

Text: Marie Hazard x JAPANESE BASKETS

OV Projects

#MarieHazard

#JapaneseBaskets #OVProject

On the occasion of our 20th exhibition, OV Project is delighted to present, for the first time in Belgium, the work of the French artist Marie Hazard, together with a selection of traditional Japanese bamboo baskets.

Marie Hazard is a weaver. She weaves to create her own canvas and tell a story – her own and that of her time. The etymological origins of the word *tisser* ('to weave') highlight the significance of this traditional and ancestral act. The word comes from the Latin *texere*, to write. By choosing weaving as a medium, Marie Hazard is telling the story of a technique, of *savoir-faire*, of an ancestral artisanal production which she adapts to our present time. Olivier Vrankenne decided to show the artist's work alongside the Japanese ancestral tradition of bamboo basket-weaving. Bringing the two together is an invitation to think about the very idea of the border between craft and art, between technique and creativity, between utility and beauty.

Like the work of yarn weaving on a loom, bamboo basket making involves transmitting a knowledge, a technique that cannot be invented but instead must be learnt. Mastering it fully requires life-long learning and practice. In fact, bamboo as a material is highly demanding and being able to work with it takes years of training, from learning how to choose the right bamboo to its transformation and including weaving. Marie Hazard was determined to learn: first in the studios of Central Saint Martins in London and later, once she had acquired her own weaving loom, in her workshop in Paris. Her work continuously poses the question of the value of labour, specifically manual labour. She reactivates a craftsmanship that had at times been forgotten and, at least in Europe, long remained restricted to the spheres of dressmaking, furnishing and home textiles. The ancestral heritage of Japanese basket-weaving was perpetuated by the tradition of the tea ceremony in 19th-century China, trying to satisfy a growing demand. The primary link between the artist's work and this tradition is therefore its practical function. Just like yarn, bamboo is used to build, protect, clothe and decorate; it is intrinsic to everyday and domestic life; it is part of our direct environment. For example, in mythology, Ariane unwinds her thread to help Theseus find his way out of the labyrinth; Penelope continuously weaves and unweaves her fabric, so as to suspend Time and Destiny. Over time, an artistic practice emerges, claiming its own aesthetic. By turns, the simple utilitarian function is supplanted by the artist's vision of these traditional practices, which become an artform in their own right.

The link between the art of Japanese basket-weaving and Marie Hazard's work is deepened by the choice of naturally occurring materials. For her show at OV Project, Hazard decided to only use linen and paper: like bamboo and Japanese paper, these are both natural and organic materials. The plant origin of these raw materials ensures the simplicity of the aesthetic result of the fabrics, their raw, unadorned, no-frills appearance (the choice of silk, for example, could have distorted this search for beauty in austerity). In this sense, both practices can also be related to the Japanese *wabi-sabi* philosophy, which promotes "the beauty of things modest and humble",<sup>i</sup> simplicity as a "state of grace arrived at by a sober, modest, heartfelt intelligence."<sup>ii</sup> Marie Hazard combines materials, overlays techniques and matters. The exposition invites us to come closer to the material, to penetrate it, to form an intimate bond with it. The artist has a carnal relationship with this material; her hand intervenes and

transforms it directly. “The *wabi-sabi* objects are usually small and compact, discrete and turned towards the inside. They seem to be saying: come closer, make contact with us.”

The very support of the work is at the heart of Hazard’s reflection. Prior to choosing weaving as her preferred medium, she had been a painter. However, rather than the act of painting, she was interested in the canvas, in the painting support itself. The other side of the support fascinates the artist: the wooden stand, the linen canvas, the technical materials it is composed on. These elements are put together to create a new, hybrid support, *sui generis*. Each piece is the result of overlaying materials and colours: once the work on the loom is finished, the artist uses digital printing to introduce various colourful motifs, misshapen stripes, thin or thicker lines. “The thread reel is my starting point: it’s my raw material. I start from the yarn to get to the result, to a whole.” The dichotomy between the top and the bottom, between the front and the back, is the cornerstone of Hazard’s practice. Looking at the front side of the work, we see the artistic result – seemingly perfect, beautiful and aesthetically pleasing. In order to grasp the process, we must nevertheless pay attention to the reverse. On the back of the weaving, we see the inner structure of the yarn. The connections and links between the threads produce a harmonic creation, to an alchemy of colours and motifs.

Like the art of Japanese baskets, Hazard’s weavings maintain a cyclical relationship to time, which becomes a creative element in itself: the ritual of weaving and entwining gives rise to highly contemplative works. By weaving, the artist registers time, confers a lasting value on the day-to-day and pays tribute to our collective imaginary. Weaving is constructing, structuring a frame. However, the artist also makes space for chance [*hazard*], for the accidental, which remains an integral part of the creative process. As Agnes Varda said: “We are open to chance and chance brings us new things.” Chance fuels Marie Hazard’s work – it breaks away from the initial expectations and imposes a disruptive rhythm, a point of disorder, of imperfection, a need to let go. A mystery.

Charles Geoffrion

i<sup>ii</sup> Leonard Koren, *Wabi-sabi: For Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers*, Imperfect Publishing, 2008, p. 7.

ii<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid*, p.82.