

PRESTIGE

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CHARMAIN
KWEE

BEHIND THE WHEEL OF HER FAMILY LEGACY

A TALE OF TWO PRINCESSES | ANDREW GN | SINGAPORE'S COFFEE CULTURE

THE MATERIALISATION OF EMOTION

After representing Madagascar at the 2019 Venice Biennale and opening an art space in his hometown, JOËL ANDRIANOMEARISOA now expresses his art of emotions through Moroccan crafts in a major museum show.

Words: Y-JEAN MUN-DELSALLE

Visual investigations of love, passion, desire, hope, despair or melancholy, Joël Andrianomearisoa's works originate from an emotion or a sensation. "I'm from Madagascar, but I'm trying to have a discussion with the entire world," he says. "My art brings emotions, but inside of those emotions, you have questions and discussions. I believe that the idea of emotion, which is in all of us, can create something, can be something. So I'm trying to figure out this idea of universal elements that can touch everybody. For example, sadness and tears; we all have a little part of sadness within us. When I'm talking about emotion, I'm really talking about all of us together, so it's really the idea of 'us'. And then I think emotion has something to do with the idea of the hands, the craftsmen, the handmade – I think they're all connected."

We're inside the artist's exhibition, Our Land Just Like a Dream, at the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) in Marrakech, one of the few private contemporary art museums in Africa

that was the brainchild of architect Othman Lazraq, who is also the director of Fondation Alliances, a non-profit organisation for cultural development in Morocco.

Running until July 16, 2023, the museum's very first solo show dedicated to a contemporary artist is "a declaration of love to the land and to the hand", states Andrianomearisoa. "The land is Morocco, it's Marrakech, it's the museum. The land is a technique, a land, a people, a smell, an atmosphere. So it's very patriotic, and then to connect it with the idea of emotion, affirming the dream, that this land is actually just an excuse to open the discussion to all other discussions."

VIVA EXOTICA

Presenting his interpretation of traditional Moroccan savoir faire, the exhibition resonates with the territory of Marrakech by highlighting the diversity of its artisanal techniques through a new body of work created in-situ and in conversation with a selection of pieces from MACAAL's permanent collection.

*The Labyrinth of Passions
display at the Our Land Just
Like A Dream exhibition*



Joël Andrianomearisoa
working in a studio
Opposite: Plates made by
the artist with Moroccan
ceramist Soufiane Tiglyene



Having expressed early on a fondness for artistic crafts and manual creation, the 45-year-old artist has been working for over two decades with Malagasy master embroiderers and, more recently, with weavers in Udaipur, India, mirror mosaic craftsmen in Istanbul, Turkey, tapestry artisans in Tunisia and a master loom-setter in Aubusson, France. “The idea of working with craftsmen started from Madagascar when I was 18 or 19, when I spent one year on crafts, exploring and trying to understand all the mediums that you can manipulate in Madagascar,” he recalls.

“It’s very clear that it’s one of my passions. For me, it was also important to open windows around the world, and this is one of my biggest desires in my life, not just being comfortable in Paris or Madagascar, working on my own thing. I’m always trying to go somewhere to try to experiment with different things. So if there is an opportunity to create something with craftsmen or discover another technique, I’ll go for it, not only for a project or a residency.”

This principle of collaboration and dialogue nurtures Andrianomearisoa’s entire artistic practice – spanning sculpture,

installation, textile art and the written word – which finds its apotheosis at MACAAL in his exhibition signalling the importance of local production in his host country.

The hand – his own but also those of Moroccan master glassmakers, ceramists, tile craftsmen, metal workers, basketry artisans, jewellers, embroiders and weavers with whom he has partnered – appears as a main theme to which he dedicates an opus that’s at once intimate yet open to all, a sensory and poetic experience that resonates within each one of us. Breaking the boundaries that separate art and craft, he encouraged these artisans to offer their personal interpretation of his creative concepts.

We find stacks of white ceramic plates scratched with energetic black lines sitting on a gigantic table in a domestic interior, which were made in concert with ceramist Soufiane Tiglyene, a relationship Andrianomearisoa describes as extremely complicated. He had explained this to Tiglyene: “I need the plates to have the sensation of your hands, with all the mistakes. I’m not looking for perfection. I’m trying to reveal that each plate has something to say, has something in it to feel. I’m not going to send you drawings; I’m going

to spend time with you in your atelier and make the drawings in front of you.”

“In the end, Soufiane understood that the spirit of the hands are the best thing that you have to keep when you are a craftsman,” he adds.

Another artwork that stands out is *Hymn to Roses*, which plunges viewers into darkness and offers them a multi-sensory experience engaging their senses of sight, hearing and smell. Inside the room that may be imagined as either a jewellery box or a funerary space, 43 hammered, wrought iron roses – a universal symbol of romance and an emblem of Marrakech – fabricated by blacksmith Miloud Bouarfa and coppersmith Azzedine Toufikalah adorn the black walls.

At the same time, the haunting feline voice of Moroccan singer Hindi Zahra spills out across the space interpreting a text composed by Andrianomearisoa, which mixes the locally spoken French, English and Amazigh languages in a sound piece that’s part hymn, part elegy, while the scent of the woody Burkan fragrance created by The Moroccans fills the air with notes of leather, rock rose, cedar, smoky oud, red thyme and incense, evoking a fiery volcano.



*Les Herbes Folles du Vieux Logis
at the MACAAL exhibition
Right: A Few of my Favourite Things*



The lightness and fragility of the medium contrast dramatically with the radical architecture of the building’s solid concrete grain silos that once used to store maize from all over South Africa.

His dialogue with the built environment comes naturally, having originally moved to Paris at the age of 20 to study architecture under Odile Decq, after a childhood spent in his native Antananarivo in Madagascar. Splitting his time between the two capitals today, he also produces his larger creations in a third studio in the tiny village of Magnat-l’Étrange in central France.

After becoming the first artist to represent Madagascar at the Venice Biennale in 2019, Andrianomearisoa decided that the best way he could galvanise the nascent Malagasy contemporary art scene – formerly impregnated with the French colonial presence until the island’s independence in 1960 – was to create neither a museum nor a gallery, but an independent space for artists.

In 2020, he founded Hakanto Contemporary in Antananarivo for the promotion of Madagascan art and culture

internationally, in the manner of other artist-led residencies on the continent by the likes of Ibrahim Mahama in Ghana or Kehinde Wiley in Senegal. Under his artistic direction, it showcases the richness of contemporary Malagasy art through an exhibition programme and spaces for artists in residence.

“Hakanto Contemporary is a little space where we’re creating something, a kind of laboratory, and it’s more about the energy, but it’s very serious. We support artists with production and try to help them to be part of this big art game, so it’s a project between hospitality and generosity. The idea of the residency is not about research, but to be free for one or two months to think about something. It’s definitely not the same rules as a museum or art centre; it’s an artist project,” he concludes.

“I think in two years’ time, we will start to invite artists and curators from abroad, but for the moment, it’s dedicated to Malagasy artists and Malagasy audiences for people there to be convinced that art has to be part of our lives.” ■

JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

Guided by a transversal and instinctive approach, Andrianomearisoa applies no other method than experimentation, refusing any hard and fast rules in order to constantly allow himself to be surprised. “The more challenging a project is, the more satisfaction, or deception sometimes,” admits Andrianomearisoa.

“It’s really up and down; it’s always like that. I love discovering something, even in my studio. For example, when we are doing textile pieces, of course I’m doing the drawings and the first test, but there’s always a moment of surprise, and I’m always looking for this moment of surprise. It can be a bad surprise, but it can also a good surprise. But that’s the point. The process has to be a

surprise and the result also. When you make a drawing, you know your intention, but the best moment is when you draw the lines and you don’t know where they will stop, and that is this little crazy moment called art.”

In Andrianomearisoa’s works, black dominates – a radical choice which, according to the artist, gravitates towards the universal. But far from being monochrome, black is simultaneously one and a thousand colours, the sum of the chromatic prism whose countless shades he examines through paper and textile that are emblematic of his vocabulary.

“I like the idea that I’m working on a colour which is a non-colour,” he discloses. “It’s an exploration, a challenge, an exercise. The second thing that is very interesting is

that to make the colour black, you need many colours, so actually black is very colourful. Then I like all the contradictions of black. For example, on one hand, black is for funerals and mourning. On the other, black is the definition of elegance – like on a Parisian woman with the little black dress. Black is also the colour of the skin, which is something very political. In theatre and cinema, black is the beginning and the end, when you cut to black to refresh your eyes or to get you ready to go somewhere. So I like the diversity of purposes of black.”

BEAT OF AFRICA

An in-demand artist, Andrianomearisoa is having a moment on the African continent with a major exhibition at Fondation Zinsou

PHOTOS: AYOUB EL BARDJI FOR JOËL ANDRIANOMEARISOA AND THE MUSEUM OF AFRICAN CONTEMPORARY ART AL MAADEN (MACAAL)

in Benin opening in September, and a monumental site-specific commission, *The Five Continents of All Our Desires*, currently draped in the atrium of the Zeitz MOCAA in Cape Town until June 25 this year.

At the latter, his material of predilection – black silk paper – is used for six large-scale sculptures forming a suspended archipelago in a poetic nod to land masses and geographies of the imagination, while referencing migration and language, and the ongoing pursuit of the realms of engagement and desire. “There are six floating elements, and the sixth continent is the continent of fantasy or desire,” he notes. “It’s to affirm the idea of all together the five continents and all our desires. You can see this idea of ‘our’ in most of my texts; I never write ‘I.’”