



Sketches of Japan

A Visual Diary

Volume 1

Daniel Van





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Preface

When I was a child, Japan seemed to be a magical land. Japan was a place where wonderful things came from, things like my father's Black and White SONY Television set, our National Electric Fan, or ASTROBOY, or Zatoichi, the Blind Swordsman.

At a teenager, I read Abe Kobo's "The Woman in the Dunes", and I was completely mystified by the Japanese psyche. And thus, I spent my years as a young man often wondering what it was like to be in Japan.

In 1995, as an engineer, by chance, I was dispatched by my company on a trip to Japan. And what I saw changed my vision forever. Then, as I came back and forth to Japan on many trips, I made up my mind to capture every impressionable image through my own eyes, rather than via the lens of a camera.

I didn't always bring my sketch book with me. But I sketched and painted with materials found in Japan whenever I could. It was my own visual diary of the land I love. And yet, it was recorded entirely by an outsider.

This book is the first collection of many of those memoirs.

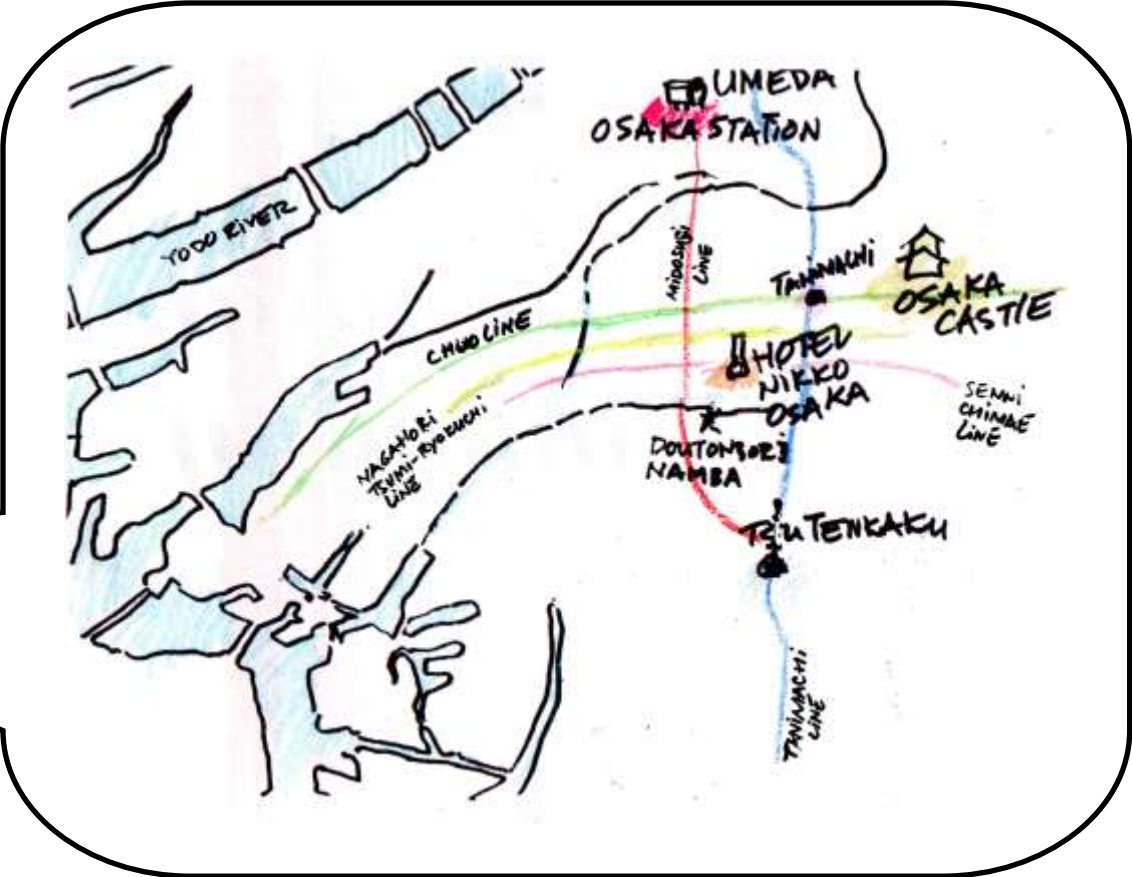
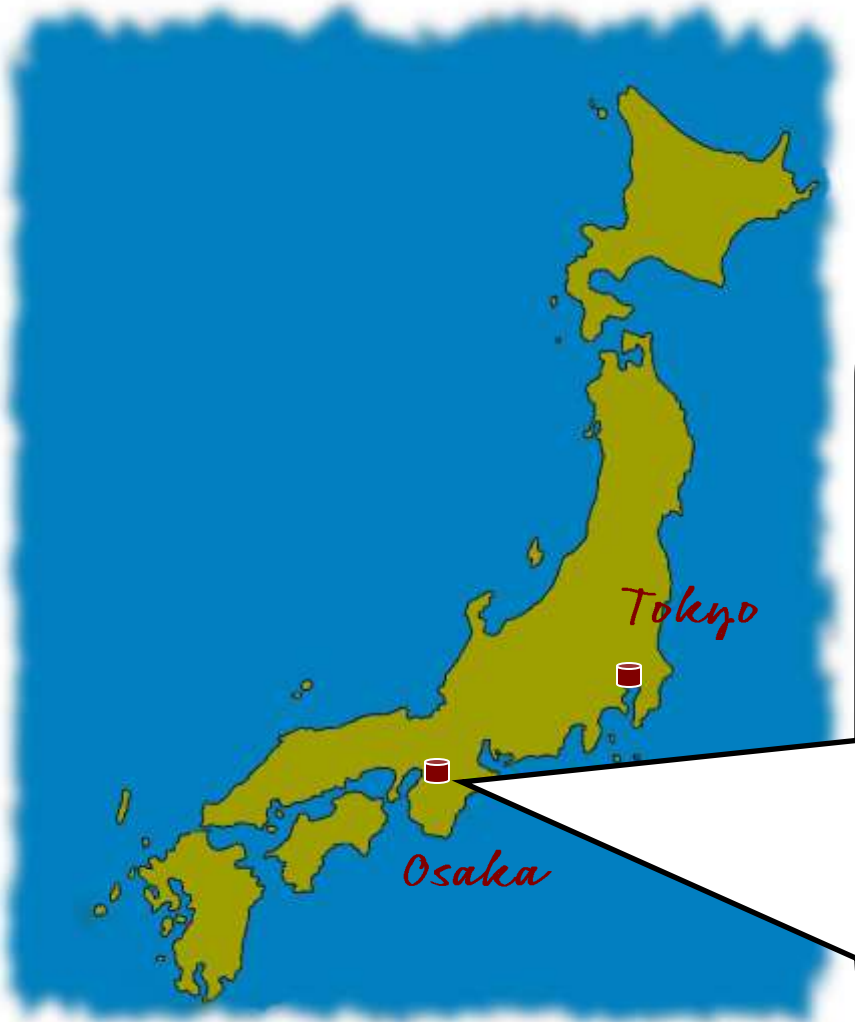
Daniel Van

The train came out of the long tunnel, and there it was, "Snow Country"

(Yukiguni)

Yasunari Kawabata

OSAKA







Tanimachi

In 1995, through Kansai International Airport, the city of Osaka welcomed me. I thought I was prepared for Japan, but what I was about to see completely overwhelmed me. Despite that the bubble economy had passed, the wealth, the culture and technology, even the cleanliness and structural orderliness put me in a state of bliss. I had never seen anything like this before. I was at the doorstep of a fantastic civilization.

Tanimachi area is the home of Osaka Castle and Osaka Prefectural Office, and also the NHK Building not far away.

“道頓堀橋”

日本・大阪・難波

2004年10月11日

DANIEL VAN

菊谷智恵子に捧ぐ



Doutonbori and Namba

While Dotonbori Bridge with the "Running Man" symbolized Osaka, it was the back streets that put the seal on it. A world of its own, smaller, more intimate, yet sweet and full of subtle details that would tickle your sense of culture and history. Pachinko Parlors, Okonomiyaki restaurants that seat only five, colorful shops, Hostess Bars... Smell the street vending Takoyaki, fill your eyes with all the neon colors, hear all the ever chattering conversations, count the foot traffic all around, and you might begin to feel the heart beat of this lively city, Osaka.





Waking up from the first night in Japan from the 18th floor of the Nissei Osaka Hotel, a bluish, tightly packed, and energetic city slowly rose up to greet me. I have never forgotten that sense of excitement in encountering something larger, more beautiful, and full of unexpected promises that morning. There was a gentle rumbling, sounds of vehicles, people, smokes, as if a giant is shaking off the drowsiness of the night, and preparing to go into the battle of the day.

Perhaps due to jetlag that quite early that morning I was already up. I rushed out to discover the new world, walking the streets of Namba, across from the Hotel when shops were just about to open, and people were getting ready to go to work. A simple thing like this little street fascinated me so much. This peaceful orderliness, the colorful stores and restaurants coming into life, the smell of fresh coffee, well-dressed women, salaried men in their suits on the way to their offices, etc... All seemed so new and different to me.