

El Anatsui: Material Wonder marks the 40th anniversary of October Gallery and celebrates the vision and creative force of El Anatsui. The exhibition also coincides with the largest retrospective of the artist's work to date, *El Anatsui: Triumphant Scale*, at Haus der Kunst, Munich. Moreover, in February 2019, *TSIATSIA - searching for connection* was installed in the atrium of Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town. When this immense work first covered the façade of the Royal Academy, in 2013, the artist won the prestigious Charles Wollaston Award.

El Anatsui is undoubtedly one of the most influential artists of the present time. Throughout his long career, he has focused his many interests to examine a wide range of subjects and explored an extraordinary array of media from cement, ceramics and tropical hardwoods in his early years, to corrugated iron, cassava graters, milk-tin lids and bottle-tops in his later installations. Today, he is best known for his mesmerising works composed of many thousands of aluminium bottle-tops laboriously sewn together.

The success of these works owes much to the protean nature of the material itself, which being light and flexible yet still robust, is capable of repeatedly being reshaped and re-formed. Speaking of the plastic qualities of his metallic composites, El Anatsui recalled:

"I was playing with this idea of a 'fabric' as something that's not fixed. The folds in the material have their own way of running - I don't create them - they happen naturally, by themselves. The amazing thing about working with these 'fabrics' is that every time you display one of them it becomes an entirely new work of art."

The metal wall sculptures in the exhibition are accompanied by a series of prints made in collaboration with Factum Arte, Madrid. El Anatsui has always been fascinated by the physical history of the materials he employs and the journeys they undergo. The basic materials for his 'fabrics' are made by a team of assistants, who cut and pierce the aluminium strips on tables and smaller wooden 'flats.' After years of repetitive pricking and piercing, these wooden worktops present a scored landscape of textured relief. Using Factum Arte's cutting-edge, 3-D scanning and plate-making technologies, these scarred surfaces are translated into

I was fascinated by this because these materials are sustainable. This approach is something I would like to consider taking forward with the construction of my sculptures due to the fact in my lifetime the world would become inhabitable. Therefore, finding away to sustain instead of waste material will help make the world more inhabitable in the future. For example, stripping bamboo into thin sheet which could be made into string that could be used as a form of cable ties instead of plastic cable ties because one of the biggest issues the world faces is plastic pollution due to its long 450 year degradable time period. With the amount of plastic being consumed in everyday necessities (plastic bottles, toothbrushes etc).

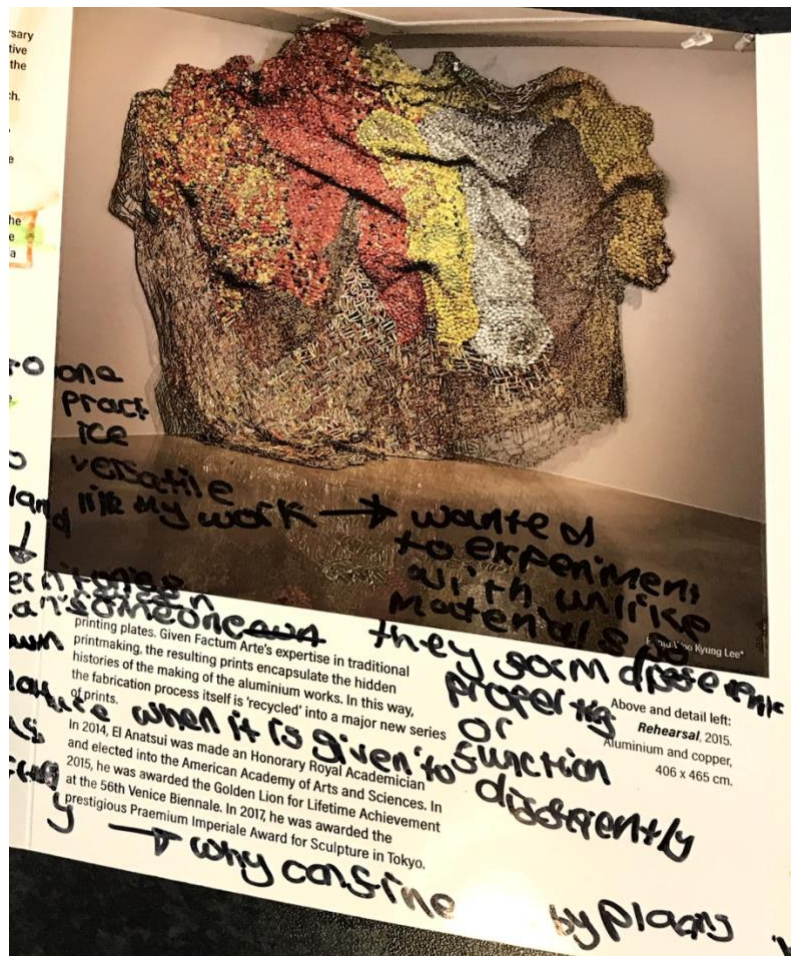
The idea of making 3D large sheet of metal essentially behave as lightweight intrigued me. This is due to the fact advancement in technology and construction techniques as sculptures means that sculptures could be made to fit the brief of an artist or convey it visually to an audience without wastage of material. As a young practicing artist, I have come to terms with the fact that my work entails a lot of usage of material and because I am not confined to one type of material while making my sculptures. Most of these materials are not sustainable and therefore end up thrown away in a skip. This means there is a lot of wastage taking place.

It just shows that his process is probably more rewarding than the result. The fact that it was a process of repetition means it took patience, skill and was thoughtfully planned out. This is what I felt made my piece successful because it was a process of cutting out strips of mod rock, then dipping in water constantly before plaster was applied. There were various steps but most of which were repetitive, which made me feel like I was doing nothing for 2 months.

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Also, what I find intriguing is that his work **drapes** as if it were a sheet of paper but is made of **conglomerate** of metal which has **opposing** properties to paper. Heavy and clunky, hard and strong whilst paper or "fabric" which he refers to it as is **lightweight** and can be **crumpled and** manipulated with **little effort or strength**. He speaks about making his sculpture something that is not "fixed," however **steel** can be **permanently** fixed as it is not easy to fiddle with because tools such as **pliers, slapper, snips and shears** are required. Its properties make **manipulation** it **difficult to** work but the presentation of his work essentially being made in a drape like form like **silk** makes it appear **delicate** and **fragile** as if to say no one understands the struggle of negotiation of **land** and **territory** in Lagos because Lagos itself is claimed to be "No Man's Land." This is due to political and religious divisions involving **Lagosians** (indigenous owners of Lagos who are land owners), Historically, Lagos Island (Isale Eko) was home to the Brazilian Quarter of Lagos where the majority of the slave trade returnees from Brazil settled.

Aworis who are the original parts of Lagos Island, **Eguns** who reside in **Badagry**, the **Ibinis** who invaded Lagos and settled in Idungaran, **Idun Itafa, Idumota, Idumagbo** etc, **Nupes/Tapas** who settled in Lagos Island, returnees who settled at the Brazilian Quarters, **Ijebus** who settled in **Epe** and **Ikorodu** axis, **Egbas** who settled in **Abule Egba, Agodo Egba** etc and **Ekitis** and **Ijeshas** who settled in a part of the Mainland.

Everything in blue are tribes in lagos

Lagos state is also split into two parts the mainland and the island. The mainland being a local government area with less privileged people and the island being for wealthier people.

The hustle and bustle to achieve ownership of land being a Lagosian without illegal ways by using higher status power. What is ironic about his "Material Wonder" collection is that he claims he wants it to not be "fixed" but it is held and confined in one position, pinned to retain shape. Surely, if he wanted them to not be fixed then they would be in transition meaning they would require some type of movement in my opinion.