





LILIANE LIJN  
moonmeme

The WORD is ART

MOCA London  
11 May - 7 June 2025



## moonmeme

In a work that demonstrates the interlocking of opposites, Liliane Lijn writes the single word SHE across the moon in letters large enough to be seen from earth.

Interweaving science, myth, art and language, Liliane Lijn proposes to use the moon as a living canvas. The idea is to project a word of poetic and mythic significance onto its surface. The meaning of this word will be gradually altered over the 29.5 days' lunation period by the related motions of moon, earth and sun. Using an astronomical program, moonmeme tracks the real moon's phase. The lunar image is updated every 26 hours and 13 minutes and augmented with a layer of monosyllabic poetry. Over the course of the lunar monthly cycle, the movements of moon, earth and sun reveal that HE is contained within SHE and SHE emerges from HE.

*moonmeme* is an homage to the feminine principal of transformation and renewal, which for millennia was held sacred in the form of the full moon and its recurring monthly cycle. Since prehistoric times, people have kept track of the phases of the moon, using them as a pattern for the rhythms of agricultural life. Stories and myths were generated by lunar transformations and passed down from generation to generation. The moon influences the earth's tides and female menstrual cycles. Consequently, in most cultures, the moon was considered feminine.

*moonmeme* is a multifaceted work that has been constantly evolving, since Lijn first imagined it happening in 1991. In its current state, *moonmeme* is presented on monitor; a large image of the moon as it would appear in the sky on the viewed date. The viewer is invited to type in their name and birthdate. On doing this, they are presented with the lunar image, SHE or HE projected upon its surface, as it was at the time of their birth. Within 20 seconds, the lunar cycles of the first six months of the viewer's life will appear on screen. After a brief interval, the viewer's data will be placed chronologically within all the birth data moonmeme has received to date.

From seeing oneself as a unique cosmic phenomenon, the individual is seen as a small part of a much larger pattern. All the while, the soft chant of the interwoven gender is heard, followed by tales of connections between moon and the feminine.

Lijn has questioned whether this linguistic intertwining of gender might be universal. To gather data on languages in which the word for 'he' is contained within 'she' or vice versa, Lijn posted her question on the online Linguist's List. Up to date, Lijn has received s/he in thirteen languages from linguists around the world. For moonmeme, Lijn has produced a set of nine digital prints, entitled S/HE, each a projection of the word SHE in nine different languages. HE is seen on the waxing moon after the First Quarter: As the Earth's shadow leaves the lunar surface, She appears towards and during Full Moon (author's correction).

The latest development of *moonmeme* is as a virtual reality installation.

**Liliane Lijn**

Email research with Prof. Dr. Bernard Comrie  
Director, Department of Linguistics, University of California Santa Barbara

Dear Bernard Comrie,

*moonmeme* is a project that I have been working on for some years. It involves projecting the feminine pronoun SHE onto the surface of the moon where the motions of the earth, sun and moon will change its meaning over one lunation. I am at present unable to do this in reality on the moon but I have done it as a virtual projection online. I would very much like to do this in as many languages as possible, however I need to find languages, which use personal pronouns and in which SHE contains HE. I am already aware of Russian and Polish ONA and ON and Spanish.

Dear Liliane,

Sounds like an interesting project. I have a couple of questions:

1. Are you also interested in the reverse pattern? At the moment, I can think of only one example, Lithuanian (JIS he, JI she).
2. You will need to make a decision on what to do about diacritics. For instance, the Spanish word for <he> is actually written ÉL, that for <she> ELLA, so the former is not literally included in the latter. The same problem arises with at least one other language I can think of, Upper Sorbian (Slavic). My sense is that since you are working from the spelling, then Spanish is not a good example, though Catalan ELL <he>, ELLA <she> would be.
3. I assume that you want the forms in block capitals (for languages whose scripts make a distinction in capitalization).

Dear Liliane,

Responses came in quite rapidly during the first few days after the posting, but have now reduced to at most a trickle, though one interesting one (Kambaata, a minority language of Ethiopia) did come in a couple of days ago, and seems to be unique for its geographical area. I'm attaching a list of what we got from the posting.

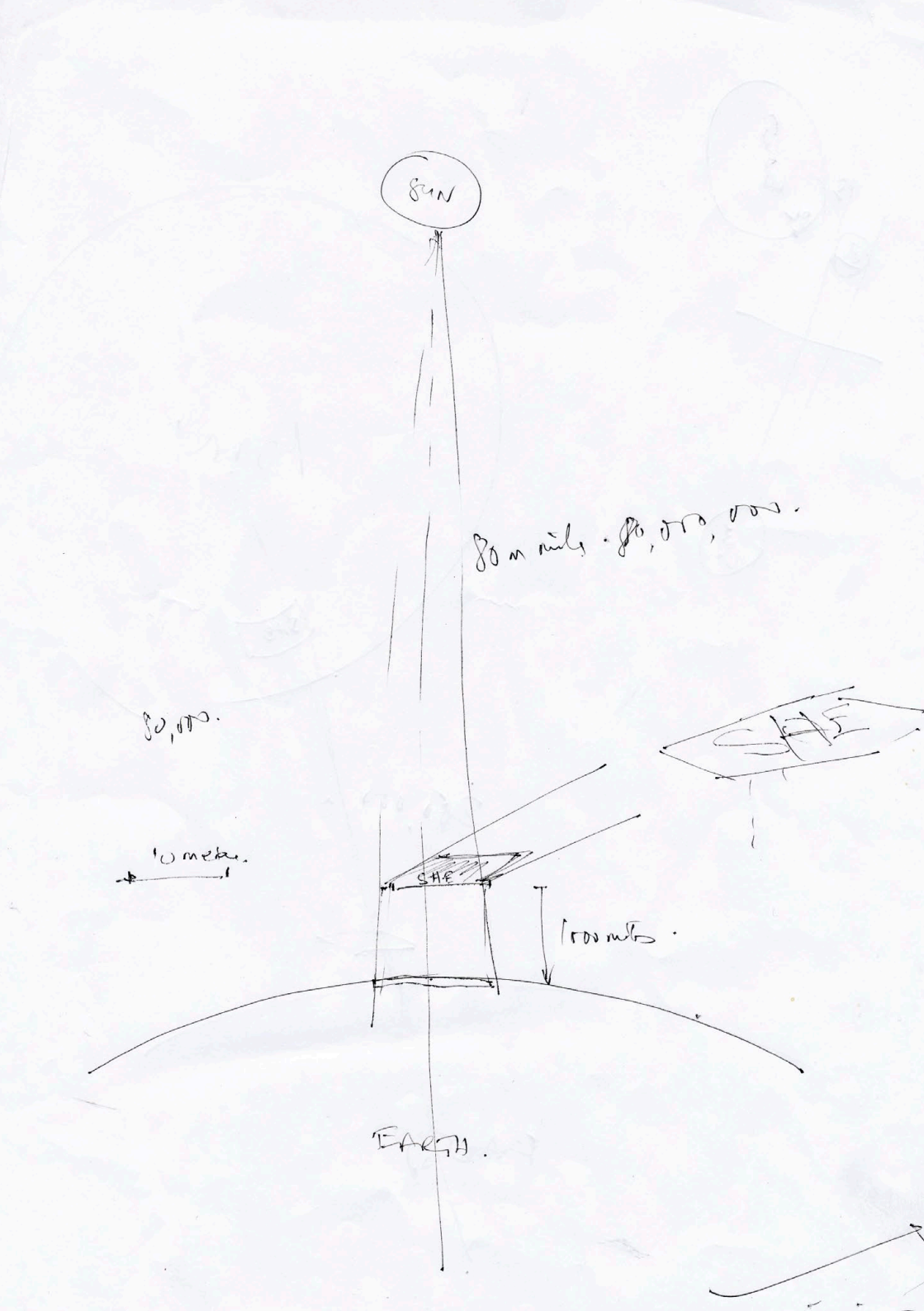
Dear Bernard,

Many thanks for sending me the list of words received from your posting. The Kambaata is very interesting since I have never heard of that language. Japanese is interesting since the sound is completely different, although kare remains visually the same ideogram. So sound changes depending on relation to an other ideogram.

Dear Liliane,

I've also been able to find a couple of additional examples, one from Kabyle (Berber of Algeria) where the forms are *netta* and *nettat* - Kabyle usually uses the Latin alphabet - and one using Arabic script, namely Sindhi (one of the larger languages of Pakistan). We're now up to 12, plus 1 of the inverse pattern, which you may want to use given that there are 13 lunar months in a solar year.

Best, Bernard





## Language 'he/she'

### Latin script:

Catalan	ELL	ELLA
Croatian	ON	ONA
Galician	EL	ELA
Kambaata [Cushitic; Ethiopia]	IS	ISE
Lower Sorbian	WÓN	WÓNA
Lithuanian	JIS	JI

### Cyrillic script:

Russian	OH /on/	OHA /ona/
Sindhi	وه /ho/	هوه /hoa/

### Japanese script:

Japanese	彼 /kare/	彼女 /kanozyo/
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### Languages without relevant pattern:

Hebrew	אָוה /hu/	אִיה /hi/
Turkish	o	o

### Source:

M. Carme Picallo  
Anna Pineda

Alexander Hoyt

Francisco Dubert

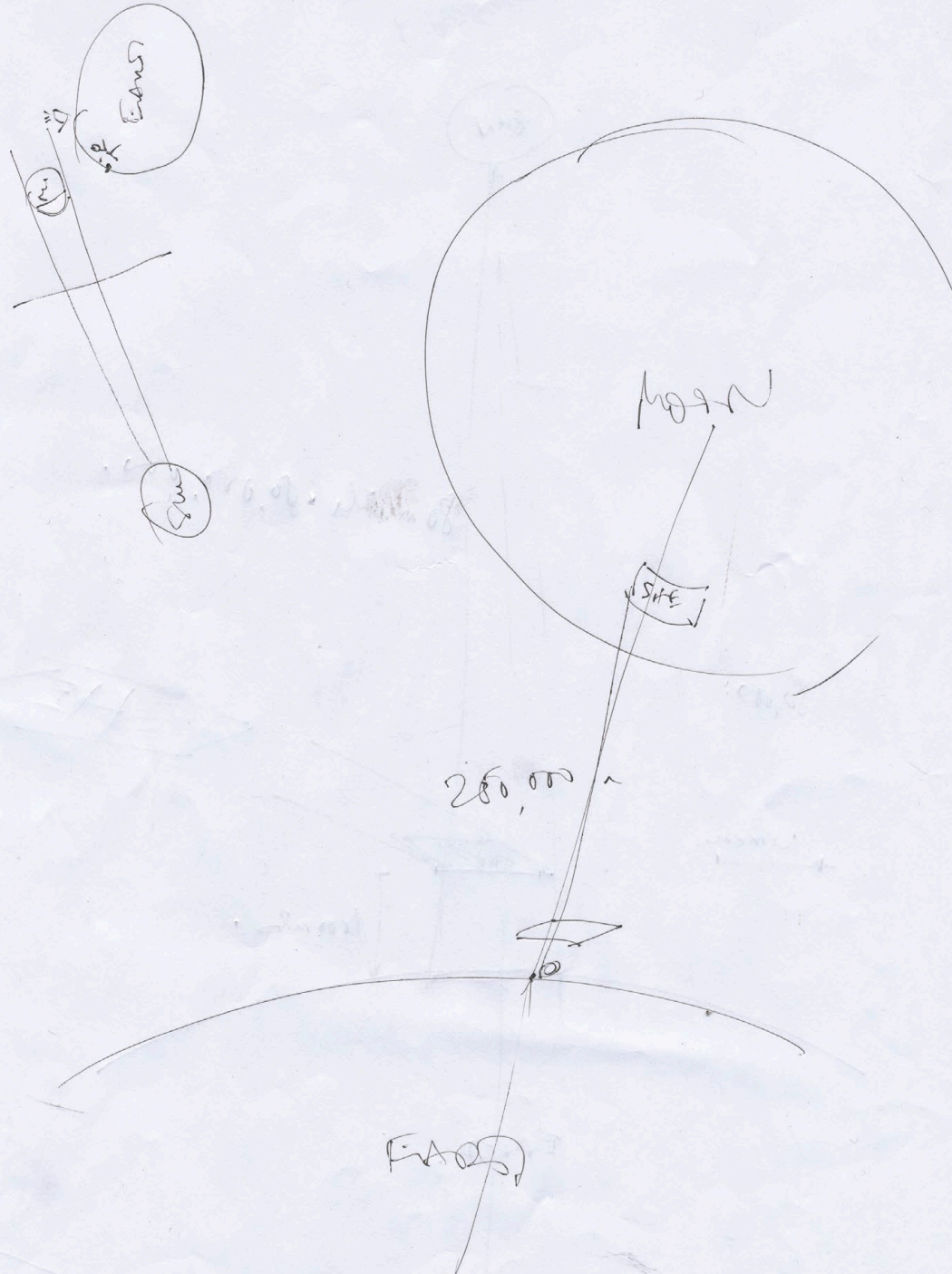
Yvonne Treis

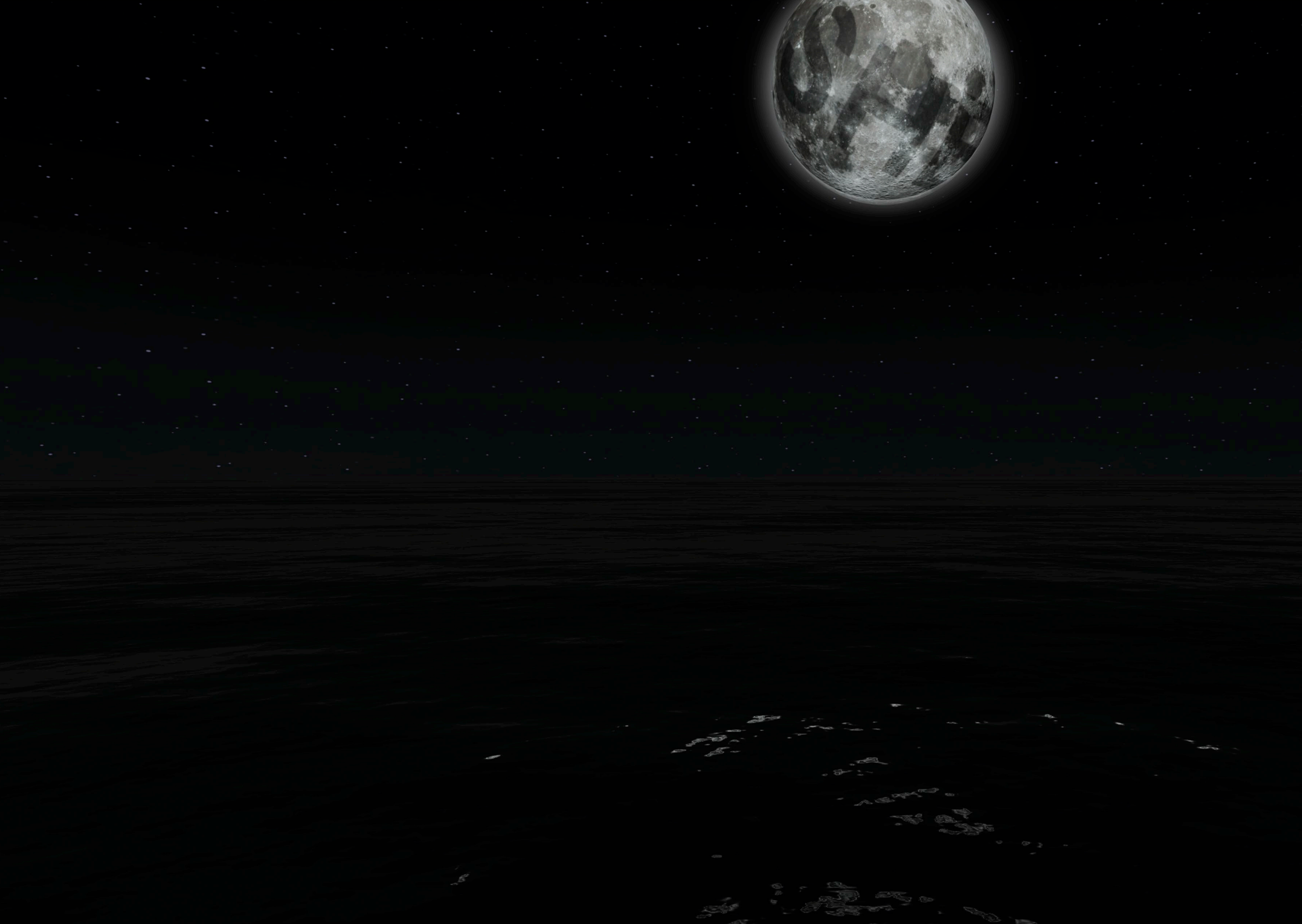
Marina Gorlach

Peter Backhaus  
Becky Taylor

Marina Gorlach

Bahar Otcu-Grillman  
Emel Uçar











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LILIANE LIJN

moonmeme

The WORD is ART

MOCA London is proud to host a virtual reality (extended reality XR) version of Liliane Lijn's ongoing project *moonmeme*. This is the first in a series of exhibitions of extended reality (XR) works based on artists' pieces in Michael Petry's book *The WORD is ART* published by Thames & Hudson. They are produced in collaboration between the artists, MOCA London and Eric Prince ART[XR].

Hamish Hamilton Penguin Random House have just released *Liquid Reflections*, Lijn's autobiography. Lijn's solo museum exhibition *Liliane Lijn. Arise Alive*, is opening at Tate St. Ives on the 23rd of May – 2nd of November 2025.

**The artist would like to thank:** John Campbell Brown, Brian Butterworth, António Cidadão, Bernard Comrie, Nick Justice, Sylvia Kouvali, Eric Prince, Hannah Robinson, Tom Ruen, Andi Studer and Richard Wilding.

**Works list:**

**Outside cover:** *S/HE*, 2014, Kambaata, [Cushitic; Ethiopia], two sets, each of nine digital giclée prints on Epson 325gsm Archival Fine Art paper; 100% cotton rag, acid free base

**Inside front and back cover:** *moonmeme*, 1992-ongoing, Interactive digital realtime program for Mac Mini and monitor (various sizes). HESHE voice chant and Lunar Tales

**Pages 2 and 15, 10-11/13:** *S/HE*, 2014, Lower Sorbian and English.

**Page 5 and 6:** *moonmeme* diagram drawings by Nick Justice for Liliane Lijn, 2011

**Pages 8 - 9, 12:** *moonmeme* XR, 2025, virtual reality image, produced by Eric Prince

**Page 14:** Poster artwork of *moonmeme*, commissioned by London Underground, 2008

**Texts:**

**Page 3:** *moonmeme*, courtesy Liliane Lijn, *Space Feminisms*, edited by Claire Webb and Annick Bureaud and published by Bloomsbury 2024.

**Page 4:** Email extracts, 2014, correspondence between Liliane Lijn and Prof. Bernard Comrie FBA. Director, department of Linguistics, University of California Santa Barbara.

**Page 7:** Linguist List: <http://linguistlist.org/index.cfm>

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