

In a studio in Cachan, a poetic and intimate universe unfolds across a pile of fabrics, fragments of experimental embroidery and sculptured textiles. Corinne Gradis and Elodie Watanabe are a duo who've been working in appliqué for several years. Less well known in France than abroad, the fruits of their collaboration, seen here, amount to a secret garden of treasures.

Their association came about by chance. It happened, as does most of their work, initially through experimentation and then through a kind of osmosis, producing a uniquely colourful magic.

Elodie, coming from the fashion world, preferred experimenting with textile materials to the rigour of a set procedure. Corinne had acquired her graphic skills through engraving and sign making, but the rigidity of wood no longer satisfied her. Working individually, their solitude had become arduous. A desire to work differently and more freely was what brought them together and the textile element provided an ideal vehicle for self expression.

The precision and refinement of Elodie's fashions and her Japanese culture complemented Corinne's seductive palette, influenced by her Moroccan childhood. Their collaboration grew little by little, continually gaining strength through constant exchanges and a natural empathy.

Corinne contributes the tone, the concept, to which Elodie subscribes. Together they search, talking at length, bent over their sketches. Constructed like abstract pictures, the works develop through the playful juxtaposition of bits of fabric, gathered, cut, reassembled, then embroidered by machine following an appliqué technique. 'It's colour that leads us; it's the basic element of the design,' explains Corinne. Verticals and horizontals create tramas with strong lines and rhythms. Nothing is left to chance, the drawing is rigorous. Combined and reinforced by a thicker or finer material, the colours occupy a fundamental place, producing an emotive and intense dynamic that reveals its purpose. The work is then enriched by machine embroidery, sometimes straight, sometimes zig-zagging or sometimes hand-done by Elodie who excels in the fine detail of finish.

Their techniques, like their convictions, complement each other. Intimately linked to the feminine world, the textiles with their use of age-old techniques have a universal dimension. The work titled 'Berber Marriage' represents an artistic odyssey through the terrain of Corinne's childhood. Here, a society regulated by an ancient matriarchal system, imposes itself on this arid ochre earth through the luxuriance of colour and festive costumes.

Other creations evoke the kind of paradise associated with Eden. They simultaneously suggest a sense of well-being and an interior searching. 'Green Mineral' calls the elements of nature to a place where they can meet and be harnessed. The result is miniscule, sometimes touches of white astound the eye, like the pink of dawn.

'The Blue of God' makes use of symbolic colour linked to spiritual belief. 'Relics', miniatures created from african cloth with a herring-bone pattern, are like portable icons or collection boxes conveying a precious object or metaphysical significance. Sometimes the woven fabric dematerialises through the play of forms and spaces to create airy sculptures like a spider's web whose lightness astounds.

Textiles for Elodie and Corinne possess a sacred dimension. Their common dream is to create a shroud in which to wrap the dead for their passage to the Beyond, a project which demonstrates that their story is far from over.

Céline Catucci



It is the surface stitching and texture that lend movement to the finished object. The thread, alternately taut and slack, silent and dynamic, irrigates the cloth like life blood flowing through the veins, criss-crossing the material, carrying with it the memory of its own past. What seemed homogeneous is briefly transformed into a fabric of separate incidents, disparities and details, leading the eye deliberately away from its goal. It is as if at the final moment it no longer deigns to divulge its secrets but has elected to remain concealed in the caressing softness of the cloth. Once finished, the work is so fine it has the permeability of skin, the organic unity of a spider's web, fragile but tensile and with a language completely its own.

These are the caskets containing the precious objects, the compartments where letters are secreted, the dwellings offering and protecting solitude, allowing the mystery within to gestate and mature. We wait for it to emerge from the depths of its hiding place and share its secrets with us at last, transforming itself yet again as it does so.

Marie-France Vilcoq