

Frieze

## Joël Andrianomearisoa Pays Homage to the Artisans of Morocco

By Chloe Stead, May 11, 2023.



Joël Andrianomearisoa, OUR LAND JUST LIKE A D, 2022, metal, paint, 2.5 x 2.5 m. Courtesy: the artist and MACAAL, Marrakech

**Despite good intentions, a polyvocal exhibition at MACAAL, Marrakesh, reaffirms the Malagasy artist as the star of the show.**

To enter 'OUR LAND JUST LIKE A DREAM', visitors must first sidestep a temporary wall affixed with three large-scale canvases hatched with frantic, intersecting lines. Although HOW CAN I FORGET YOU (all works 2022) is ostensibly a work by Malagasy artist Joël Andrianomearisoa, it closely echoes the embroidery in ET SI LA MAIN ÉTAIT L'HISTOIRE (And If the Hand Was History), a collaboration between Andrianomearisoa and Marrakech-based cooperative Assabirates. In doing so, HOW CAN I FORGET YOU is both a drawing and manifesto, immediately signaling to audiences that – although this exhibition is billed as MACAAL's first show dedicated to a single, living artist – Andrianomearisoa doesn't intend to enter the museum alone.

Entirely produced in Marrakech, the predominately monochrome works produced for this exhibition have mostly been created together with master artisans – a generative act that aims to expand the notion of what belongs in an institution dedicated to showcasing contemporary art from across the continent. The resulting exhibition presents an array of handicraft techniques, from papermaking and tarz el ghorza embroidery to glass blowing and rag-rug weaving. FEU CONTRE FEU (Fire Against Fire), for instance, is an installation of Beldi tea glasses handmade by Beldi Country Club using traditional techniques – scrap glass fed into a furnace, mouth blown, then cut using gas and oxygen – but designed with an elongated neck to add a contemporary twist.

'Am I an artist or a florist?' Andrianomearisoa asked, tongue firmly in cheek, during a press tour on the exhibition's opening weekend. The question was raised in reference to

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DANCING WITH ASHES, a gigantic bouquet painted the artist's trademark black and hung from the ceiling. But while the piece may flirt with the decorative craft of floristry, its carefully considered installation, bombastic size and accompanying interpretive wall text indicate that it's clearly intended to be read as a work of contemporary art.



Joël Andrianomearisoa, 'OUR LAND JUST LIKE A DREAM', 2023, exhibition view, MACAAL, Marrakech. Courtesy: the artist and MACAAL, Marrakech

Ultimately, this is Andrianomearisoa's world and, for the most part, the artisans are just living in it. Gorgeous handmade paper by Tibari Kantour, for instance, is inscribed with song lyrics and text written by Andrianomearisoa, framed and signed with his name (CHANSON DE LA LUNE, Song of the Moon), while a series of tastefully arranged ceramics by Soufiane Tiglyène features drawings by Andrianomearisoa (THIS IS MY WORLD). Hammered-iron roses, made in collaboration with Miloud Bouarfa, are installed in a black room and accompanied by a sound piece performed by Hindi Zahra, in which the Moroccan singer interprets a text written by Andrianomearisoa in French, English and Amazigh (HYMNE À LA ROSE, Hymn to the Rose). Although illuminating, a separate room on the ground floor, which acts as a mini retrospective of Andrianomearisoa's work, reaffirms him as the intended star of the show.

But there are exceptions to this imbalance, particularly when it comes to works made by practitioners who have an already established connection to the visual arts. A collaboration with artist and architect Amina Agueznay, for instance, has Andrianomearisoa bend to her aesthetic instead of the other way around. Set opposite his NOSTALGIA – a room-sized installation of pompoms that viewers can look at but not enter – Agueznay's PROSCENIUM is a pair of blood-red earrings made by unfurling a single silk pompom and spinning the thread into two delicately woven rectangles. Set within a 24 carat gold frame, they are decorated with sequins – historically used in rural Morocco to ward off evil spirits. Exquisitely made, this piece of jewellery may have been prompted by a collaboration with Andrianomearisoa but, in breaking free from the morbid colour palette that dominates the rest of the show, PROSCENIUM gets a step closer to the vibrant markets celebrating Moroccan craft that lie just beyond the gallery walls.