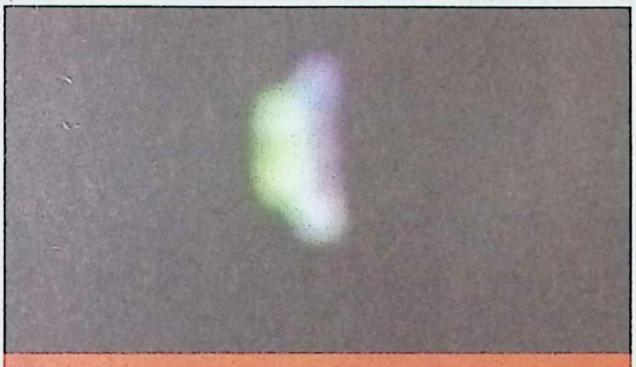
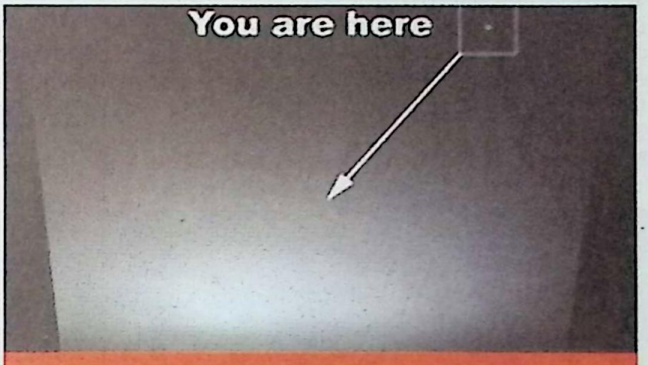




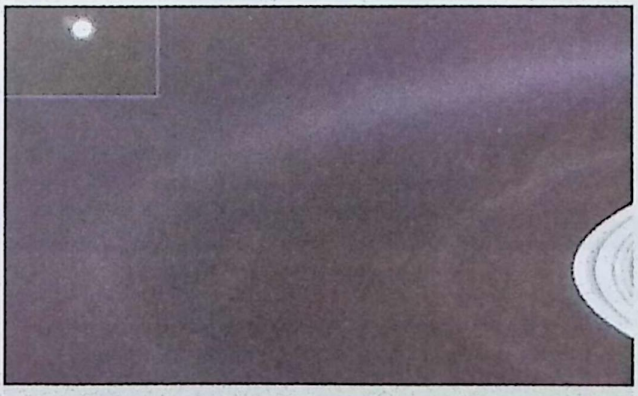
5) On the Way to Mercury: MESSENGER's Earth flyby on Aug. 2, 2005, not only adjusted the spacecraft's path to Mercury but allowed the spacecraft team to test several of the onboard instruments by taking some shots of its home planet. The camera, designed to characterize minerals that may have formed in Mercury's crust, took this three band composite image on the left using multiple wavelength imaging, giving the continental areas their red color - a result of the high reflectance of vegetation in the near-infrared part of the spectrum.



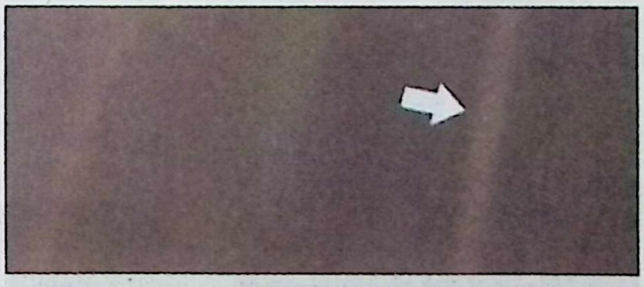
4) On the Way to Mars: After traveling more than 727,000 miles in three days, the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter's cameras were pointed toward Earth on Aug. 15, 2005. The Orbiter's main objective, to obtain daily global images of Martian meteorology, was postponed to help the Mars Color Imager science team obtain a measurement of the instrument's sensitivity and to check that no contamination occurred to the camera during launch.



3) A First from Mars: This is the first image ever taken of Earth from the surface of a planet beyond the Moon. It was taken by the Mars Exploration Rover Spirit one hour before sunrise on the 63rd Martian day, or sol, of its mission. Because Earth was too faint to be detected in images taken with the panoramic camera's color filters, the inset image shows a combination of four panoramic images zoomed in on Earth.



2) From Saturn: This image was taken by the Cassini spacecraft's wide-angle camera on Sept. 15, 2006, at a distance of 1.3 million miles from Saturn and about 930 million miles from Earth. The moon Enceladus is also captured on the left, swathed in blue and trailing its plume of water ice particles through Saturn's E ring.



1) The Pale Blue Dot: Part of the first ever "family portrait" of the solar system taken by Voyager 1 in 1990, this image of Earth was captured from a distance of more than 4 billion miles. Pictured here as a dot only 0.12 pixels in size, the Earth is, as described by Voyager contributor Carl Sagan, "...a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly and compassionately with one another and to preserve and cherish this pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."