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## This Madagascan Artist Blurs The Lines Separating Art And Craft In A Moroccan Museum Exhibition

By Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle, April 25, 2023



Installation shot of "Our Land Just Like a Dream" at MACAALPHOTO OMAR TAJMOUATI. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MACAAL

The principle of collaboration and dialog nurtures Joël Andrianomearisoa's entire artistic practice – spanning sculpture, installation, textile and the written word – which finds its apotheosis in his exhibition "Our Land Just Like a Dream" at the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) in Marrakesh. One of the few private contemporary art museums in Africa, it is the brainchild of Moroccan architect Othman Lazraq, who's also the director of Casablanca-based Fondation Alliances, a non-profit organization 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, signalling the importance of local production in his host country.

Presenting Andrianomearisoa's interpretation of traditional Moroccan savoir-faire, the exhibition resonates with the territory of Marrakesh 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 hand – his own but also those of master glassmakers, ceramists, tile craftsmen, metal workers, basketry artisans, jewelers, 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 reverberates within each one of us. Breaking the boundaries that separate art and craft, he encouraged these artisans to offer their personal interpretations of his creative concepts.

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A piece that stands out is “Hymn to Roses” that plunges viewers into darkness and takes them on a multi-sensory journey engaging their senses of sight, hearing and smell. Inside a room that may be imagined as either a jewelry box or a funerary space, 43 hammered, wrought iron roses – a universal symbol of romance and an emblem of Marrakesh – 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 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.

We also 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. In the final room, Moroccan artist Amina Agueznay deconstructed a pompom taken from a 1930’s horse headdress and converted it into a pair of earrings called “Proscenium” crafted by weaver Malika Benmoumen and jeweler Baissat Mzaidaf. They echo a space Andrianomearisoa decorated with 850 shousha (traditional pompoms) in countless colors, shapes and textures that he had chanced upon or ordered from artisans, haberdashers and antique dealers in the Marrakesh medina, speaking of his boundless obsession with passementerie and collecting. I sit down with the Paris- and Antananarivo-based artist to discuss his Malagasy origins and his deep-rooted relationship with crafts.



Plates by Joël Andrianomearisoa and Soufiane Tygliene in Marrakech PHOTO OMAR TAJMOUATI. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MACAAL