

Connecting Forms and Crafts in Casablanca

By Rebecca Anne Proctor
Casablanca
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A woman carries a child on a quiet street as a man gathers petals behind her, their colour echoing the crimson leaves adorning a lone tree in the scene. *We will be fine* (2020) is by self-taught Ivorian artist Joana Choumali, who created the work through a mixture of photography and embroidery.



Exhibition view: *The Inner Garden*, Loft Art Gallery, Casablanca (7 October–14 November 2020). Courtesy Loft Art Gallery.

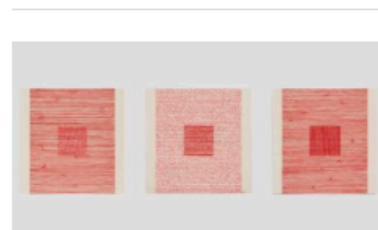
The piece comes from the 'Alba'hian 3' series (2019–2020), which was developed as an extension of the meditative state the artist entered during her daily morning walks during the global lockdown earlier this year, allowing her to immortalise the Abidjan sunrise through multilayered renderings.



Joana Choumali, *We will be fine* (2020). Embroidery on photograph, printed on cotton canvas. 50 x 50 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Loft Art Gallery.

Choumali's evocative work is part of *The Inner Garden*, a group exhibition at Casablanca-based Loft Art Gallery (7 October–14 November 2020) featuring the work of three female artists—Moroccan artists Amina Agueznay and Ghizlane Sahli, and Joana Choumali from Côte d'Ivoire—who have made textiles the cornerstone of their practice.

The show marks one of the first exhibitions in Africa dedicated to the incorporation of African textile traditions in contemporary art, and is also viewable online through the digital platforms of 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair and its partnership with Christie's, as well as on the gallery's website, where a video guides guests through the physical show in Casablanca.

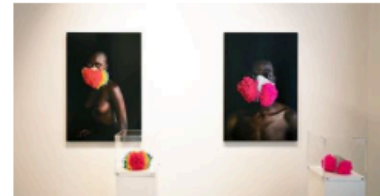


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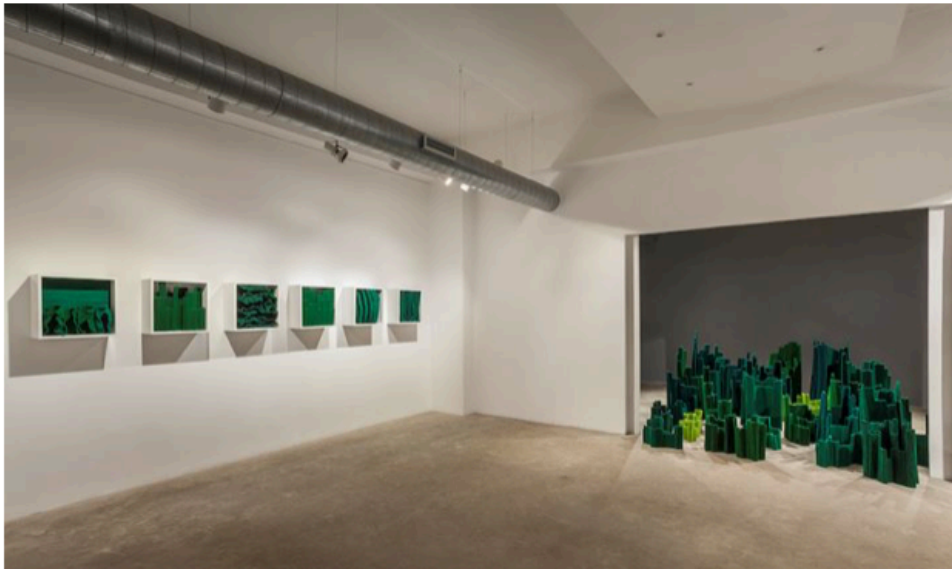


Exhibition view: *The Inner Garden*, Loft Art Gallery, Casablanca (7 October–14 November 2020). Courtesy Loft Art Gallery.

The exhibition's title, *The Inner Garden*, and its focus on textiles couldn't be more apt to what the world is facing from the ongoing coronavirus. Recalling the ubiquitous masks and face coverings that protect individuals from contracting the coronavirus, textiles can be read as layers that separate people from the outside world, or as layers for protection. The medium can also be viewed, as these artists demonstrate, as a cocoon to support a place to rest and importantly, to dream.



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Amina Agueznay, 'The Garden Inside' (2020). Exhibition view: *The Inner Garden*, Loft Art Gallery, Casablanca (7 October–14 November 2020). Courtesy Loft Art Gallery.

The physical notion of a cocoon can be experienced through the work of Amina Agueznay, whose artistic lexicon focuses on the incorporation of soft fabrics to create life-size amorphous structures. Agueznay trained as an architect and is also a jewellery designer, and her art rests on preserving the ancestral heritage of her native Morocco by collaborating with skilled artisans for her work.



Amina Agueznay, 'The Garden Inside' (2020). Exhibition view: *The Inner Garden*, Loft Art Gallery, Casablanca (7 October–14 November 2020). Courtesy Loft Art Gallery.

For *The Inner Garden*, Agueznay has created a large-scale installation made of variously hued green pieces of wool that look like constellations growing out of the ground—they expand upwards, like branches of a tree reaching towards the sky. Part of the series 'The Garden Inside' (2020), the work, like her art over the past 15 years, reflects the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary art, architecture, and design.

‘Choumali, Sahli, and Agueznay show how the past and present, like individuals from different cultures, are always interconnected.’

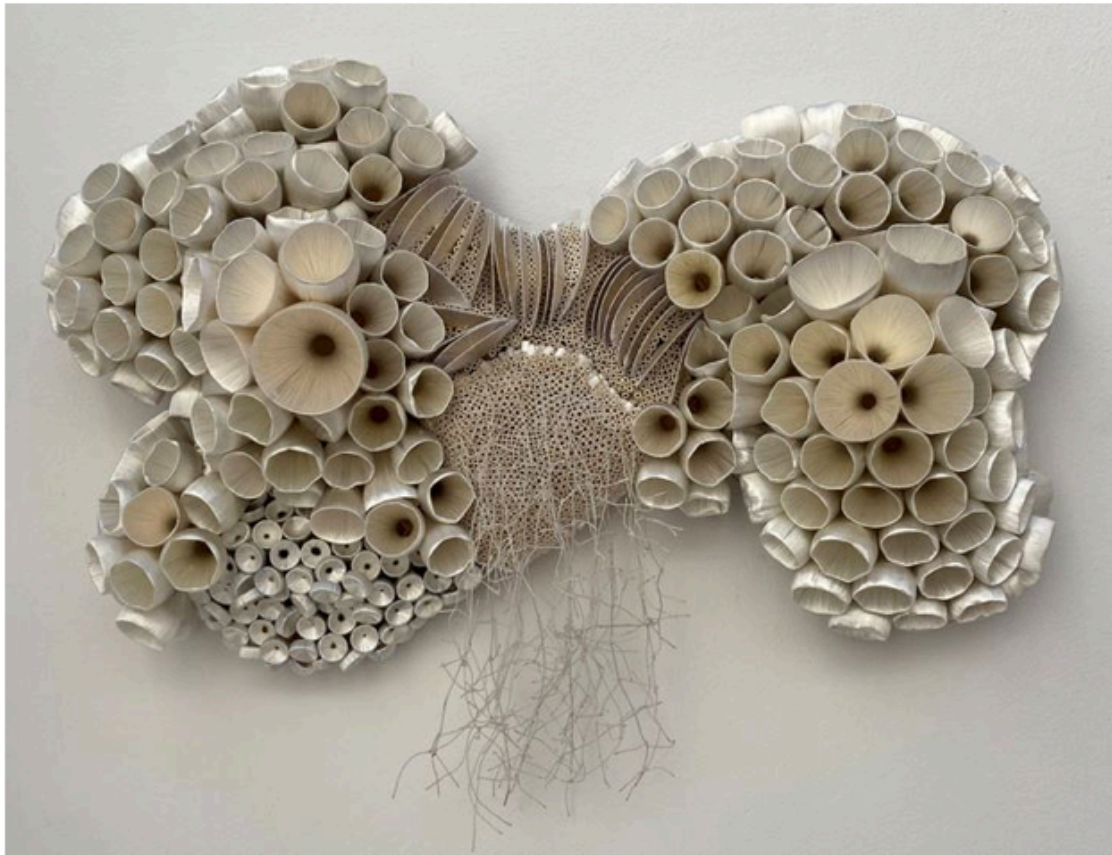
At first glance, Agueznay's enrapturing anamorphic forms, with their rich colouring, appear almost alive—a quality that is shared by the textile sculptures of Ghizlane Sahli. Retaining similar anamorphic forms, their bright blue and red colourings are offset with shades of cream and silver.



Ghizlane Sahli, *M.O.M 014* (2020). Silk thread on plastic and metal. 110 × 152 × 32 cm. Courtesy the artist and Loft Art Gallery.

Like Agueznay, Sahli strives to uphold the importance of preserving traditional embroidery and weaving techniques in Morocco. The works on view in *The Inner Garden* from the 'M.O.M' series (2020), draw from the repetitive gestures of weaving and embroidery practiced for centuries in Morocco. They are made up of silk thread on plastic and metal, depicting fluid shapes, like cells of living organisms.

'These alveoli tell a story of interiority with which I write a personal history', says Sahli. 'Through my work, I tell a story of an inner and organic journey, carried by a universal dimension.'



Ghizlane Sahli, *M.O.M 003* (2020). Silk thread on plastic and metal. 85 × 116 × 26 cm. Courtesy the artist and Loft Art Gallery.

Gallery co-founder Yasmine Berrada describes *The Inner Garden* 'as an act of resistance' that 'offers the public an immersive world in which to take refuge'—all while striving to maintain a crucial part of African and Moroccan heritage. Resistance in this sense is against losing sight of shared heritages and histories, with the artists in *The Inner Garden* demonstrating the vital importance of fabric and embroidery to their own contemporary lexicon.

Like the embroidery and rich textiles imbued in their work, Choumali, Sahli, and Aguezmay show how the past and present, like individuals from different cultures, are always interconnected.—[O]

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