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CRAFTING COSMOLOGY

FEATURE *by* LOUISE MARTIN-CHEW

Parisian-born Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien approaches textiles with an awareness of both the traditional practices of the Akan people in Côte d'Ivoire in her heritage and contemporary training at the École des Beaux-Arts in Cergy. Working in installation, using sculpture and weaving, she creates ephemeral, poetic narratives that create maps, with symbols that bear witness to and trace the past within the present.

Her installations utilise materials ranging from raffia to hair, clay to aluminium. Each iteration of a specific work is presented differently for every showing. Her ambition is to create a poetic space, a cosmology capable of evoking multiple identities and showcasing the myriad cultural influences that coalesce in her practice. In her work, she strives to tell a story by crafting her materials into visual poetry.

'Within Map #91' is a poem that loops around a circle in which she writes: "I bind myself to the skies. I bind myself to the seas. I bind myself to the earth. I am waters. I am woman. Man. That I love, which is in tune with the Asters, with all the carnal mass of its diverse body."

French curator Cédric Fauq describes her work as creating 'force fields', writing that, "For the artist, on a personal level, [art] is also a way to relate, more intimately, to knowledges and histories that she embodies but are so far apart geographically and historically."

Most recently, her work was seen in *Equilibrium* (2025–25) at Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, *Apparitions* (2024) in Paris and *Ten Thousand Suns* (2024) at the 24th Biennial of Sydney.

Messouma Manlanbien spoke to *VAULT* from her artist residency at London's Gasworks, highlighting the influence on her work of syncretism – which facilitates coexistence and unity among different cultures and world views – and the philosophies of poet Édouard Glissant.

MARIE-CLAIRE MESSOUMA MANLANBIEN



Performance view
MARIE-CLAIRE
MESSOUMA MANLANBIEN
L'être, l'autre et l'entre, 2023
Palais de Tokyo, Paris
Photo: Quentin Chevrier

Courtesy of the artist
and Adagp, Paris

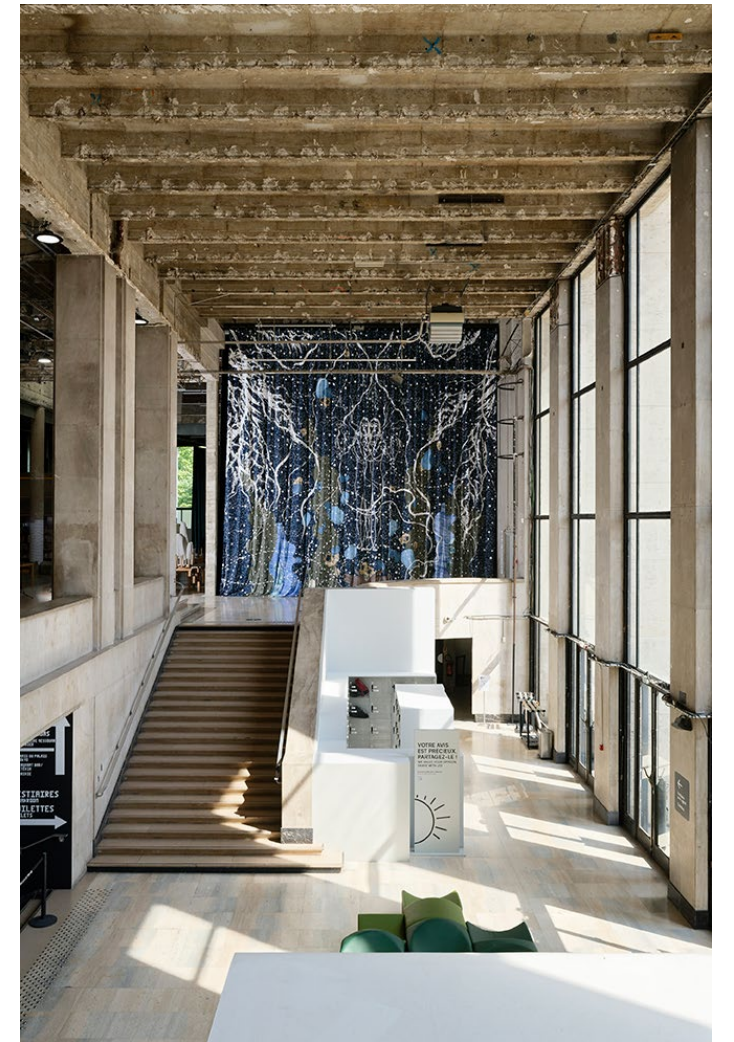


Top to bottom
Installation view
MARIE-CLAIRE
MESSOUMA MANLANBIEN
Cosmogonie – Mondes – Écumes, 2023
Collection de la Ville de Montrouge,
Montrouge, Paris

MARIE-CLAIRE
MESSOUMA MANLANBIEN
Installation view
L'être, l'autre et l'entre, 2023
Palais de Tokyo, Paris
Photo: Aurélien Mole

Opposite
MARIE-CLAIRE
MESSOUMA MANLANBIEN
Installation view
L'être, l'autre et l'entre, 2023
Palais de Tokyo, Paris
Photo: Aurélien Mole

Courtesy the artist



How and why did you become an artist?

From a very young age, I drew and painted. I was introduced to several creative techniques, such as pottery, cardboard making and sewing, and I did silk painting with my mother and grandmother.

I was also inspired at a very young age by certain people in my family, like my brother, who I remember drawing cardboard figures and bringing them to life through games like soccer. My father, an engineer, would leave mechanical parts lying around, as well as pieces and ribbons of various metals. One of my uncles, a carpenter, made beautiful wooden furniture that adorned the entire house. My cousins, who were apprentice engineers, repaired and created inventive machines. So, all around me, there was a lot of creativity, and it was in this environment that I grew up.

I believe you came to Paris because of the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire in 2004, when you were a teenager. How did this impact you?

It was planned that I would continue my studies in Paris, where I had relatives on my mother's side. Political events precipitated things.

Your work incorporates traditional practices from the matriarchal Akan society in Côte d'Ivoire. Even before then, there was political unrest. What are your memories of this time?

I have fond memories of my years in Ivory Coast; it's where my paternal roots are. I spent my entire childhood there. The different stages of a person's life are very important and shape their current and future personality. I return there from time to time, as well as to Guadeloupe and France, where my maternal family is located, and to all the other countries where I pursue my artistic and practical research.

How did you refine your artistic approach?

My creations all stem from research I've been conducting for several years while I was a student. This research has been refined over the years and is constantly evolving and changing. All my research and discoveries inspire my creations and produce the unexpected and surprising. I'm very interested in the notions of 'Creolisation' [a new discourse of hybridity that links both creole and creolisation to notions of settlers and colonisation] and 'Everyone' – both concepts developed by the philosopher, writer and poet Édouard Glissant – as well as syncretism, which is also found in my work.

Of course, I observe the society I live in, as well as the things, certain behaviours and people around me. Some

creations reflect discussions, and I learn a lot from my spiritual Mothers, from my Mothers and Fathers – artists, creators, philosophers, researchers and scholars – who have nurtured my artistic studies throughout my years at art school and who still nurture me every day.

Can you expand on the use of syncretism in your work? And on how your work is influenced by Glissant's Creolism?

My work is born from several artistic research projects, the first of which focuses on 'creolisation'. According to Glissant, "Creolisation is the bringing together of several cultures, or at least several elements of distinct cultures, in a single part of the world, resulting in a new, completely unpredictable element."

From a very young age I created objects from different elements from my different cultures, and I composed using all of these. My years of study allowed me to become aware of what I was doing. Gradually, I became interested in the notions of syncretism, which is the synthesis of two or more different elements, giving rise to new forms. What interests me is the act of bringing together elements not only from different cultures and origins, but also, and above all, elements of different natures, materials, materialities and beliefs, and thus creating something new that unites us and creates something rich in all these ingredients. It may then create things that surprise me and surprise the eyes of others.



Of course, I observe the society I live in, as well as the things, certain behaviours and people around me. Some creations reflect discussions, and I learn a lot from my spiritual Mothers, from my Mothers and Fathers – artists, creators, philosophers, researchers and scholars – who have nurtured my artistic studies throughout my years at art school and who still nurture me every day.

How do you construct your day in the studio? What do you listen to, read and think about while making your artwork?

It depends on my mood. I like to work in complete silence ... At other times, the time is punctuated by the music I listen to or the musicality I create through various instruments I particularly like and have in my studio. Sometimes I watch films or documentaries. It really depends on my mood and the stage of the work I'm at.

What are you working on currently, and where will it be shown?

I am currently an artist in residence at Gasworks in London, where I am developing my research for three months. This artistic research and creation residency will result in a solo exhibition in the Gasworks spaces from October 2 to December 14 2025. My interests focus on our personal bodies, but also our 'World' body, in which we are all connected and linked to each other, and certain ailments related to the reproductive system.

You have been awarded a Villa Medici Fellowship for 2025–26 at L'Académie de France à Rome for one year. What are your plans during the fellowship?

During my residency at the Villa Medici I will continue to develop my artistic research. I will deepen my practice – particularly around textile techniques (weavings, clothing and costumes) – and my understanding of natural medicines, ceramics, image, sound and all other practices I encounter. ▼

Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien will be on display at Gasworks, London from October 2 until 14 December, 2025. Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien is represented by Cécile Fakhoury, Paris. cecilefakhoury.com marieclairemessoumamanlanbien.com gasworks.org.uk



Portrait: Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien, 2025
Photo: Peter Otto