'Each of us needs the memory of the other, because it is not a matter of a virtue of compassion or of charity, but of a new lucidity in a process of Relation. And if we want to share the beauty of the world, if we want to be in solidarity with its sufferings, we must learn to remember together.'

Édouard Glissant, *A New Region of the World, Liverpool University Press, 2023*

Amina Agueznay, artist-weaver of histories and human relations

For over twenty years, Amina Agueznay has been weaving a deeply-rooted reflection on Moroccan traditions and knowledge, working in close communion with local communities and the stories that sustain them. Her works are conceived as narratives of transmission and transformation. Through her exploration of vernacular practice, the artist shapes an ever more ambitious monumentality, without ever betraying the essence of matter. Her installations develop an intimate dialogue with their site of origin, determining scale, rhythm, and presence; the very essence of *in situ*. Her materials, raw or transformed, integrate an ecosystem in which the environment assumes an active role in the artistic process. Whatever the scale of the project, Agueznay is known to transcend the experience of space and spectator by allowing the matter to speak; every weave, every braid, every texture tells its own story – and leaves eloquent silences.

***Asəṭṭa* installation, a second skin for the first Arsenale pavilion**

Designed specifically for the Moroccan pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2026, *Asəṭṭa* unfolds as a space of transformation. In Amazigh culture, *asəṭṭa* is the designated term for ritual weaving. Among the Aït Soukhman,[1] a tribe with origins in the eastern Middle and High Atlas, this ritual is imagined as a sacred act that combines know-how, prayer, and transmission. More than handicraft, it is a feminine celebration of creation and memory, in which each thread symbolises cultural heritage and destiny. The finished work is perceived to be a living creature, whose birth, life, and ending are accompanied by specific rites and rituals. Much like a skin, *Asəṭṭa* acts as a layered structure, taking shape as the vestiges of a metamorphosis.

The sacred nature of gesture precedes the first thread of the weave. Wool is first collected, picked clean, then washed. Women often proceed with this task in groups, walking

[1] Benkhallouq, F. (2019) "*Asəṭṭa*-le tissage : transmission du sens à travers l'acte", *Asinag*, 14, pp. 29-38. doi: https://journals.openedition.org/asinag/300

together to nearby springs or streams, rinsing the wool thoroughly in an atmosphere of song, storytelling, and shared meals. A moment of community that comes before the more solitary act of weaving.

The performance of weaving follows a collective ritual in which the opening gesture carries a votive dimension. The warping[2] of the wool threads is done around two stakes planted in the ground by three women, whose doyenne then crushes pieces of sugar on the stakes before reciting the *basmala*: 'In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.' This invocation places the work under the blessing of the Almighty in order to see the work through to completion.

The women then set about assembling the loom in a silent communion. Each gesture is precise and controlled. Before raising the loom, they purify themselves, sprinkle water on the ground, sweep the floor, and sometimes scatter a handful of grain — wheat and barley — to ensure the peace of the spirits of the place. The loom is greeted with care and never stepped over; it is considered a being in its own right, bearer of a soul whose seat is the reed through which the warp threads interlace. The work unfolds in secrecy: it is customary never to speak of the work in progress, so as to protect its unfolding and integrity — it is rolled around the lower beam and covered with a cloth to shield it from any malevolent eye.

The completion of the weaving is considered a death. The cutting of the warp threads — a solemn operation using a blade — is performed ten threads at a time, accompanied by propitiatory words invoking good fortune. In certain regions, children may not witness this moment, for in releasing the woven piece, the soul of the loom rises and risks carrying with it the soul of the child.[3]

To be born, to live, to die: weaving follows the rhythm of the living. And it is this cosmology of gesture that *Asəṭṭa* summons and spins out. Carried by the cyclical temporality of life, the installation becomes a site of emergence for another reality, where the collective unconscious embroiders itself onto the fabric of the world. A community takes shape within it; bonds are woven between the artisans, accompanied by the artist, and sustained in the sensory experience of the audience. More profoundly still, *Asəṭṭa* creates a space of 'being', within which each person may emerge and unfold. Weaving a work together and inviting viewers to take part makes possible the emergence of a shared commonality — a metaphysical place, the very place of the work of art.

Âatba, architecture of the threshold, from one world to another

In Moroccan dialect, *al âatba*[4] goes well beyond its architectural function of the demarcation between interior and exterior. Traditionally, this threshold manifests the border between what is domestic (intimate, feminine, protected) and what is public (masculine, open).

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[2] Set up and stretching the warp threads on the loom, preparing the foundation upon which the fabric will be constructed.

[3] Elements related to weaving rituals are derived from research conducted by anthropologist Ahmed Skounti within the framework of the *Asəṭṭa* project.

[4] In Arabic: العتبة

Like an echo of what is lived within the space of the work, *Asəṭṭa* rises up as the *âatba* — it is a habitat that establishes itself as a liminal zone, a place where the very experience of passage is felt. In medinas, the *âatba* asserts with particular acuity its role as interface between two worlds organised according to distinct codes. The threshold becomes at once a point of crossing, and a space of transition between private and public, sacred and profane, known and unknown.

In many regions of Morocco, the *âatba* is the site of ritual practices – the sprinkling of water, henna, and salt – at life's turning points: departures, returns, marriage, death. These rituals solidify the threshold in a cosmological context, that of a space that is 'inhabited', a term used by Malek Chebel[5] to interpret symbolic spaces in Maghreb Islam: places imbued with invisible forces, to be respected or warded off, crossed with care, sometimes accompanied by a prayer or an invocation. Because the *âatba* is also — in its metaphysical dimension — benevolent or malevolent. An appeal for abundance or fertility, or contrarily for misery and sterility. It is exactly this accursed threshold that becomes the subject of a poem by the High Atlas poet of the early 20th century, Mririda n Aït Atik:

Strangers, of course, who do not know…
More than twenty have held the six-pinned key
And none of them escaped the misfortune
That weighs upon the guests of the cursed threshold.

This fundamental ambivalence is also found in the profusion of apotropaic devices that inhabit the threshold in vernacular creation: horseshoes hung from lintels, door knockers in the form of the *khamsa*, geometric and floral motifs incised, engraved, or painted on door panels, nail heads arranged in circles or rosettes — so many visual languages designed to ward off malevolent forces and protect the home from djinns and the evil eye. This language, which Amina Agueznay handles with restraint, is found braided and carefully scattered across the hollow folds of the installation, subtly translating vernacular memory and gesture into a contemporary context.

The notion of threshold transcends that of any door frame. Moroccan writer and critic Abdelkébir Khatibi uses the concept of the threshold to resist any fixed notion of identity. The threshold is a place of decentring, of a decolonial concept that does not oppose but rather articulates Arab, Islamic, African, and Western heritages, thus becoming a space for translation and poetic creation.

In pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, the poem often begins with an evocation of the *aṭlāl*, the ruins of an abandoned nomadic camp. This moment of pause before the faded remnants of the past forms the opening to the *qaṣīda*,[6] the classical ode that includes the prologue, or *nasīb*:

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[5] Chebel, M. (2009) *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Coran*. Paris, France: Fayard.

[6] Classical lyrical poem pf Arab tradition, structured in monorhyme around a single theme. Often performative, the *qaṣīda* can be recited or chanted, combining language, rhythm, and emotion to create an experience that is both aesthetic and spiritual.

more than a simple introduction, it is the heart of the poetic ritual, the space where the poet summons memory, desire, and absence, even before entering the story.

Hassan Fathy[7] emphasised how thresholds and gentle transitions (buffer zones, patios, *riwaq*) are essential to organising the sensory and social experience of space. The *âatba* can thus gain density and depth: it might include a small vestibule, a hallway, or an antechamber. This marks a contrast with more sharply defined 'hard' thresholds. The *âatba* is soft, gradual, malleable, reflecting the thinking of Indian architect Rahul Mehrotra, who introduced the concept of the 'soft' threshold: a visually and physically porous space, plural in spirit, in resonance with its context, yet rigorous in form. This reflection invites us to approach the installation not as an architecture with a sharp boundary between interior and exterior, but as a supple threshold where that boundary runs thin. The structure — or, we might say, the skeleton of the work — asserts itself as a psychic architecture, an architecture of thought, where the threshold is neither outside nor inside. It is in between. Far from being a mere neutral passageway, it establishes an active rite of passage.

Suspended between forms and their functions, *Asəṭṭa* is thus a meditation on the threshold, understood in its architectural, symbolic, and sensory dimensions. A threshold one crosses, one passes through — but one may also inhabit. A liminal place, a zone of passage between outside and inside, between the here and now and the beyond, as if "on the threshold of being".[8]

A pluriversal experience between artisanry, architecture, and the poetics of space

To better reveal this architecture of threshold that accompanies us from one world to another, Amina Agueznay imagines the *Asəṭṭa* installation using modular textile bands, thus reactivating our sensitive and everyday relationship with textile, that familiar envelope that "separates us from the outside world".[9]

Asəṭṭa surrounds, filters, and protects.

Incarnate, revealing the music of its materials.

Agueznay blends elements from her personal lexicon (*snassel, aouinates*, *chouk*) with traditional frameworks borrowed from weaving or embroidery. From intimate to monumental, the modular units navigate between material density and progressive simplification, creating a unique volumetric effect. Sometimes interconnected, sometimes functioning individually, the modules come together – like voices in a canon – as visual polyphony. Each combination evokes the inseparable link between material and body, between artisanal expression and contemporary

[7] Fathy, H. (2000) Architecture for the Poor. Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press.
[8] Bachelard, G. (2014) *The Poetics of Space.* London, England: Penguin Classics.
[9] Interview with Michel Gauthier (2018): conducted during the Sheila Hicks exhibition *Lignes de Vie*, Centre Georges Pompidou.

thought. From architecture to wearable objects, from jewellery to large-scale murals, Agueznay has always moved back and forth between scales, where gesture becomes language.

The chromatic palette that constitutes *Asəṭṭa* is drawn from the exhibition space itself, as if the artist had used an imaginary pipette to extract the hues from its walls, shadows, and light, and subtly redeployed them in the Artiglierie. The openings framed by the building's windows and doorways, as well as zones of suspension in the exhibition's rhythm, introduce pauses and variations in cadence; they extend the temporality of an act of craft that becomes poetic vibration.

Faint sounds call out to us, beadwork resonates within us.

Superimposed layers and the spatial arrangement generate a plurality of perspectives, renewing the sensory experience with every step. The infinite forms and combinations that make up this monumental textile membrane are answered by the emergence of thresholds and transitions.

The installation invites us to enter a succession of strata that intersect at times and interrupt at others, tracing sensitive interweavings where silences – far from empty – vibrate, revealing intimate memories. It is in these absences, these breaths between forms, that a thought of the interval manifests itself; that which the Japanese refer to —in poetic and architectural tradition — as *ma*: a space between two breaths, two notes, two lines – a principle that permeates throughout. The exhibition is intended to exist as an expanse, a landscape dotted with areas of contact between macro and micro perspectives, lines of territory, and a sense of detail, offering an experience that is both attentive and intuitive.

***Dār al-ṣinā'a*: the house of craft**

It is not incidental that *Asəṭṭa* takes form in this precise place. The word 'arsenal', readily assumed to be Venetian or Latin, may carry within it a remembrance of Arabic. While Jean-Claude Hocquet [10] attributes its origin to Latin (*arasante*, *arsanatus*), the work of Christophe Picard[11] on Muslim arsenals in the Mediterranean, and that of Carmen Maqueda Galán[12] on Arabic borrowings into French, suggest that the terms used in Castilian, Catalan, Italian, French and Portuguese to designate the arsenal derive from the Arabic *dār al-ṣinā'a*: literally, the house of craft. An etymological hypothesis which, if confirmed, speaks volumes in itself about the extent of circulation between the shores of the Mediterranean. What official history presents as a Venetian military institution appears, then, as the fruit of a passage, a translation, a borrowing between worlds.

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[10] Picard, C. (2004) 'Les arsenaux musulmans de la Méditerranée et de l'océan Atlantique (VII^{e}-XV^{e} siècle)', *Chemins d'outre-mer*. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne. doi:10.4000/books.psorbonne.3997.
[11] Hocquet, J.C. (2011) "The Venice Arsenal: Creations, Modernizations, and Survival of a Great Industrial Structure" *Dix-septième siècle* 253, no. 4, pp.627–38.
[12] Maqueda Galán C. (2018) *Histoire des emprunts en français*, Universidad de Sevilla. doi: https://idus.us.es/server/api/core/bitstreams/8676c9ae-d432-47d8-9bdb-57c5fbc39997/content

What is perhaps more striking is that the phrase *dār al-ṣinā'a* resonates with the name *Dar Saniâ* — a shared nomenclature among cooperatives and craft workshops with which Amina Agueznay collaborated across Morocco to produce the pavilion's installation. Whether or not the etymological connection holds, its very proximity is a sign: the same expression names the place of exhibition and the places of making, Venice and Morocco, stone and thread. One of those silent correspondences that the installation sets out, precisely, to make audible.

Built around the mid-sixteenth century, the Sala delle Artiglierie is itself a palimpsest. It served successively as a workshop for turners, a warehouse for armour and bronze cannons, a tar depot, a showcase for the military power of the Serenissima, a space looted by French armies, reorganised by the Habsburgs, then abandoned before being reclaimed by the Biennale. Its nine modular units punctuated by stone portals, its Palladian roof trusses, its lion-head keystones: so many superimposed layers that make this building an open-air archaeology. The Arsenal itself was formed through successive additions, extensions, juxtapositions, the excavation of canals and spaces, all enclosed by three kilometres of walls — shaped by wars and alliances, expansions and retreats. Never fixed, always in flux.[13]

It is into this architectural body traversed by time that *Asəṭṭa* deposits its own strata. Amina Agueznay's textile membrane does not cover the space: it enters into dialogue with it, layer by layer, revealing what the building still carries of its former lives. Two *dār al-ṣinā'a* face one another: one of stone and history, the other of thread and gesture. Two houses of craft, two memories of making, in resonance across centuries and shores.

In the Artiglierie, *Asəṭṭa* assumes the form of a living membrane; a skin that sheds, spreading across space and peeling away in places, revealing layers of the past and others that persist in the present moment. By freeing itself from the constructed envelope to which it has been grafted, this second skin redefines our relationship to space: charting a new path, that of the in-between – and our ability to inhabit it.

A transcultural installation, a minor-key journey between Saharan handicraft and Mediterranean memory

Through this installation, Amina Agueznay revives a seminal memory: a workshop held in Laâyoune in 2009, during which local *mâalmines*[14] presented her with a kind of bead they call *shriâa*[15] in their Hassania dialect, which they described as a stone from the desert.

This semi-precious stone, highly prized by the peoples of the greater Sahara, appears to have travelled from Mauritania and other sub-Saharan lands into the hands of artisans in the

[13] Historic elements concerning the Arsenale are the product of research conducted by Ines Abergel in the context of the *Asəṭṭa* project.
[14] Master-artisans in Arabic.
[15] In Arabic: الشريعة

southern provinces. It is set at the crown of men's silver rings — *khatem loutad* — and fashioned according to a precise body of knowledge: the casting of pure silver, shaping, polishing, then the setting of the *shriâa* at the summit. But beyond its form, it is distinctive by its inherent power. In popular culture, the *shriâa* facilitates trade, attracts *baraka*,[16] and reinforces the social standing of whoever wears it. It is also, and perhaps above all, a shield against magic. A stone that protects, connects, and radiates.[17]

Intrigued, the artist observed this uniquely shaped object, which, to her eyes, strangely evoked the *rosetta*. Not a stone but a glass bead, the *rosetta* — literally "little rose" in Italian — is made by assembling rods of coloured glass into bundles, heated and drawn out until the patterns merge into a miniature flower, repeated ad infinitum in the depths of the material. How a ‘stone’ born in the furnaces of Murano in the 15th century — the *rosetta* — spread so spectacularly: it became one of the most sought-after beads in trade between Europe and Africa, circulating along the trans-Saharan routes, changing hands, crossing deserts. Archaeological excavations at sub-Saharan sites have unearthed *rosette* in the tombs of wealthy individuals who were buried with their beads, as one takes with oneself what is most precious. These objects have risen through the sands and crossed centuries until they dissolved into the collective memory of the peoples of the greater Sahara — like stones from nowhere, or rather, from everywhere at once.[18]

It is therefore difficult not to draw the correspondence: what popular culture in southern Morocco calls a stone from the desert may, in certain cases, be the distant heir of those Venetian furnaces. The stones set in these *khatem loutad* are not simple gems, but murrines — sections of those coloured glass rods in which starred or floral patterns have formed. The result of a sophisticated glassmaking technique, they crossed the Mediterranean, followed the African coastline, and travelled up the Saharan tracks to come to rest at last on the fingers of the men of Laâyoune, invested with a new life and new virtues. For this may be the most striking thing of all: by crossing land and sea, the *rosetta* also changed its nature. From trade bead, it became a stone of power; from Venetian technique, it transformed into a talisman. The beauty of the craft gesture became charged with an apotropaic force that Murano had never anticipated. One object, two cosmologies. A form that travels and, in travelling, transforms itself.

From this unexpected encounter between Saharan craft practice and Mediterranean memory emerges a discontinuous genealogy, a narrative to be reconstructed and revived – a history that neither Italy nor Morocco can lay claim to alone. The *shriâa* and the *rosetta* share a single vocation, each protecting, invoking, and attracting the favour of invisible forces. Two objects born of distinct practices, on opposite shores, that join together in a shared gesture: to enshrine an object of beauty as a bulwark.

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[16] A divine blessing in Islamic and Maghrebi tradition, extended in everyday usage to mean luck or favourable protection.
[17] According to research conducted by anthropologist Ahmed Skounti in the context of the *Asəṭṭa* project.
[18] According to research conducted by Ines Abergel in the context of the *Asəṭṭa* project.

It is precisely within this space of circulations and correspondence that the work of Amina Agueznay takes root.

Sustained by architecture, design, collective practices, and the excellence of Moroccan craftsmanship, her work defies categorisation. Her artistic quest seeks to connect contemporary forms with sensitive heritage, intuitive impulses with technical rigour. *Asəṭṭa*, like her entire approach, rejects immobility; it is a response to the disruptions that threaten the sustainability of artisanship in our globalised societies. With each threshold crossed, the work opens up new possibilities.

Rejecting ostentatious monumentality and unequivocal narratives in favour of an ancestral language, *Asəṭṭa* is imbued with raw and precious materials, through humble and patient gestures. A music composed of matter in almost-secret tones; a music that requires intimate listening.

Asəṭṭa is, above all else, a tribute to those talents who often go unnoticed: the keepers of centuries-old knowledge. The artist invites them not as peripheral figures, but as resource persons, witnesses to a living tradition where artisanship is never objectified but rather activated as language: as thought in action. The installation transforms the Moroccan pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2026 into a living archaeology of these gestures – transmitted, transformed, and magnified – that continue to shape new forms from ancestral legacies; a token of recognition addressed to those who, in a minor key,[19] contribute to the beauty of the world.

[19] In reference to the theme of the Biennale Arte 2026 and the curatorial statement by its curator, Koyo Kouoh.