

thing. I grew up with that. If you see nature like that, everything is alive, and you have to be much more respectful. I do believe everything has spirit.

**DW:** And you have some female characters that are literally larger than life in your novel, including a grandmother who is a kind of giant.

**JWH:** Yes. When I started on the novel, I wanted to write about the immigrant women and their different personas and lives. That was taken from life; I didn't make that stuff up. But there is also a larger-than-life aspect in *The Legend of Fire Horse Woman*. I wrote the novel in five books because there are five acts in a Kabuki drama and the characters are bigger than life because that is how characters are in Kabuki drama. The heroine is *really* a heroine. The hero is *really* a hero. It's over the top. Not everyone is going to pick up on that. With Kabuki drama you could make anything happen. It is not totally realistic.

**DW:** You've lived in Santa Cruz since the early '60s. It has been a home base for you and your creative projects for most of your creative life.

**JWH:** We'd been coming here even before then, in the 1950s. Jim was a surfer. We came to Santa Cruz because it's by the ocean. We were driving around and we saw this house which was all boarded up. They were going to tear it down. Jim said, 'let's find out who owns the house. Maybe they will let us live there and I will help whoever lives there fix it up.'

**DW:** That must have been intimidating.

**JWH:** I wasn't afraid to fix up this house because hey, I used to live in a barracks! All we had was this empty room with planks and holes in it that we had to make livable.

**DW:** You mentioned wanting to go back to Manzanar to develop a new novel.

**JWH:** I can't talk about it because it's not in progress yet. It is in here (she points to her head). But I will tell you what I am doing. I am working on a musical film of *Fare-*

*well to Manzanar*. Wouldn't that be wild? I've got such a really good idea. It would be a musical movie but it would be two stories. The narrative line would be going to camp, but there would be a story within a story. In a musical you also have to have the lighter side. That would be perfect for *Farewell To Manzanar* because we did have a musical director, Louis Frizzell, who came and worked with high school students to put on really good musicals. In film you can do a lot of fantastical things that are difficult to do on stage. It will be very interesting artistically.

**DW:** Clearly, Manzanar still has a hold on your imagination. Something keeps bringing you back.

**JWH:** In my mind the energy never leaves the place. I have only been back three times and it's such a weird experience. There is something unearthly about the place for me. I took my daughter Cori back there with me once, and she was videotaping. We went back to the block where I lived. I figured out where it was. They left all the ruins there. I found where the hospital was. I went to the exact spot where my barracks were. When my father came to Manzanar, he started taking care of the pear trees and brought them back to life. They were struggling. When I returned, they had a water spigot up there. I could see the trees.

**Jeanne Houston's** book *Farewell to Manzanar* (with James D. Houston), has become an American classic. Her other publications include *Don't Cry, It's Only Thunder* (with Paul G. Hensler), *Beyond Manzanar and Other Views of Asian-American Womanhood*, and *The Legend of Fire Horse Woman*. She married James D. Houston in 1957, and they were literary collaborators until his death in 2009.

**Dan White's** first book, *The Cactus Eaters*, published by HarperCollins in 2008, was a Los Angeles Times "Discovery" selection. Dan has his MFA from Columbia University.

## BELLE YANG

*Kite*, 1997  
Gouache, 16 x 22 in



courtesy: the artist