

The Legend of the Moon Rabbit

BY SUZANNE C. LEE

Anuj and Smita Poddar of AP Limited Editions get personal in a new maki-e fountain pen.



Left—AP Limited Editions Writer series “A Rabbit’s Journey to the Moon” maki-e fountain pen. Above—many Asian cultures and some Native American tribes see the figure of a rabbit in the markings on a full moon (ears pointing southeastward).

AP Limited Editions is by no means unfamiliar with epic endeavors. Renowned for ingenuity and success in marrying traditional art and its techniques to contemporary and innovative styles, Smita and Anuj Poddar already enjoy a stellar reputation for the magnificent artistry they produce. An intriguing new masterpiece pushes the boundaries still further, connecting ancestry and fairy tale, innocence and wisdom, imagination and action. In fact, the exquisite writing instrument is the result of a stellar collision: two luminous personalities drawn together by the mysterious forces of firmament and fate.

Certain stories are cultural; they belong to an entire people and illuminate fundamental truths about society and the human lives unfolding within it at a given point in time. Narratives can also be personal, with favorite anecdotes that function as snapshots, or more detailed memoirs that offer insight into an individual’s perspective on the world. When the dance between biography and culture is particularly graceful or poignant, the stars align, and magnificent art is made.

Smita and her grandnephew Advay so delighted one another from the start that a natural grandmother-grandson relationship between the two blossomed. The creative and cerebral five-year-old is passionate for travel and knowledge (including Japanese samurai and the mythology of Chinese dragons). In addition, the eagle-eyed youngster can casually spot the difference between perfect and less-than-perfect urushi application on a pen barrel, and he fancies fountain pens over rollerballs.

“He is pure, undiluted therapy for the soul!” Smita says. “It’s a relationship of companionship, of friendship. Time is so short, so we truly ‘live the moments’ together. It is the magic meeting of minds and hearts of generations apart. It benefits [us] mutually in invaluable ways. Kids these days are very technologically savvy and can approach a situation from a completely unique angle. Their agility, energy, and enthusiasm is contagious and uplifting.” In turn, Smita continues, “A grandkid might be more receptive to counsel and wisdom shared by a grandparent and be inspired by traditional stories that strengthen roots and grounding.”



From left—"Advay" and "Smita," represented by the rabbits on the barrel in an eggshell mosaic, gaze upward at a colony of rabbits on the moon, captured in a variety of maki-e techniques. Above—illustration based on a 16th century Chinese novel in which Sun Wukong ("The Monkey King") fights the Moon Rabbit.

Joy itself can be a powerful force, and its light can help to compose great art. When the respective imaginations of Smita and Advay come together, the stories they conjure are vivid and intricate. In real time, the two transport themselves via narrative invention by transforming into rabbit avatars with great powers: characters named "Advay" and "Grandma" in a world of their own, ever-widening tale. The two are in pursuit of the moon, an idyllic place whereupon they can escape what is often a difficult, disorienting, and absurd reality—for hares and people alike!

Pleasant symmetry exists between the personal fairy tale that Smita and Advay have created and a wider cultural myth that varies by region in Asia but is especially common in East Asia. The Moon Rabbit is a character, an interpretation of the dark crevices, valleys, divots, and distinct features that exist on the near-side of the moon. In fact, some indigenous American tribes also discerned a rabbit figure in the patterns of the moon's face.

The new AP Limited Editions writing instrument, A Rabbit's Journey to the Moon, reflects the almost musical and definitely dreamy result of combining an intimate tale with a greater generational myth. Maki-e influence is clear in this piece, which is breathtaking in detail and depicts two rabbits

on the barrel whose delicate mosaic bodies are composed of *nashiji* maki-e and eggshell. The figures gaze together at the moon's face where they are greeted with the celestial reflection of similar rabbits in *nashiji* maki-e, representing both their imaginary, limitless selves and the larger, serendipitously parallel cultural myth.

On the barrel, a horizon of elaborate trees and mountains is made in *togidashi* maki-e with gold, silver, and blue-gold powder, and wild plants and flowers are applied in *taka* and *hira* maki-e. As below, so above—the sky is beautifully illustrated, graced with gold and silver *hirame* (a flat, ground powder) and seashell fragments in *togidashi* maki-e.

A Rabbit's Journey to the Moon is part of AP Limited Editions' Writer series of mid-sized ebonite writing instruments. The pen is limited to nine editions total as a rollerball or fountain pen with an 18 karat gold nib in extra-fine, fine, medium, broad, or broad-italic. The fountain pen also features a bulk-filler system developed for the brand by Belgian company Conid.

Anuj Poddar notes, "Our partnership with Conid is one step further in our endeavor to perfect the writing instrument. We had an overwhelming response from customers worldwide appreciating the bulk-filler system. At this time, the bulk-filler system is being expanded into our urushi collection."

Below—The Tradition of Sumo Connoisseur-bodied fountain pen depicts the Japanese sport in the Palekh school of Russian lacquer art; Diamond Deco rollerball has a contoured body and bamboo clip to augment its Art Deco geometric pattern. Right—The Splendid Synergy Connoisseur fountain pen has 105 maki-e squares composed of four triangles.



A Rabbit’s Journey to the Moon portrays a vast realm of enchantment summoned by two powerful imaginations, those of Smita and Advay, and that universe is vividly realized on the instrument.

Smita says, “Our family has been featured for the first time. This is my tribute to the unique relationship with my grandson, who came into my life five years ago. He spurred my creativity and reminded me of the carefree times of my childhood. I was always a storyteller, and being with him brings a new dimension to my stories.”

The magnificent new pen has its narrative roots in a precious and singular affection between a grandmother and her grandchild—in this case, both artists, both brilliant. Together they create a visual song of that particular love, and it is spellbinding. The pure heart in A Rabbit’s Journey to the Moon is matched only by its unique and lovely aesthetic, and the story of Smita and Advay’s relationship inspires its own fairy tales.

As for the enchanting masterpiece itself, Advay is more than enthusiastic.

Smita laughs. “He has seen the pen, loves it, and wants one all for himself! He has already thought of the sequel.”

PW, for its part, imagines the fairy tale going something like this:

Once upon a time there was a beautiful woman, Smita, whose job it was to paint the sky, so she often sat in contemplation of color and form, dimension and depth. One day, as she applied horsehair brush to atmospheric canvas, a young but brilliant dragon named Advay hid himself behind a stone, watching with silent fascination. Rooted to the spot, wholly mesmerized, Advay remained so long that when he came to his senses, Smita had begun to sketch the moon. He exhaled slowly, enchanted at the diamond-dappled night and glowing celestial orb that she was even now creating. Startled at the sound of sudden breath, Smita jumped a little and her brush jerked, etching into the silver moon a series of dark lines, by accident. Even as she smiled at the theretofore unseen visitor, Advay stayed fixated on her work as though he were reading.

“What do I do with this?” she asked the dragon, gesturing to her mistaken marks.

Advay spoke dreamily. “Nothing! It’s a perfect rabbit. Let it be.”

Forever thereafter, the pair were inseparable companions and partners in creation.

And they all lived happily ever after.

Visit aplimitededitions.com.