

## Fredj Moussa — Open Studio

During his residency at L'Atelier by Selma Feriani, Tunisian artist Fredj Moussa extends his research first initiated in Dakar around spiritual and sacred architectures as spaces of imagination and resistance. His inquiry asks: how do these dreams become catalysts, capable of shifting spaces and gathering them anew? From the reconstituted Mosquée de la Divinité on the Senegalese coast to the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, Moussa studies how faith and form coexist. The cohabitation of these referential elements prompts the artist to think about the aesthetic and plastic dimensions of places marked by tension, yet can still offer comfort to those who seek it.

Experimenting for the first time with clay on locally sourced, repurposed fabrics, Moussa ushers a new dialogue with *Bogolanfini* while searching of his next gradient. A uniquely indigenous practice from Mali, *Bogolanfini* is a Bamana word that describes this textile dyeing technique; *bogo* means “earth” or “mud”, *lan* means “with” or “by means of”, and *fini* means “cloth”; an interdependence between the bowels of land and the body.<sup>1</sup> He composes puzzle pieces recalling how fabric once circulated as currency, as value. Several written and oral sources have noted that textiles once functioned as currency throughout parts of Africa: woven plant fibres among the Kongo, Téké, and Kuba peoples, or long cotton bands patterned with stripes or dyed in indigo, circulating as units of exchange. Certain fabrics, such as the *Mashru*, also travelled along routes of spice and slave trade,<sup>2</sup> until colonial economies imposed cheaper imports that disrupted indigenous production.<sup>3</sup> In Moussa’s research, this material memory is neither overtly illustrated nor explained; it is implied and absorbed. The more the cotton absorbs, the more it stiffens; the more clay binds it, the more it solidifies, temporarily fixing what is destined to dematerialize, layers composing strata of historical residue.

It is not a mere intervention draped on architecture, but rather a new architecture that he has articulated within the walls of the studio. It is not so much to hide, to conceal as it is to reveal the surfaces; the fabric comes to fix the earth rather than to cover it. Draped and dried, the textile retains gestures, forming what Moussa calls “phantoms of motion”. Paradoxically and intentionally, the works dematerialize even as they build, opening apertures through which questions might surface. Amid these fabric structures, spiritual amulets hang like talismans. The forms that emerge, at once garment, sculpture, and shelter, suggest bodies in potential, sculptures that act as costumes interchangeably, awaiting activation through the artist’s cinematographic work. Within this constellation lie the first fragments of his forthcoming film, in which poems by Ahmadou Bamba will appear; a gesture that bears a *basculement géographique*, a turning of gaze: from previous adaptations of European texts toward voices and narratives that stem from the African continent itself.

Through these process-oriented experiments, Moussa composes an archive of correspondences, where architectures born of dreams are dissected, and fabric becomes the ground upon which new forms are imagined.

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<sup>1</sup> Steele, Valerie. *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*. Farmington Hills, Thomson Gale, Cop, 2005, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Agrawal, Yashodhara. “Mashru as a Trade Textile.” Rosemary Crill, ed., in *Textiles from India, India*: Seagull Books, 2006, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Marion. “Cloth as Money: The Cloth Strip Currencies of Africa.” *Textile History*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1980, p. 197.