



## Crafts Council / Stories

### From Madagascar to Morocco: why Joël Andrianomearisoa puts craft traditions in the spotlight



The multidisciplinary artist has paired up with Moroccan artisans for his show in Marrakesh's MACAAL museum

Charlotte Jansen  
10 March 2023

exhibitions   premium   crafts magazine

Malagasy artist Joël Andrianomearisoa is known for creating dramatic installations, paintings, drawings and sculptures that are abstract yet poetic. Traditional craft techniques have also long informed his works, which regularly incorporate textiles he finds in markets.

Andrianomearisoa typically works between Paris and his hometown of Antananarivo, Madagascar, but has recently completed a residency in Morocco – and now has a major solo exhibition in Marrakesh’s MACAAL museum. Titled *Our Land Just Like a Dream*, the show sees the artist take his work with materials and makers even further, presenting pieces made with Moroccan embroiderers, basket makers, glassblowers, ironworkers and a wealth of other artisans.

Here, he shares his thoughts on blurring the boundaries between art and craft, and how he navigates the hurdles of collaborative projects.

*Above: image courtesy of the artist and MACAAL, © Ayoub El Bardii*



A view of the exhibition *Our Land Just Like a Dream* at MACAAL, Marrakesh. Photo: © Omar Tajmouati

***Our Land Just Like a Dream* features several Moroccan craft techniques, but the starting point for this exhibition at MACAAL in Marrakesh was emotion. Could you tell me more?**

I started to discuss the idea of working in Morocco with Othman [Lazraq, Director of MACAAL] and Meriem [Berrada, Curator, MACAAL] in 2019, just after I presented the Madagascar pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Meriem was very clear from the start – she wanted the work to be produced in Morocco. So I said, ok, let’s set a new challenge and produce *everything* here, and go deeply into Morocco’s roots.

This is part of the emotion of the show, it wasn't about referencing a few craft elements, it was about trying to really live in this place: smelling, eating, touching, getting lost in the medina, meeting different people. I came here many times but without any specific aim; the emotions came from chance encounters.

I really wanted to open my eyes and find things you don't always think of as Moroccan. I ended up discovering different fabrics, glass, silver, gold, metal – I went back to my studio in Paris with almost 100kg worth of stuff!









**Tell me more about how these chance encounters evolved from there.**

One example is the singer I collaborated with, Hindi Zahra. I was meant to be working with another very famous Moroccan singer who I'd met in Paris, and we were driving together in the Gueliz neighbourhood of Marrakesh. At about 10pm we heard this song on the car radio, *Beautiful Strangers*. I asked who the singer was and it was Hindi, so I said, it has to be her! In French I'm always talking about *fulgurance* [a sudden flash of brilliance] – this is how I work, in that fleeting moment when an idea comes.

For the exhibition opening in September, I designed a seven-course dinner for 100 people, which included a frozen mint tea that I had tried once by chance. Almost everything in the show happened by accident. There was no regular process – the most beautiful things happened in the space in-between.

**It's interesting to hear about this spontaneity in the process, because the results presented in the exhibition are so precise. One of the more surprising things in the show is the series of basketry 'paintings' that you made in collaboration with Yassine El-Harrat.**

It was surprising when I saw Yassine's little basket-weave stools made out of torn and wrapped palm leaves. I was about 10 kilometres outside of Marrakesh and I sat with him for an hour drinking tea and trying to weave. It was dramatic working with him and it took six months of production, but I loved this process – and the problematic moments.

With Soufiane Tiglyene, who I made the ceramics with, it was similar: when we first met, we fought! He didn't want to work the way I proposed, and he was furious that I had to come to his 'secret garden' to see how he worked. In the end, he was happy because I pushed him somewhere different.

On negotiating with the artisans – I could tell you thousands of stories...



Installation shot of *Our Land Just Like a Dream*. Photo: courtesy of the artist and MACAAL, © Omar Tajmouati

**Artist collaborations with local artisans can often feature an exploitative dynamic. How did you work to avoid this?**

Many of the artisans were scared, because they had certain ideas of what it would be like for a ‘big artist’ to come in to their space ... but then they were disappointed because I didn’t play that role! When you enter the show, you’re given the names of the artisans and they’re all on the same level in the catalogue – you don’t know who is famous, and who isn’t.

We also spent a lot of time together after the exhibition, having couscous here at the museum. I consider them friends now. Some of them have asked me to collaborate again and we are discussing more projects – for me it’s the beginning of another chapter.

Share

[facebook ↗](#) [twitter ↗](#) [whatsapp ↗](#) [email ↗](#) [pinterest ↗](#) ...