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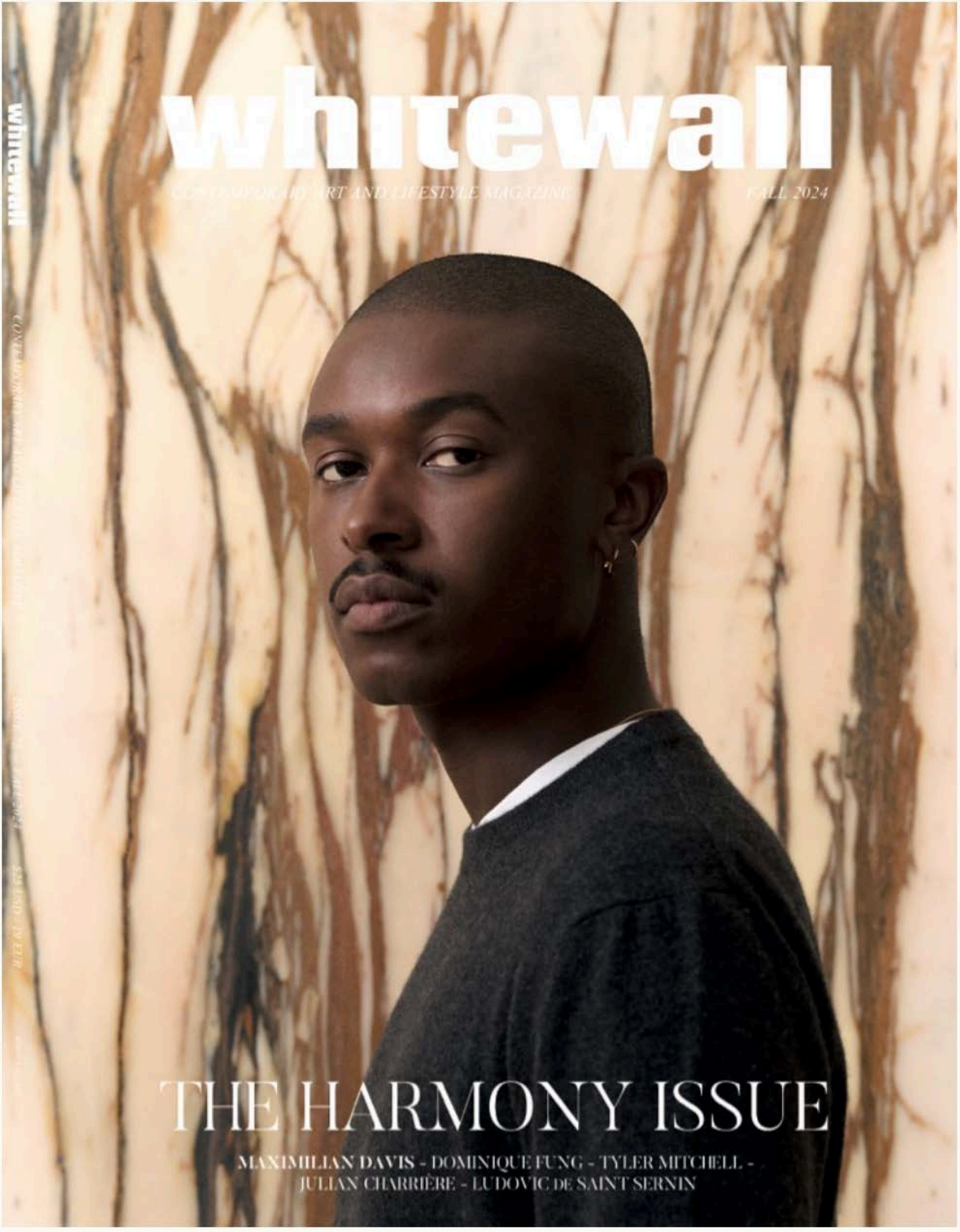

## THE HARMONY ISSUE

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# JOËL ANDRIANOMEARISOA

Opening a new Hakanto Contemporary art complex and revealing *La Vague Affection* at the 2024 edition of Un Été Au Havre.

BY ELIZA JORDAN

# ATELIER VISIT

In 2017, the first edition of Un Eté Au Havre took place in Le Havre, France. To celebrate the northern French port city's five hundredth anniversary, the multi-month fête was fueled by an extensive presentation of art installations, visited by millions. In the years since, Un Eté Au Havre ("A Summer in Le Havre") has become a not-to-be-missed open-air contemporary art activation filled with sensational artworks inspired by the ground they're presented on. Its success has led to an annual presentation visited by attendees from around the globe and a permanent art collection, inseparable from Le Havre's unique identity.

Curated by Gaël Charbau, this year's edition is open to the public from June 22 to September 22 and features site-specific installations and multifaceted works by artists like Stéphane Vigny, Edgar Sarin, Ad Minoliti, Grégory Chatonsky, and Joël Andrianomearisoa. Artworks on main roads and rooftops join pieces in libraries and gardens, all sparking dialogue about Le Havre's evolution.

Andrianomearisoa's *La Vague Affection*, is shown with support from the Rubis Mécénat endowment fund—carrying out committed artistic and social projects, which has supported Andrianomearisoa's work since 2019, when he represented his country at the first Malagasy pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale. Presented between two of Le Havre's landmarks, the Bibliothèque Universitaire du Havre and the Bains des Docks, words by the artist glow in the dark: *Sur la vague infinie se joue le théâtre de nos affections* ("The theater of our affections plays out on the infinite wave") and *Sur le crépuscule du temps se dessinent nos promesses éternelles* ("Our eternal promises take shape on the twilight of time"). The neon lights, emblazoned on the facades of the sites, form two halves of a poem that Andrianomearisoa wrote in a recently released novel with the same name, *La Vague Affection*. Inside the library, fragments of poems are scattered for readers to find on their own terms—that week, next month, or in ten years.

Exploring scale, language, and history is something the artist has been interested in communicating for decades, working between Paris and his birthplace of Antananarivo, Madagascar. His sculptures, installations, textiles, and collaborations have been presented at MAXXI in Rome, the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C. In 2020, the artist created an independent, non-profit art space named Hakanto Contemporary with the entrepreneur and collector, Hasnaine Yavarhoussen in Antananarivo, Madagascar. Here, a dynamic destination that supports Malagasy art serves as a platform for artists and their engaging exhibitions. On September 15, Hakanto Contemporary will open a new venue five times larger than its original space—a 2,000-square-meter warehouse divided into modules that adapt throughout the year, featuring rooms for presentations, workshops, a library, a boutique, and more.

Timed to the opening of Hakanto Contemporary's new art center and this year's edition of Un Été Au Havre, Andrianomearisoa shared with *Whitewall* how he approaches making and presenting art in

**WHITEWALL:** *How did your participation in this year's edition of "Un Été Au Havre" begin?*

**JOËL ANDRIANOMEARISOA:** I received an invitation by the curator, Gaël Charbau, who is very interested in literature. He was interested in big installations, but at the same time, very minimal. There's a contradiction in it, but he liked this idea of invasion. At the same time, it's something that you have to find out between the walls or on the corner of a very specific street. Then he told me that he was really interested in this part of my work, which is the most conceptual part of my work, about literature—text, words, and language. That's something that I sometimes include on a sticker, on a tote bag, on a T-shirt, or on a poster for a show. Sometimes, I also can include it on a very large scale, like in neon or on a sculpture. For the show, he was interested in this idea of the different scales of text and messages that I can produce.

We ended up with this idea, and it took us about a year to decide on the perfect scale and how we're going to work on it. It was very interesting because I didn't know Le Havre, the history of Le Havre. So it was interesting. We end up with a novel, a real book named *La Vague Affection*, which was the starting point of everything. Inside, I wrote a love letter to the city of Le Havre. It's 120 pages, and it starts and ends with a love story. Between, you have all these things, like, "One day I love you" and "The second day I hate you." It's a reaction that I have with love, but everything is very poetic, sometimes tragic or very happy. Sometimes there are things that may be too romantic. But everything starts from this novel.

**WW:** *Can you tell us more about the novel?*

**JA:** It's very exclusive because we only printed five hundred copies, so chosen people will receive it. It's more like a statement. But then we have 25,000 postcards, which will be inside the library—the shop and bookstore. Someone can leave it on a car, on a bus, or on a tramway. If you are buying a ticket at the train station, maybe the person can give you one with a ticket. It's really invading the city. It will be everywhere—and randomly. Then, the main piece that everyone can see is going to be on the facade of two main buildings.

It's part of my conceptual work, but it's very physical, and it's something that you can read and keep reading. I'm working with the idea of emotion and how to share that emotion. The main idea, the main question, is how to materialize those emotions. I did that through the neons and the facade, the book, and from the postcards. The project is a discussion between the curator and I, and of course, with the city.

**WW:** *What does having a partner like Rubis Mécénat to support your show, and your work at large, mean?*

**JA:** It was important for this exhibition to have another partner, Rubis Mécénat. They have been supporting contemporary art for many years, and supported me when I represented Madagascar at the Venice Biennale in 2019. They also have one project in Madagascar, and we collaborate a lot.

They are supporting this ecological project in Madagascar called Ndao Hanavao* They support my work, but there's also always a discussion between my work shown somewhere, and then going back to Madagascar with another reflection. We have been in many different locations together. But they were really seduced to go to Le Havre with me. This isn't just a painting on a wall or an installation in a museum. They love the idea that it's becoming popular—it's something that can create actually another level of discussion with the population.

If you're a tourist in Le Havre—in the summertime there are many people in Normandy—and you find one of these postcards and you decide to send it somewhere, or keep it with you, or put it in your book, at a certain point, the work is going to travel all around the world. That's part of the concept of my work about language. The neon is there for the people that are present, but it's also very interesting because you can take an image and it travels. It's traveling on your phone, and then the phone is traveling on a plane. The power of language is very interesting because it's a kind of a never-ending story.

**WW:** *Your new space for Hakanto Contemporary opens September 15 with an inaugural exhibition named "Family Stories." What will this feature?*

**JA:** This inaugural program unfolds through a captivating series of three monographs by three Malagasy artists or artists with close ties to Madagascar: Aude Onivola Rajaona, Alexandre Gourçon, and Jessy Razafimandimby embark on a deeply personal and sensitive exploration of family bonds through their original new works. Jessy Razafimandimby evokes the enduring duality within family relationships in a journey that reimagines architectural aesthetics between sculpture and furniture. Alexandre Gourçon delves into his family memory, manipulating his preferred medium, textiles, alongside other locally sourced materials. Aude Onivola Rajaona expresses her sensibilities on the theme through a sound piece, marking a groundbreaking approach that the young artist is experimenting with for the first time in her musical practice.

Alongside these solo exhibitions, we present two unique dialogues. Tunisian artist Asma Ben Aissa offers an intimate tribute to her mother in conversation with Malagasy chef Tiana Nasisandrealy. Meanwhile, Malagasy influencer and comedian Andrianaina Rajoelisoa, known as Joely, offers a fresh reinterpretation of family representations through the lens of Andy Warhol's iconic Polaroids. Finally, I've carefully selected a collection of paintings from the Hasnaine Yavarhoussen collection, each piece adding another layer to the exploration of family narratives.

**WW:** *How will this new space provide a new way of presenting exhibitions? Will we see that unfold in the first presentation—and in those after?*

**JA:** The beauty of this multifaceted space allows us to curate a program that unfolds across different timeframes. The major exhibitions will rotate roughly every six months, while the projects presented in the three modules will offer more flexibility. The theme for our second season, kicking off in early 2025, is "The New Love"—a thought-provoking exploration of love in all its forms, extending beyond the human realm. Then, in September 2025, we will host the first retrospective of the great Malagasy photographer, Pierrot Men. I'll be devoting the entire space to his work. Another key advantage of this new venue is its ability to be a constantly buzzing hub of activity, open from Tuesday to Sunday. We can close off certain sections while others come alive with workshops, performances, dinners, and evening events. Having this expansive and versatile platform is incredibly motivating. It allows us to push the boundaries even further in our unwavering commitment to fostering contemporary creation.

**WW:** *What role does Hakanto Contemporary play in Madagascar's art scene?*

**JA:** In Madagascar, there is no established system for contemporary art like the one we are familiar with in France or elsewhere. Culture is not a top priority, and the plastic and visual arts hold even less weight. There are still no dedicated art schools, museums, galleries, and a true art market as such. For most Malagasy artists, creative endeavors often take a backseat, representing just a fraction of their time as they juggle other jobs. Hakanto Contemporary aims to be a beacon of light in this artistic desert, offering a haven for artists to create freely a platform to bring their dreams to life. Allowing artists to be artists.

* Ndao Hanavao is an innovation and training laboratory for social design created by Rubis Mécénat in 2018. Its objective is to respond to local societal and environmental issues via innovative, viable and sustained design projects, developed in collaboration with guest designers. It also aims to sustainably contribute to the professional integration of Malagasy youth from underprivileged backgrounds, helping them build commercial and collaborative initiatives based on projects developed in the laboratory.