



ART

Amina Agueznay – Artison-Creator

Posted on June 10, 2020

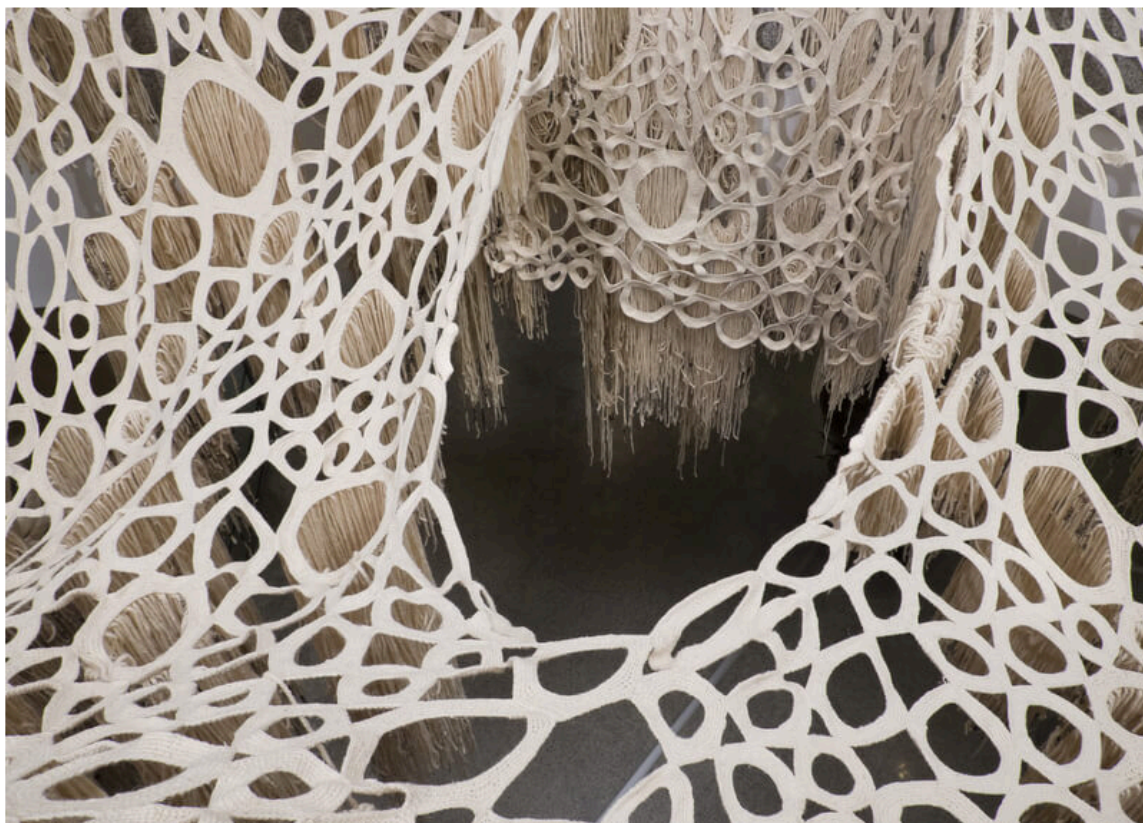


*“I’m an artisan-creator. My work exists in the context of contemporary art
in galleries and museums, though it involves craft-based processes.”*

— AMINA AGUEZNAY

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For Amina Agueznay, a Casablanca-based artist, jewellery designer and architect, creativity and art are part of her DNA. She grew up in a household immersed in creative expression and freedom, surrounded by her artist mother and her fellow Casablanca School artist-friends: *"My mother encouraged all kinds of artistic expression. We even had a darkroom, which was uncommon. It was second nature for me to paint and draw."*



ANKABOUTH Exhibit: Ankaabout, Casablanca, Fondation Société Générale, 2016 Photos by Guy Thimel.
Courtesy Fondation Société Générale

Roots

But Amina's creative roots reach deeper than just her childhood. *"It is important to understand that in Morocco, everyone is connected to craft and to handmade things. If you want to wear something to a wedding, you buy the fabric and work with the artisan to make a kaftan that is right for you. We appreciate these skills and the relationship between the person who commissions the work and the person who meets those expectations. It is natural."*

It is no surprise then that Amina works in close collaboration with artisans. *"When I started making jewellery, I found a silversmith to do the finishing on my pieces. When I couldn't find all the materials I needed, I created my own matter and brought it to him."*

After returning to Morocco from the US, where she studied and worked as an architect before turning to jewellery design, Amina started facilitating artisan workshops on behalf of Government agencies where she worked closely with weavers, woodworkers, leatherworkers, basketry weavers and other craft people. She considers all of these influences as catalysts along her way.



ANKABOUTH Exhibit: Ankabout, Casablanca, Fondation Société Générale,
2016 Photos by Guy Thimel. Courtesy Fondation Société Générale

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Her journey from architect to designer to artist is not linear. *"I don't see it that way. I practised architecture in the US, then in Morocco, I developed different approaches to artisanal creation, including jewellery design and craft. It is all architecture in a sense."*

Amina learned discipline in America, the rigour of architecture, the professional discipline of working as a team. But having lived there did not change the way she experiences Morocco. *"They are different places. When I returned to Morocco, the rhythm of work was not the same as in the US, though it was a natural transition. I spoke the languages, I understood the practices and could move from one project to the next, working with artisans who were willing to share their craftsmanship with me."*



ANKABOUTH #2 Exhibit: Metamorphosis, with Malika Agueznay and Amina Agueznay Attijariwafabank headquarters-Rabat, 2018 Photos by Guy Thimel Courtesy Attijariwafabank Foundation

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Scale

Approaching a project from several perspectives, Amina's emphasis on detail is important to her in terms of creating a micro and macro scale. *"I am very conscious of the versatility of my artistic practice – it is about the matter, what materials I use and how I control them. I explore the matter and push it to its limits. In terms of scale, two things come to mind. First, I often use a modular process, moving from small to large through repetition of the module. Second, I think of shifting scale as an exercise, a rhythm that evolves from one project to the next.*

*For example, after creating **Ankabouth**, a large-scale textile piece hung from the ceiling to floor in an eight-storey atrium space in Casablanca, I participated in a group exhibition, **In the Carpet**, at ifa Galerie in Germany, with intimate-scale works."*



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Space

But there is always the concept of space, and Amina's intention to create an emotional response to the space and to the matter. Amina prefers to work in-situ. For her, the space must have a presence as that will impact the work. *"I do consider how the viewer will experience the work, and to me, this experience should, and does, involve all of the senses – except taste! I like to work with sound installations. Wool has a certain smell and a very tactile quality. Many people who experience the work want to touch it, which is usually not allowed in a gallery or museum space. Lately, I have been thinking of incorporating touch, I would like to do so, but now with the coronavirus, I don't think this will be possible..."*

*"My works are mostly site-specific, but it is interesting to produce matter, then stretching it to fit a particular space, then seeing how it fits into a different space. For example, **Aouinates** was expanded to fit the space at MACAAL. Another example, **Ankabouth** was designed for an immense space, suspended in mid-air above the spectator. Later, in an exhibition called **Metamorphosis**, I showed a version of the same piece where it is lying on the ground. In this way, the work evolves in time, in space, and in how people experience it."*

Noise was originally shown in Assilah, where the work was created. *"When we decided to show it at MACAAL in Marrakech, the work was adapted to that space. Because the original format is modular, I was able to create a room where the modules were fitted along all four walls. This presentation was different from the first exhibition, but it felt very authentic to me, to walk into the room and experience the work in a sensorial way."*



NOISE Exhibition: Material Insanity, MACAAL, Marrakech, 2019-2020 Photo courtesy of Fondation Alliances
Production by Fondation Forum Assilah

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Process

For Amina, a project begins in her notebook – words, images, a memory of some field experience, an idea from ten years ago. Something there will trigger the creative process, and from then on it is very organic, like a sixth sense taking over. *"I never sit down to design a project, it comes in bits and pieces, with a lot of experimentation. It is more a question of stories. And sometimes these stories are invisible. This creative process has evolved over time as a result of hundreds of workshops I have led and interactions with artisans all over Morocco."*



AQUINATES – PROCESS Exhibit: Ankabout, Casablanca, Fondation Société Générale, 2016 Photos by Guy Thimel. Courtesy Fondation Société Générale

Collaboration

From her notebooks, Amina moves on to making a prototype. Then many prototypes with the help of a supervisor who ensures that each prototype is technically well-made. *"I then visit the site to confirm that it will function in the space. Once I am sure that the prototype works, the head of the atelier administers the project budget organising twenty to forty artisans to do the work. With the help of an assistant, the modules are assembled and delivered to the site. It takes two or three people, and if the piece is complex, an engineer, to install the piece under my supervision."*

Without her own studio, Amina either goes to the artisans' ateliers in their territory, or they work together in the space of a workshop. It is fieldwork, where disciplines sometimes overlap in the creation of a final project. *"Crafts in Morocco involve amazing heritage skills, handed down from one generation to the next, and each artisan has their own particular voice. Some are eager to innovate, others are not, they just want to perform the same gesture. I understand who they are, and they understand me, so we can work in a seamless way, one-on-one, each respecting the other's individuality."*



AQUINATES Exhibit: KUBATANA: An Exhibition with Contemporary African Artists, Oslo, Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, 2019 Photo by Nina Ansten Courtesy Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium Oslo

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Colour

"I like off-white because that is the colour of wool in its natural state, but I use both natural and chemical dyes. I work with artisans on the dyeing process – there is an incredibly talented woman in Taznakht. Colour combinations from nature interest me. When I design jewellery, for example, I might be inspired by a sunset, and immediately translate orange, yellow, and purple into coral, citrine, amethyst. I use a lot of green though I am not sure why. Green, white, black and red."

For Amina, colour also tells stories. In **Noise**, she used colour to tell the story of Assilah, which is the coastal town where she organised the workshops. *"It is an artists' town, with pastel-painted houses, stone walls, and the ocean, so I brought the outside landscape into the workshop: muted blues, pinks, yellow and green."*



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For Amina, collaborating with artisans is all about the process. By encouraging the artisans to see and work with their familiar material in a different way, Amina gives them the opportunity to grow and explore their own creativity and process. Although the ideas are hers, it is important for Amina that the artisans' names appear next to hers on the artworks and in the galleries.

"I am the conductor, but sometimes I am one of the musicians."

— AMINA AGUEZNAY

Gallery: [Loft Art Gallery](#), Casablanca

Instagram: [@aminaagueznay](#)

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