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Plus léger que l'air - Lighter than air

The Flight of the Dragonfly, Uehara Michiko

Laure Schwartz-Arenales

Bertrand Piccard

Michiko Uehara

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During the cherry blossom season of April 1924, 100 years ago, on his only trip to the Land of the Rising Sun, Alfred Baur, an extraordinary entrepreneur and founder of the Museum of Far Eastern Art in Geneva, was charmed to discover the sparkling poetry of the "images of the floating world" (ukiyo-e), combined with the landscapes of the great masters of the print and the delightful motifs found throughout the objects in his superb collection of Japanese art.

Echoing his taste and pioneering spirit, and as part of the celebrations marking the 160th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Japan, this book, thanks to contributions from leading specialists in the fields of handicrafts and textiles, takes an in-depth historical, technical and comparative look at the desire for lightness that underpins the aims, aesthetics and meaning of the work of Michiko Uehara, a virtuoso weaver.

In her studio bathed in the subtropical sunshine of Okinawa, in the archipelago in the far south of Japan where she was born and which is renowned for its textiles, she succeeds in pushing the material to the very edge of nothingness, weaving and dyeing sublime fabrics in three-denier threads*, as fine and transparent as "a dragonfly's wing" (akezuba in the local language).

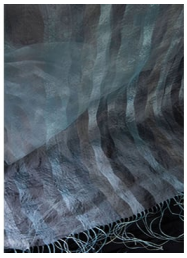
This bonding relationship – combining the physical and the spiritual – which links Uehara to silk fibres and more generally to nature itself, gives rise to "woven air", as she puts it: an aerial, rhythmic journey, free of borders and attuned to living things.

As this book suggests, this quest is not unrelated to some of the research carried out by Swiss explorer Bertrand Piccard, whose solar aircraft, a giant, silent dragonfly whose carbon-fibre ribs combine extreme strength and lightness, intelligently weaves a harmonious path between humanity, earth and sky…

* The Denier (Den) is a measure of continuous thread, i.e. its weight in grams per 9000 metres of thread; i.e. 1 Den = 1 gr./9000m of thread

Text in English and French.

A graduate of the École du Louvre and a doctor of Paris IV Sorbonne, **Laure Schwartz-Arenales** began her career at the Musée national des Arts asiatiques-Guimet and the École du Louvre, where she taught East Asian art. Her research on Japanese ancient painting, conducted since 1998 in Japan (Tohoku University - Kyoto National Museum), was awarded the Kajima Foundation for the Arts in 2007. Professor at Ochanomizu University and then at Sophia University (Tokyo), she has been director of the Baur Foundation, Museum of Far Eastern Arts in Geneva since 2018. Born in Naha, Okinawa in 1949, **Michiko Uehara** became familiar with Okinawan textiles through the Japan Folk Art Museum (Tokyo) when she was in college. After entering the world of textiles under the tutelage of the renowned master weaver Yoshihiro Yanagi, she learned traditional Okinawan weaving techniques from Shizuko Ôshiro and established the "Mayu-ori" workshop in 1979. Using 3-denier silk threads, the finest thread a silkworm can produce, Uehara weaves incredibly light and airy textiles, baptized "Akezuba-ori," which, in Okinawa, means a dragonfly's wing. Explorer, psychiatrist and pioneer of clean technologies, **Bertrand Piccard** is the author of two first aeronautical round-the-world flights in a balloon and a solar plane. President of the Solar Impulse Foundation, this United Nations Environment Ambassador uses his fame to serve progress, sustainability and quality of life, three themes that are reflected in his concept of "qualitative economy".






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