



*Ways of Seeing* My first Lithograph at Elam art school. *Skye Isaac 1964*

We are all created from the creative power of the Universe. We can't help being uniquely creative. That is who we are. All of us.

My creative life was fuelled with everyday creative perception of ordinary things. As a toddler holding onto my mother's skirt and leg, I was swooped up to look at the porridge bubbling in the porridge pot

"Look" said my mother with shiny eyes and awe in her voice. "It's like Rotorua and the geysers."

Singing, dancing, making things, writing and reading was everyday, natural joy. Not at school though. Bright girls at Napier Girls' High school were banned from the art room and had to study Latin and Maths instead.

Once I left high school, I took night classes with Yvonne Rust, to qualify for entry into Elam Art school. "Was I good enough?"

## *Art School*

Just as my English Grandma Ellen's painting room was chaotic and quite wonderful, so too was Art School quite the most wonderful place. Full of sound and fury and possibly, meaning. I could be real here. Felicity West was the other art student from Wellington. In the holidays we travelled back and forth between Wellington and Auckland on the overnight train. At 2am one moonlit night we saw herds of wild Kaimanawa horses running the

plateau beside the volcanoes. Ruapehu, Ngarahoe, Tongariro, stood crisp and bold, shadowy white with snow before the indigo night. The steam train, snorted around the base of the volcanoes while the horses tails streamed free over the vast plateau. My blood ran with them and I made a small painting.

One lunchtime at Elam, a quiet, uncertain man, Colin McCahon, came cautiously into my barraged corner of the huge painting room. I was alone, wrestling with myself, through a series of small, clay reliefs. He was silent long enough for me to relax a little.

“It’s not what we have to do for our assignment,” I began.

“It’s about you and your life, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Yes,” was my inaudible reply.

“Keep going,” he said with a smile.

So I kept going. I stopped being so preoccupied with what the rest of the world expected of me. More and more I learnt to pay attention to that inner impulse which sought expression through me. This is beyond thought. It’s more like an attunement to the ‘field’, the Source of all Life. Colin McCahon had that depth, bravery, complexity and integrity in his painting. I am grateful.

One morning I read a notice on the board by the library.

*“Staff and students from Elam School of Fine Arts are cordially invited by the School of Architecture to a week long seminar given by Buckminster Fuller, inventor, writer and global thinker.”*

I felt excited. Why? I had never heard of the man. No one else from Elam was going to attend. He was a short, bald man with ultra thick glasses and an impossible accent who totally engaged me in an electrifying way. I understood little of what he said on the verbal, cognitive level. Most of his talk was about our planet which he called ‘*Spaceship earth*’ and how humankind must learn to live in collaboration with each other and with all life on our spaceship. He had detailed diagrams of his vision of shared energy systems for the whole globe.

This was 1963, before Neil Armstrong walked the moon and gave us photographs of our beautiful blue and green planet taken from space.

**Buckminster Fuller** knew all this from his inner vision, his insight. It blew me wide open into a world view with concern for all life and for spaceship earth. Most students wrote about Gothic Architecture, Monet or Picasso, for their thesis so I wasn’t sure if it was acceptable when I wrote a long poem about Bucky and JOY, for my thesis.

It got A++. So it was good to do what I felt impelled to do!

Bucky also told us stories of his very eventful life and the conscious decisions he made along the way. A key story went something like this:

*“When I returned from the football reunion weekend, I hugged my precious, only, very disabled daughter. She asked me.*

*‘Daddy did you bring me the flag I asked for?’*

*In my drunkenness I had forgotten. She looked at me and died in my arms. I felt such a terrible, worthless person I decided that the world would be better off without me. One freezing cold, grey day I walked steadfastly into Lake Michigan, determined to end it all. When I was about chest deep I heard a voice say:*

*‘You do not belong to you. You belong to the Universe. Get back, you’ve got work to do.’ I hesitated and the voice came again. I went back. I spent a couple of years in silence after that. I wrote down my instructions to myself as to how to live my life. I would only work for what my inner impulse prompted me to do.”*

We were a bunch of young students crowded into the small lecture theatre, some of us sitting at his feet. He looked at us and said:

*“You may not think you and your life is that important. Write it down anyway and pass it on. Everyone’s life has something to contribute.”*

Later, I learnt that he died as he had lived in his later years, consciously. He and his wife had been through a lot together. They decided they wanted to lay down their earthly bodies at the same time and move on to the next world together. When she got a stroke, from which she would not recover, he visited her in hospital.

“Would you leave us for a while,” he asked the nurse. Twenty minutes later the nurse returned to find Bucky dead, with his head in his wife’s lap. She died soon after. I too, want to leave my earth-body-suit consciously when the time is right. I am still stirred and inspired by Bucky.

(excerpt from my Memoir *‘If I wake before I die.’*)