



RACING THE GALAXY

An exhibition by Jérôme Sans and Dina Baitassova



JOËL ANDRIANOMEARISOA

Born in 1977 in Antananarivo, Madagascar, he lives and works between Antananarivo and Paris, France.

Initially drawn to the multifaceted nature of architectural practice, Joël Andrianomearisoa started engaging with other disciplines such as fashion, design, and scenography, to pursue a career as a couturier before shifting his practice to the visual arts. Consequently, he works across various media, avoiding categorization, and also incorporates performance, video making, and large-scale installation work. Portraying emotional journeys, Andrianomearisoa collects clothes and paper clippings which he cuts, tears, and weaves into ensembles deployed as black tapestries hanging throughout a space to evoke the tragedies of political bodies, love, violence, sexuality, the global economy, and contemporary alienation. A recurrent element in his work, textile is treated in a multifaceted way and becomes a unique language that is able to be fragmented, folded, creased, and mixed. Using silk paper or *lamba*, a ubiquitous fabric in Madagascar for garments and sometimes to shroud the dead, the artist's iconic series *The Labyrinth of Passions* is a metaphor for fragility as an essential life force. His superimposition of diverse silk papers in the space also provides architectural solidity to the work. Black becomes an 'emotional fabric', with its limitless nuances. Andrianomearisoa insists on intimacy

and fragility in mapping out thoughts, emotions, and social realities in environments that are both flattering and misleading. His materials are raw but also exquisitely delicate, almost to the point of breaking in the chaos of experience.

Joël Andrianomearisoa has participated in many international exhibitions, such as *African Metropolis: An Imaginary City*, MAXXI, Rome (2018); *Hello World*, Hamburger Bahnhof Museum, Berlin (2018); *A Beast, A God, A Line*, Dhaka Art Summit, Para Site Hong Kong, MoMA Warsaw (2018); *All Things Being Equal*, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town (2017); *Africa Remix*, Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie, Bamako (2009); Havana Biennale (2006); *The Progress of Love*, Menil Collection, Houston (2012); and *Divine Comedy*, MMK, Frankfurt, Germany (2014). His major solo shows include, *I Have Forgotten the Night*, Madagascar Pavilion, 58th Venice Biennale (2019); *Cartography of Desires, the Space Between Us*, Encounters – Art Basel, Hong Kong (2019); *Le Pli*, Fundação Leal Rios, Lisbon (2018); *Les saisons de mon cœur*, Sabrina Amrani Gallery, Madrid (2017); and *The Labyrinth of Passions*, Kaunas in Art, Mykolas Žilinskas Art Museum, Lithuania (2016).

◀ Joël Andrianomearisoa, *The Labyrinth of Passions*, 2019. Paper collage, silk paper, variable dimensions
Courtesy of Joël Andrianomearisoa and Sabrina Amrani Madrid
Exhibition view *Racing the Galaxy*, Palace of Independence, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 2019
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GEOMETRY OF DESIRE

Joël Andrianomearisoa in conversation with Jérôme Sans

JS: *How would you describe your work?*

JA: It's not easy for me to describe my own practice, but if I have to say something, I would define it as an exercise or research activity on the materiality of emotions.

JS: *Madagascar is an island at the confluence of several cultures – British, French, Portuguese, and Chinese – while still being part of the African continent. How does being born and raised there influence your sense of culture and shape your identity as an artist?*

JA: As you mentioned, Madagascar finds itself in the middle of many cultural experiences. Geographically we're part of Africa but culturally we're more like Asia. And there are so many stories with the Portuguese, the French, and the British... Most people are still very nostalgic about the French period. Given all these elements, I can safely say that Madagascar is a geography without geographies. And my attitude is quite the same. I'm from Madagascar, but I'm in love with the world. I was born and raised in Antananarivo, and I'm now working between Paris, Antananarivo, and Magnat l'Etrange, while moving around the globe from Cotonou to Madrid and Buenos Aires to Istanbul...

JS: *You live between Madagascar and Paris. How do these places influence your practice, and are you a nomadic artist?*

JA: As I said, I know where I'm coming from and I really like the idea of living between two or more territories and dealing with two or more feelings and kinds of consciousness. For instance, I can use some pocket mirrors I found in Istanbul or fabrics I picked up in Bamako... I can read Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo in Paris and drink a Caol Ila malt in Faravohitra. There are no geographical boundaries to my emotional research. I don't like the idea of nomadism or being referred to as a nomadic artist. I'm a much more a sentimental artist, attached to some territories but also dreaming about the world.

JS: *When did your artistic career begin? Were you encouraged by your family?*

JA: I think everything started about 42 years ago, when I was born one afternoon in Antananarivo, and then at 18 I choose to pursue art, design, and architecture. But my career really started when I was 20 and when I met Pascale Marthine Tayou, the *Revue Noire* family, Odile Decq, Alice Morgaine and :mentalkLINIK. They are all my relatives. If I

have to say something about my original family, for them I'm still a mystery.

JS: *You have an architectural background. Why did you turn to visual art and to what extent do these two disciplines mingle in your practice?*

JA: I never left architecture for art, and I never left fashion for something else. Just like I never left Madagascar for another country... All of them are still here in my heart, together, they're my inspirations and part of my emotional fabric. I don't believe in the barriers between disciplines. Mies van der Rohe might be a starting point for some of my textile pieces and then I'll use some clothes by Ann Demeulemeester for a particular space.

JS: *Why does urban space inspire you so much?*

JA: Urban space is the best metaphor I can imagine to describe my attitude to the world. A city is full of emotions and contradictions, all combining to create an atmosphere. There are diverse and layered spaces and architectures, stories and histories, smells and sounds, bodies and desires, realities and mysteries, smiles and kisses, music and silences, cars and textures, objects and cuisine, love and death, and dust.

JS: *You allow us to see obsessional and sentimental architecture. Do you have a particular way of approaching the space in your installations?*

JA: There's no particular way for me except being emotional. The most important thing for me is to enter the process (or the space if you prefer) with an emotional momentum. Most of the time I have to feel melancholic... This is because I'm talking about the geometry of desire or the sentimentality of an angle.

JS: *In your monochrome installations, black has a multitude of shades. What does this colour mean to you?*

JA: Of course, black is not just black since you need many colours, shades and textures to get the perfect black. So, black is complex; it's an exercise or exploration. And when I am talking about

black, it's beyond colour. Black is an attitude and a sensation. I like this idea of a never-ending story... with and in black.

JS: *Many of your works involve human relationships portraying friendship, love, passion, hope, despair, nostalgia. How do you express your own emotions through your art?*

JA: Choosing human relationships as a major theme reinforces the idea of a non-geography, as well as the power of emotion in all our lives. For instance, you need passion to achieve power. Love is universal, and nostalgia is everywhere, building the present. My own expression of these and other emotions is complex. That's the reason why I'm using the word 'exercise' because for me it's still research... a long investigation.

JS: *Can you explain the genesis of your series The Labyrinth of Passions? What does it mean?*

JA: This work is about atmosphere. It's a melodrama in which I invite the audience to get lost in their own passions. The series began 10 years ago when I was trying to define my idea of passion, as romance but also as a tool for domination. The essential reference for this series is *Laberinto de pasiones* by Pedro Almodovar. It's a journey from desire to politics, and from sexuality to despair.

JS: *You demonstrate a special sensibility for different materials, fabrics, papers, woods, and plastics. Which features in silk paper run through your work, and why are you obsessed with this material? Is it to express a kind of fragility?*

JA: The concept of fragility is essential to my work and for human beings in general. We are all fragile. For me silk paper is the perfect representation of this. You can ruin it with a single drop of water (like tears) but when you combine many sheets of this material it becomes very strong and dense. I like the duality of paper, from fragility to density.

JS: *You also collect fabrics. Can you tell us about your creative process with textiles?*

JA: Textile is another essential medium in my practice. It's another language I use to express

human emotions. From the action of crossing two threads (which is the starting point of a textile) we can begin to tell a story. We all have a piece of textile with or on us, so again, it's universal, like emotions. Even the state of nakedness is related to the action of removing a textile. So, we're all textiles.

JS: How do you feel about the history of art, and more particularly to Minimalism?

JA: I'm interested in art history, and not just in the minimalist style. I like to use combinations, such as Josef Albers with some texts by Marguerite Duras or Alighiero Boetti in relation to the amazing voice of Jeanne Moreau. I'm also inspired by Philippe Starck's designs alongside some *bazin* textile from Bamako. My stories are not simply related to art history.

JS: Are you inspired by any Malagasy traditions?

JA: Yes, but again I'm interested in combinations. Some Malagasy poets like Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo and Flavien Ranaivo, together with some Malagasy pop music from Bodo to Lalao Rabeson. I've also done a lot of research about Malagasy traditional textiles and some collaborations with Chef Lalaina, our local version of Alain Ducasse.

JS: Earlier this year you represented Madagascar in the country's very first pavilion at the 58th edition of the Venice Biennale. What did this mean to you?

JA: Of course, this first participation is an historic event for Madagascar. And it's a sign of dynamism and modernity for our nation, reflecting a positive image at both the national and international levels, despite the all too frequent predominance of either exotic or miserable imagery associated with it. I'm really proud of it, but my real question is: "As an historical moment, are we talking about the first or last Madagascar pavilion?". It's one of the reasons why I choose the title *I Have Forgotten the Night*. Do we have to forget? Do we have to remember, or do we have to enjoy the present? This piece is a concentration of all my desires and references.

It's like a book (a black one), where you can read some stories (and my own) about nights in different places in the world.

JS: What's your point of view on the Malagasy art scene?

JA: I'm going to be rude. The Malagasy art scene is very quiet. And that's because no one believes in it; not the people who could be supporting the artists, nor the policy makers or the public, and not even the artists there. We have to believe in our art and our artists in order to make some noise in our world and the world in general.

JS: How do you imagine the future?

JA: I see a sentimental future. Let's be more sentimental!

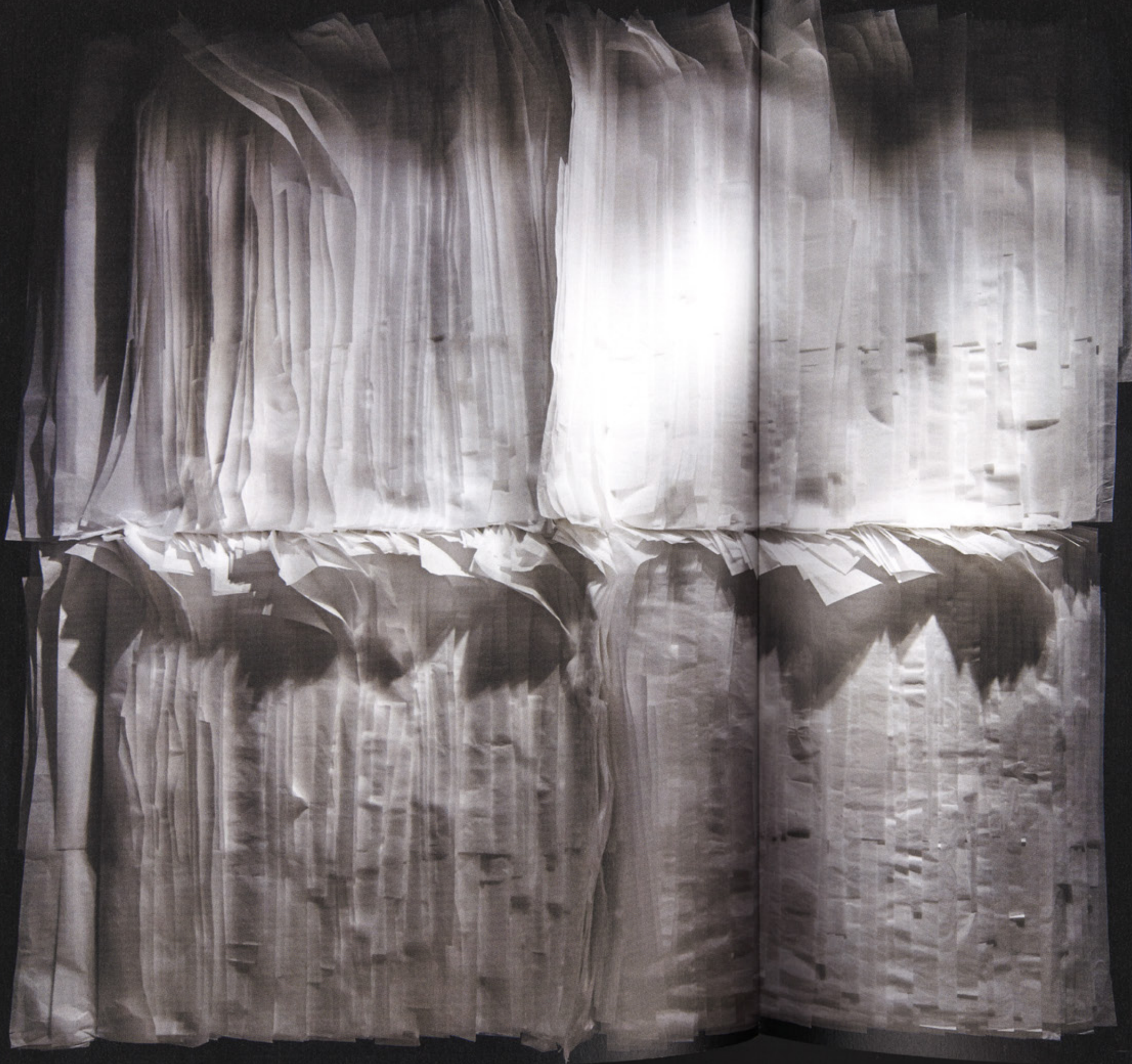
JS: What's your next dream project?

JA: Building my first sentimental architecture in Madagascar; a place where we can have dinner together with the world.









Joël Andrianomearisoa,
The Labyrinth of Passions – Act V, 2016
Paper collage, silk paper, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and
Sabrina Amrani Gallery, Madrid



Joël Andrianomearisoa, Installation shot of solo exhibition *Tomorrow, tomorrow. Those are words. You love flowers. How about tomorrow* at Sabrina Amrani, Madrid, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Sabrina Amrani Gallery, Madrid 71