pac-Man in Culture

More than four decades after the release of the original arcade game, Pac-Man continues to be relevant, influencing pop culture realms like fashion, advertising, film, and beyond. The signature shapes, visuals, and color palettes associated with Pac-Man and the ghosts have now become a canvas for a litany of willing creatives working in many disciplines. Whether in the service of nostalgia, beauty, or social commentary, Pac-Man continues to provide a cultural touchstone to millions around the world.



British designer Giles Deacon did his part to keep the yellow dot muncher in fashion. His 2009 Spring/Summer runway show focussed on the '80s style icon, dressing the venue and runway in familiar images. Models donned ghost-colored dresses and bags (many with embroidered Pac-Men on them) or the spectacular candy-colored fiberglass Pac-Man and ghost helmets, designed by Stephen Jones.

