

OBJECTS AND STORIES



Moon in a Travelling Sky. Photo courtesy of the artist.

SEEING THE SAME MOON

Kaye Green

‘Whenever I am here at night in Japan looking
at the moon, I will know you are in Australia
seeing the same moon.’

The object that represents my actual, my artistic and my deeply emotional connection between Australia and Japan is the moon. As an artist, the moon has been a constant inspiration and my muse.

In 1972 I was selected to go to Osaka, Japan as a Rotary Exchange student and left Tasmania with a suitcase, no Japanese language ability and very little information about where I was going! In Osaka I met the Doi family who was to host me for the next year.

Speaking no Japanese posed few, if any, problems and I soon settled into my new life as a Japanese schoolgirl. I had enjoyed a good life in Tasmania and enthusiastically embraced whatever was on offer at school, but almost from the moment I arrived in

Japan I suddenly felt complete—a feeling I had never experienced before. I felt as if I was in an aesthetic paradise and everything seemed to touch my inner being.

I loved listening to the *okoto*, participating in the tea ceremony, speaking Japanese, hearing the temple gongs, watching my Japanese grandfather cut the back lawn with scissors, soaking in the Japanese-style bath and seeing Mount Fuji. I started to see beauty in everything, and because of this awakening I became more and more devoted to my artistic endeavours.

I found that this state of mind was best manifested during my Japanese calligraphy classes because brush writing seemed to embody such a depth of artistic philosophy.



Kaye printing a lithograph in her studio. Photo courtesy of the artist.



It took me to a deep artistic state of mind. At first, when I could not yet speak Japanese, I think I was able to absorb more about the essence of brush writing. I tried to become like my teacher. I tried to sit exactly as she sat, to hold the brush exactly as she held it and to dip into the ink with the same gentle purposefulness. I came to understand the importance of the subtle nuances of the strokes as they appeared on the paper and I became transported into another world as I tried to create the perfect strokes.

From this visually invigorating, but verbally deficient, perspective I started

to see art in everything. I saw art in the flower arrangements, the *tatami* matting, *bonsai*, my abacas, bandaged and supported trees—this aesthetic was all around me. The sense of space, artistic harmony and grace was in everything.

I did always think of home, of course, and especially of my mother. In the first few months, I would often look at the moon and wonder if my mother in Tasmania was also looking at the moon at that same moment. That gave me the idea to write to her with a timetable of when I would look at the moon a few times each month. By calculating



the times in Osaka, Japan and Ulverstone, Australia I was able to connect us with the moon as our 'go between'. This simple act gave us both the opportunity of knowing we were seeing the moon at the same time. It seems odd now, with the internet and easy telephone access but, in those days, sharing moon gazing with her was my only way of direct contact with my mother apart from writing and receiving letters.

I came back to Tasmania (feeling fully Japanese) with my eyes, mind and heart open.

My art has grown from 'feeling Japanese' and from the heightened visual and spiritual appreciation of the Japanese aesthetic. I am inspired by the landscape because I can look at elements of the earth: the moon, the sky, rocks, water. This is my vehicle to be able to think deeply about art, poetry and semiotics—my philosophy.

The attitudes of *yasashisa* (a tender feeling) and *hosoisa* (a slenderness of expression) and *sabishisa* (a lonely or solitary feeling) are significant attitudes, which I endeavour to explore.

Professor Sasha Grishin of The Australian National University has recognised this aesthetic in my work. He states: 'She may be described as an artist who has a certain Zen sensibility in her art especially the reflective and meditative dimension. So many of her works can be best described as an internalised Zen meditation on a landscape rather than a depiction or a representation of a specific scene or object.'

I continued to go regularly to Japan. One late afternoon I was sitting with my Japanese father in the sun room as the sun was setting; we were both feeling in contemplative moods. I had not told my Japanese family about arranging with my Australian mother in 1972 to look at the moon. I think they all just thought I had some kind of personal moon ritual. But my father looked at me and said, 'Whenever I am here at night in Japan looking at the moon, I will know you are in Australia seeing the same moon.'

I still look for the moon every night and never tire of its mesmerising effect and, as I look, I always know there is someone in Japan seeing the same moon.



Kaye Green was born in Ulverstone, Tasmania in 1953 and in 1972 spent a transformative year in Osaka, Japan as a Rotary exchange student. She completed her BA in Hobart in 1976 and her MA at the University of New Mexico in 1981. Green has worked and exhibited in Japan, the US, Belgium, the UK, New Zealand, Finland and most Australian states and her work is represented in many national and international collections including the Australian National Gallery. After fourteen years of university lecturing Green returned to Tasmania to work full time in her studio. Ever since 1972 Japan has constantly and profoundly shaped Green's life and work.