

**Silke Pan** is an award-winning artist, acrobat and athlete. She is a champion who faces new challenges with determination and courage. After suffering an injury in 2007 she has turned her pain into triumph and is now a circus performer - and also a coach and a speaker !



@Mathieu Rod

She actively supports organizations that defend the rights of disabled people, children and animals. Silke has written a book with her husband. Together they have produced two documentary films about her sporting challenges and many directors from various countries (Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Belgium...) have released documentaries on Silke's fascinating life, some of which have won prestigious awards.

### **2020 – A Year of Rebirth**

Her life as a circus performer ended abruptly in September 2007 because of an accident. She became paraplegic and started using a wheelchair. But this would not stop her! Silke became a champion at handbiking and competed in ultra-paracycling.

She invented a unique technique to balance on her hands again -- an acrobatic discipline that she used to practice before the accident. After 14 years of sitting in her wheelchair, she is back on stage as a circus performer!

At the end of the 2021 season, she officially announced her resignation from the National Handbike Team and retired from the world of competition to devote herself to a return to the stage. Her first circus performance was in December 2021. Her international debut was in Italy, at the Salieri Circus Awards, in September 2022, exactly 15 years after the injury.

By choosing this path she became, it seems, the first professional hand balancer with complete paraplegia below the 10th thoracic vertebra. A new challenge that she is looking forward to facing

with all her energy and devotion.

### **HANDBIKE AWARDS**

*10 years with 132 international races + numerous sporting challenges.*

*121 x on the podium, including 80 x 1st place*

2013 – 2014: Best World Time (Marathon) + 4 marathon speed records

2015: Vice World Champion/ Gold medal at the World Cup

2017-2018 -2019: Winner final stage Giro d'Italia

2021: European Champion & a Bronze Medal at the World Championship.



### **RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

She cooperates with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, which is developing a new generation exoskeleton. This research will bring freedom and independence to many people with reduced mobility.

2016 – after being a paraplegic for 9 years, Silke was able to stand up and walk thanks to an exoskeleton. For the first time it is being adapted for children.

She began winning the 4th place and a qualification for the final in the first competition, an obstacle race, the Cybathlon, a competition for disabled athletes authorized to use bionic assistance technologies.

2017 - Silke and her team won the 1st place (three times in a row), at the Cybathlon Experience in Düsseldorf, Germany

2020 - 2<sup>nd</sup> place at the International Cybathlon race.

2021 - 1st place at the Global Innovation Challenge in 2021.

2022- Silke Pan gave the world's first ever dance performance wearing a powered exoskeleton suit

during the Swiss Robotic Day

## HISTORY

From 1992 to 2007 Silke has performed in theatres all over Europe as well as on cruise ships, amusement parks, and gala events. Her talent was noticed by Erik Nock – he is a member of a great circus dynasty dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, one of the two biggest circuses in Switzerland until 2019. She performed under his management from 1996 to 2003.

While working with Erik Nock, Silke met her future husband Didier Dvorak. Together they performed under many names including Duo Robin Street. They also performed as “Mini Tell and Taglia Tell” and “Jungle Joke”.

In September 2007, she had an accident during a trapeze training session. The safety measures put in place did not work and she broke her 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> dorsal vertebrae. As a result of this injury she became paraplegic and started using a wheelchair.

Silke and her husband were forced to choose a new profession. Together they created a company that does decorations for events and called the company “Canniballoon Team” Together they created the Biggest Balloon Labyrinth in the World at the Millennium Jam in Belgium and entered the Guinness Book of World Records building, together with a team of decorators, the Greatest Balloon Decor in the World: A giant project in China, 470,000 Balloons on 10,000m<sup>2</sup>, on which Canniballoon was mandated to realize 180 trees and 450 meters of vines and vegetation.

At the same time, Silke was determined to not give up athletic activities, though she began training on a handbike from the first day she left the hospital. In 2012 she began competing professionally, as part of the German national team. And she was very successful!

At the end of 2016 Silke switched to alpine ultra-paracycling with the ascent of more than 80 mythical passes in the Swiss Alps, the Maritime Alps and the Pyrenees. In 2018 she crossed the Pyrenees (28 alpine passes in 10 days, using the strength of her arms). And in 2019 she competed in the Tour des Lacs – 1,000km and 30 Swiss lakes crossings in para-triathlon mode [handbike, racing chair, swimming, and bellyak [a modified kayak].

In 2017 she continued competing in international races as part of an Italian team. In 2019, after being naturalized as a Swiss citizen, she started competing on the Swiss team.



*balloon decor by Canniballoon Team*

## CHILDHOOD AND ARTISTIC TRAINING

Silke was born in Germany and spent a large part of her childhood and adolescence in French-speaking Switzerland.

Ever since childhood, her interests have included acrobatic sports, dance, theater and artistic expression in all its forms.

Silke lived in the midst of tensions and a separation that agitated her parents, alongside an older sister who had a mental handicap and allowed her to understand very early what it means to be different. She then found her "lifeline" in gymnastics on apparatus. A relentless daily practice, a release. When her family moved to Switzerland, she became part of the Swiss national acrobatic diving and trampoline team (Swiss champion), She had internships in circus schools and trained daily in all circus disciplines.

After graduating from high school, she continued her training at the National Circus School in Berlin where she graduated in contortion, hand balancing and trapeze.

Silke's story is one of great courage and resilience. Her talent and passion are inspiring and she is working to make the world a better place!

*Sàdia Carone*



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