

KENNETH WHITE

Les Cygnes sauvages



éditions
Leal Torres



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French translation by
Marie-Claude White

Photographs by
Marie-Claude White

Éditions Leal Torres 2021

This is not a novel, nor the simple diary of a journey, *Les Cygnes sauvages* is part of a series of books that Kenneth White calls “waybooks”. The way, in this instance, is not pre-established. If the word reminds us, rightly, of the Chinese “tao” and of the Buddhist eightfold way, in this case, the way is created during the journey.

The narrative takes place in Japan and the itinerary goes from the bustling city of Tokyo to the wide spaces of the Northern Island of Hokkaido (literally “Northern Sea Circuit”). This is the journey that the 17th-century poet and Haiku master, Matsuo Basho, wanted to make. But he fell ill during the trip and had to give up before reaching the end. By completing the journey, Kenneth White suggests, without insisting, that what matters most in world culture, is the meeting between extreme affinities through space and time.

We could also see a double meaning in the title “Cygnes sauvages” (wild swans) with the notion of “signes sauvages” (wild signs - which are homophones in French), meaning a space that does not follow any of the codes or codings that limit and suffocate the mind. This space is represented in the book by the arrival of migrating birds that fly from Siberia to spend the winter in Japan, on a lake in the North of Hokkaido.

At the start of a project, I ask myself as an editor, how can this future book include a text and, more specifically, a dialogue between an author and an artist? How can the artwork and the written work correspond to each other within the space contained in the book? The challenge is to embody without interpreting. From the moment that we introduce a colour, an illustration or even a substance to a text, there is a risk of interpretation. This risk is avoided if throughout the entire fabrication of the book the editor bears in mind that every book is not only the project of the publishing company, but is totally shared with the author and the artist. This is the reason why, for the *Cygnés sauvages*, the choice of Marie-Claude White as the artist was made jointly with the author Kenneth White.

Marie-Claude White and Kenneth White share a strong bond both in life and with their art, and their respective works of art are surprisingly close. Kenneth White's work is marked by space and distance. His travelling is both physical and mental, based on an intimate knowledge of the earth's elements. The photographs of Marie-Claude White embody this geopoetic art.

Both, with different means, inspire us to open our eyes, to realise that not only is art all around us, but it is firstly experience and perception.

The experience also comes from touch. Therefore, for this rare edition of the *Cygnés sauvages*, I wanted to favour tactile pleasure, the pleasure of materials, shapes, surfaces: wood, linen fabric, glass, paper, photopolymers.

He is the author of an exceptional body of work, be it in essay, narrative and poetry. This work has received numerous prestigious literary awards, running from the Prix Médicis Étranger for *La Route bleue* to the French Academy's Grand Prix du rayonnement for his work as a whole, via the Prix Édouard Glissant. Furthermore, between 1983 and 1996, Kenneth White held the Chair of 20th Century Poetics at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, and in 1989 he founded the International Institute of geopoetics. Whatever his commitments, from the very start, in Scotland, he has always moved within his own space, both singular and general, which he calls intellectual nomadism and presents in his books of essays such as *L'Esprit nomade* and *La Figure du dehors*. It is this he experiences directly in the long journeys he has made around the world, as presented in *Les Vents de Vancouver* and *Le Visage du vent d'est*. As for geopoetics, of which he outlined the theory and practice in *Le Plateau de l'Albatros* and detailed more precisely in *Au large de l'Histoire*, it aims at refounding culture by going back to the basis of all culture, which is the relationship between human beings and the Earth. The final expression of geopoetics is presented in his books of poems, such as *Mémorial de la terre océane*.

If photography is very common, the great art of photography is extremely rare. Marie-Claude White, a discrete artist, secret even at times, is one of those exceptions.

The best way to get an idea of her practice, is to consider the titles of some of her series: *D'une grève à l'autre*, *Calligraphies de la mer*, *Un matin sur le sable*, *Secrets d'écorces*, *Jeux d'herbes*, *Mangrove*, *Vagues*, *Géomorphoses*. To go deeper into her artistic thought and her personal approach to geopoetics art, the base source is her book entitled *Art naturel ou artefact*, subtitled *La photographie comme médium de la connivence* (*Photography as a medium of connivance*). In this instance, the connivance is that of "nature and art getting closer" or "the coexistence of human being and elemental reality". This is the way she has wandered, with keen senses, eye always alert, on many shores worldwide, amongst scattered seaweed and the lapping of waves, or in the silence of the tangled roots of mangroves, over heath and moor where the wind blows unrestricted, through woods of silver birch whose bark has been written over by time and weather. All in all, an intense consciousness, an intimate and deep knowledge, far from any vulgar ostentation. The pictures that are scattered throughout the text of this rare edition of the *Cygnes sauvages* were taken from the series entitled "*Calligraphies de la mer*", "*Secrets d'écorces*" and "*Vagues*".

The story of Kitta begins in 1998, when the director, Yuko Kitta, started making clothing using natural dyeing techniques. In 2011, she established an atelier in Okinawa, after working in Tokyo, Hyogo Prefecture, and Chiba. At present, Kitta produces art pieces, installations, where the main objective of the concept is to guide them from their creation to their return to the earth.

Kitta dyes fabric using mainly the Ryukyu indigo (*Acanthaceae*), which she grows herself and the leaves, branches, bark and roots of various Okinawan plants.

Tsutsumu (the action of wrapping in Japanese) is an art. In Japan, traditionally, gifts are wrapped in fabric or handmade paper. Furthermore, etymologically, “wrapping” suggests the idea of containing something precious inside.

L’Imprimerie nationale and its workshop, the atelier du Livre d’art et de l’Estampe, has its roots in the history of typographic writing. In 1538, François I appointed the king’s first printer for Greek, which is considered to be a founding act, from which the entire history of writing on printed media developed in France, also creating a collection of unique punches in the world, listed as a historical monument, since 1946.

Defying the tribulations of history, the Imprimerie royale was founded, in 1640, by Richelieu, which became the Imprimerie of the Republic during the Revolution, then the Imprimerie imperiale and finally the Imprimerie nationale. The atelier du Livre d’art et de l’Estampe is endowed with rare skills that cover the spectrum of the typographic chain (drawing, engraving and casting of printing types, typographic typesetting and printing), as well as engraving. The atelier du Livre d’art et de l’Estampe can meet any request to develop projects that require its teams, skills and production tools, that are at the disposal of publishers and artists.

A text by Kenneth White illustrated with 9 unpublished photographs by Marie-Claude White.

French translation by Marie-Claude White.

The text was created in monotype Gauthier, font size 12, an exclusive typeface of the Imprimerie nationale.

This publication of 136 pages, in a 22 x 28,5 cm format, was printed on Pescia Editions 160g Magnani Paper, on the typographic printing presses of the atelier du Livre d'art et de l'Estampe of the Imprimerie nationale, in Flers-en-Escrebieux, in July 2021.

The photographs were printed by engraving done, in June 2021, on the printing presses of the Moret workshop from solarplates created by the company Malaxe.





Sur la route du Nord
pas à pas dans une lumière obscure
puis, soudain, le grand envol blanc!

Kenneth White

Sol nippon :

Littoral et montagnes. Golfes, baies, promontoires. Terre volcanique, convulsée, ravagée, lavée par le vent et la pluie, par les marées et les brouillards, par un jeu vaporeux d'eau, de brume et de soleil. Torrents fougueux, cascades et feuilles rouges...

Je voulais m'immerger dans tout cela : dans l'énergie et le rythme et la lumière de tout cela. Et je voulais, si possible, voir les cygnes sauvages venus de Sibérie s'abattre avec leurs cris d'outre-terre sur les lacs du Nord où ils viennent hiverner.

Oui, voilà ce que je voulais.

«Vol pour Tokyo : Porte 17.»



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— **Contact**

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