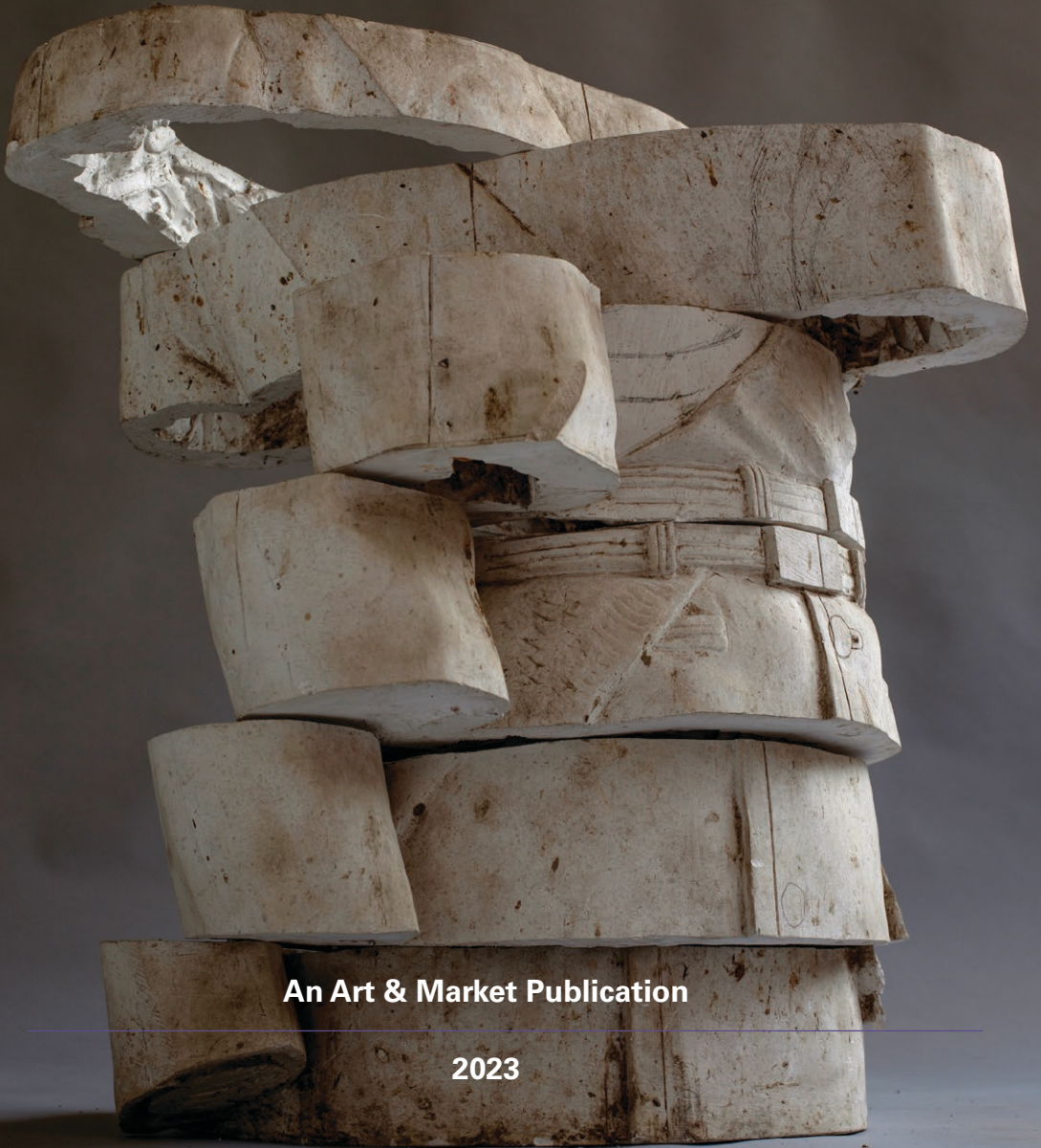


CHECK-IN



An Art & Market Publication

2023

CHECK-IN

An Art & Market Publication

2023

Check-In 2023
June 2023

artandmarket.net

Instagram: @artandmarket
Facebook: Art & Market

Made in Southeast Asia.

Editor
Nadya Wang

Associate Editor
Ian Tee

Content Producer & Publication Layout
Vivyan Yeo

Original Design
Izz Bachtiar

Content Manager
Nabila Giovanna W

Cover Art
Harit Srikhao, 'The Prototype of King Rama VIII Upper Body (Sections)', 2020.

Published by
Margins Print

ISBN
978-981-18-7692-9

Advertising and Collaborations
If you would like to advertise or collaborate with us, please send an enquiry to info@artandmarket.net. We look forward to hearing from you!

Stockist
We are stocked at A&M Marketplace at artandmarket.net/marketplace.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or any means, without the prior permission in writing of the copyright holder.

The views and opinions expressed in CHECK-IN are those of the authors or contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher's. For omissions and corrections, please contact us directly.

Copyright © Art & Market 2023 | A Project by Margins Print

Weaving the Ocean with Ari Bayuaji

Between the self and the community

Nadya Wang



Ari Bayuaji.

Before Ari Bayuaji was an artist, he trained and practised as a civil engineer. He brings the discipline of his previous work into his artistic practice. After moving to Montréal to further his studies, he embarked on several residencies, including to Sainte Alvére, France, sponsored by Fondation Agnès B. Paris and Yves de la tour d'Auvergne and with the Impressions Artist Residency programme at Montréal Museum of Fine art, sponsored by Montréal Art Council.

Ari is a keen observer of life, and his practice expresses his reflections on what he sees and experiences. From the 'Self-Portrait' series at the Esplanade Tunnel in Singapore to the 'Golden' exhibition at Parkhaus within the public park Malkastenpark in Düsseldorf, the artist looks into received ideas in the context of both art and social histories, and encourages visitors to consciously reflect upon them and see if change is to be considered.



Ari Bayuaji, 'On A Mangrove Tree', 2023, woven plastic chords, wood, copper coral sculptures, ready-made plastic objects, 220 x 60 x 10cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain.



Ari Bayuaji, 'The Villa by The Beach #2', 2019-2023, woven plastic and cotton threads, acrylic paint, wood, plywood, 213 x 54 x 15cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain.

With the 'Weaving the Ocean' project, Ari "returns" to Indonesia. Collecting plastic waste from the waters in Bali to make into objects of art with the community, he makes an aesthetic and powerful statement on the problem of pollution, and highlights the urgent need for something to be done. The timeliness of the project has ensured its exhibition far and wide, from Nunu Fine Art (Taipei) and Warin Lab Contemporary (Bangkok) in 2021 to Mizuma Gallery (Singapore) earlier this year, and currently with Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain (Montréal) from 27 May till 5 August 2023.

In this interview, Ari reflects upon his practice from its earlier days, and attributes the rich tapestry of his projects to the sharings of his teachers, interlocutors and collaborators. We begin to see what motivates Ari to continually challenge himself to create thoughtful, impactful work that pays it forward, and creates a ripple effect of positive change.

You studied Fine Arts at Concordia University in Montréal from 2005 to 2010. What aspects of your education did you enjoy, and what less so? How has this formal training contributed to your artistic practice?

I started to take my undergraduate Fine Arts study as a Studio Arts major at Concordia University when I was 30 years old. I was lucky to have some great teachers. They were mostly successful senior artists who were dedicating their time to teaching. It was an amazing new learning experience as they let me be free to create. At the same time, they told me to keep taking risks and stay out of my comfort zone. I loved being a “mature” student, as I did not take things as personally as when I was younger.

I practised as a civil engineer for a few years before I decided to quit. The most useful aspects of the engineering training for my artistic practices is that the way I work as an artist is organised and structured. I am disciplined with my working hours at my studio.

You travel extensively for your practice, and have taken up several residencies. Let’s start by talking about ‘Le Village Un Village’, the outcome of your three-month residency in Sainte Alvère, France, sponsored by Fondation Agnes B. Paris and Yves de la tour d’Auvergne in 2017. How did the residency come about, and what were the challenges adapting to a new environment, if any? And what were the rewards to you artistically and personally?

It was one of the most interesting experiences in my life. I was in a village with a small community. The organiser put me in an old school building where I lived and worked in a big studio.

The challenge was that there was almost nobody who was into contemporary art. There was no museum, no art school, nothing related to contemporary art. There were just old buildings.

After two weeks in the residency, I started to realise that I had a big blank canvas in front of me. I had to learn how to experience the things around me: the people, the streets, the old buildings, the farmhouses, and many other things. These became the materials. The residency helped me to live in the present moment. That is the lesson I have been keeping with me until now. It is the secret to being happy and to be a good creator.



Ari Bayuaji, 'Le Village Un Village', 2017, installation view at d'Auvergne' Sainte Alvère, France. Images courtesy of the artist.



Ari Bayuaji, 'Trottoir Bareé' from Cabinet of Curiosities series, 2014-2017, mixed media, installation view at Conseil des-arts de Montréal, Canada. Image courtesy of the artist.

You created sculptural works from items donated by people in the village that were rendered obsolete by modern versions. What is it about found items that first captured your imagination as an artist, and how do they continue to help complete the artworks materially and/or conceptually?

Very often, people asked me to go to their old barns or storages. They asked me to take anything I wanted. Many of the old objects were completely new to me, as we did not have them in Asia. It was a great thing as I could make a deeper conversation with the owners. By asking about the original function of the objects, I could also hear long stories of their families' histories! It was a touching experience, and I became close to many of them.

I worked on the objects in my studio. I had no assistants or helpers. My artwork was about the history of the village and the people. I wanted everybody to feel familiar with the materials that constructed the art installations... something that could touch their hearts and remind them of their ancestors in a contemporary way.

From November 2017 to April 2018, you held an exhibition of sculptural artworks following participation in the Impressions Artist Residency programme at Montréal Museum of Fine Art, sponsored by Montréal Art Council. Through this, you looked at the relationship between art and design. In essence, you designed found objects into your artworks to imbue them with new meaning and status. What attracts you to explore the connection between art and design?

I have loved museums since I was at a very young age. I always questioned why ancient household objects could be placed in museums. I also questioned why one old object could be placed in an important Western museum, and why a similar object from a different country could not.

The artists in residency at the Museum of Fine Art really helped me to understand that basically, many museums are still using Western curatorial standards to decide what is art and design.

That helped me to create 'The Cabinet of Curiosities' series in which I used ordinary found household objects as the material of the artworks. The conscious act to manipulate them to become art is the key to make them deserving of a place in the museum.

From there, you spent time in Taiwan, and was particularly inspired by the National Palace Museum as a cavernous cabinet of curiosities to make your own 'Island of Paradise' at Nunu Fine Art Gallery in Taipei from July to August 2018. As an artist who works consistently with found objects, how does a cabinet of curiosities help you to frame/order your practice?

I think a cabinet of curiosities is the very basis of how a museum works. They put something exotic or foreign in a glass box or cabinet, and it draws the audience's attention because it is something new. It makes them curious and want to know more about the objects. The cabinet of curiosities has inspired me to elevate the value of ordinary objects by processing them to become a work of art, and stage them so that the viewers see them as completely new objects.



Ari Bayuaji, 'Self-Portrait', 2019, installation view at Esplanade Theatre on The Bay, Singapore. Image courtesy of the artist.

Your works also reflect keenly on daily life. To help us understand your creative process a little more, how did you pull from contemporary life and art history to create 'Self-Portrait' at the Esplanade Tunnel in early 2019?

'Self-Portrait' was an interesting project. I was already familiar with the Esplanade Tunnel. Before I took on the project, I noticed that more than 70% of the people who were walking through the space did not really pay attention to the artworks exhibited there.

That reality sparked an idea to use the mirror as the medium of my artworks for the space. The mirror is the best tool to attract people's attention. At the same time, they create a temporary self-portrait. In the past, portraiture was mostly reserved for the wealthy, and only artists could have self-portraits. Nowadays, with smartphones, almost everybody can create their own "selfie".

With 'Self-Portrait' exhibited at the Esplanade Tunnel, I have learned that the self-portrait is still an important form of art. My artworks displayed were just the tools for the audience to create their own contemporary self-portrait.

Could you talk about your residency and exhibition, 'Golden' at Parkhaus within the public park Malkastepark in Düsseldorf in June 2019? How was it received, and how did it express your thoughts on immigration and discrimination?

With the exhibit of 'Golden' at Parkhaus Malkastepark, I expressed my thoughts on immigration and discrimination by showing some works that were reflecting the differences of human skin tones. The titles of the works were key to the viewers receiving their message. I like to deliver a subtle, poetic message with my artworks.

The show received some very good responses. It was interesting that the audience in Düsseldorf did not quite respond to the issues of immigration and discrimination. They were focused more on the artworks themselves. They liked to discuss more about the materials, techniques, and the visual aspects of them.

It was a very good experience because suddenly, I was in an environment where the audience seemed to not care much about the concept behind the works. In a way, I was quite happy that people focused on the works themselves.



Ari Bayuaji, 'The Light in the Deep Blue', 2023, woven plastic and cotton threads, plastic threads, semi-precious stone, plastic coral sculptures, 190 x 104cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

How does the experience of showing your work at various places further shape your work as an artist?

All the experiences have been great teachers for me. They have helped me to grow and build good relationships with people around me. I am grateful to have the opportunities to work with some great curators in my career. All of them have been open with my ideas and helped me to place my work in the right contexts in contemporary art history.

In early 2020, you began 'Weaving the Ocean', a community art project in Bali, Indonesia. Could you walk us through the concept, as well as the process of making the pieces, from finding and collecting the ropes to cleaning, sorting, weaving etc.?

The abandoned plastic ropes are mostly found at the mangrove forest and the sea. At the beginning of the pandemic, I collected all the plastic ropes from the mangrove forests and the beaches by myself. Slowly, more people helped me to collect them, including some fishermen.

Before we bring the plastic ropes to the washing studio, we have to wash the plastic ropes on the beach. There is plenty of free water to wash them. We need to dry the ropes at the cleaning studio before we wash it again with the rinse water from the laundry. By doing that, we won't waste fresh water to clean them.

One of the most complicated parts of the process is the unraveling work. We have to unravel the plastic ropes by hand until we have the finest threads. There is no machine that is able to do it. We need to create knots to join the threads to create a very long thread, which is then rolled for the weaving process.



A destroyed mangrove forest in Mertasari, Sanur, Bali. Image courtesy of the artist.

The fabric is produced with traditional Balinese weaving processes. We use cotton threads as the “warp” and fine plastic threads, unraveled from plastic found ropes, as the “weft.” The cotton threads are needed because they are fixed on the loom to hold the plastic tightly during the weaving process. That is why the final result is very tidy, like normal fabric. It is very, very difficult to weave the plastic threads. There are many knots that so often become stuck in the shuttle. The plastic threads are a lot stronger than the cotton thread. This can create problems as the tension during the weaving process can snap the cotton threads easily. When it happens, we have to rejoin the cut cotton threads by hand, one by one.

The other artworks are in the form of macramé or a fringe. We do not need looms or machines for this technique. By hand, we weave the plastic chords that have a bigger dimension than the threads. The chords are also unraveled from the found plastic ropes. No cotton threads are needed.



Ari Bayuaji, 'Weaving the Ocean', installation view at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., USA during RiverRun Festival, April 2023. Image courtesy of the artist.

How do you name your weavings e.g. with 'Dreamcatcher' (2022) and 'Mount Agung' (2023)?

Many of the artworks were inspired by the seascape of Bali as all the materials were from there. 'Mount Agung' (2022) was inspired by the view of Mount Agung from Sanur Beach that has beautiful, changing colour gradations. 'Dreamcatcher' (2022) was inspired by the Native American culture, where the dreamcatcher is used for protection and unity. My version of the dreamcatcher is about how 'Weaving the Ocean' has been protecting the environment, and at the same time uniting the community to survive a very difficult time.

‘Weaving the Ocean’ has been exhibited in various places, from Nunu Fine Art in Taipei in 2021 to Warin Lab Contemporary in Bangkok in 2022, and most recently at Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain in Toronto in 2023, among others. What do you think it is about the body of work that is so compelling, and relevant across geographies?

‘Weaving the Ocean’ represents a solution to one of the most challenging problems in our contemporary world. Plastic pollution is a global problem, and every country in the world is facing it. I am happy that with the community, we can do something together to transform plastic waste into beautiful works of arts that inspire many people.

How do you strike a balance among staying true to your artistic vision and practice, maintaining financial stability and living life?

When I told my late mother about my plan to study fine art, she said that I should never put myself on the pedestal as an artist. That is why my works are always inspired by the contemporary challenges in my surroundings to keep me grounded. I believe that we have purpose in our life, and it does not matter what kind of profession we have. Life and work become a lot easier, with a purpose to keep them going.

At the beginning of my career as an artist, I went on a lot of residencies. These provided financial support. The Quebec Arts Council has also been helpful, as they have given me travel grants for my overseas exhibitions.

After a few months spending almost all of my savings on the ‘Weaving the Ocean’ project, I was given financial grants by the Canada Arts Council at the end of 2020. That was very helpful.

I have been lucky to work with supportive galleries. They have introduced my works to collectors and corporations through the exhibitions. The collaboration is important as we add value to each other's work. I aim to keep growing to be an ever better artist and (hopefully) human being.

This article was first published on artandmarket.net on 30 May 2023.