

SOUKAINA AZIZ EL IDRISSE **Cabinet of curiosities**

Soukaina Aziz El Idrissi studied Textile Design in London. Wishing to find an alternative to natural fibers, she searched for different materials to weave with. She focuses then on what she could easily find: waste from old projects, photographs, paper, plastic, anything which could be transformed into a weft. Through her research, she discovered that the material for which the recycling loop is not complete is plastic. She decided to concentrate on it: this material malleable and flexible to infinity. After her studies, she came back to Morocco to dedicate herself to her artistic practice. In addition to the environmental dimension that she seeks to give to her pieces, in particular by co-creating the Zero Zbel NGO, the technical characteristics, intrinsic to the material itself, allow her a permanent learning and a continual renewal.

For this exhibition, Soukaina aims at recreating a “cabinet of curiosities”: mixing forms, materials and colours, interfering with the viewer’s eye who tries to understand what is seen, making links with the development of cabinets of curiosities created during the XVI century. Considered at first as “abrégé de la nature”, they included natural and artificial objects, created as collection to understand the world and nature. The crossroad between science and superstition, those cabinet of curiosities were a way to assert the intellectual and social status: learning and discovering objects, books, travel souvenirs, stranger things such as rocks, horns, and stuffed animals, creating microcosms as a résumé of the world. These were also places where you could share ideas; especially tools to show the influence and the power of their owner thanks to exceptional and exotic objects, developing then the idea of the first collections and founding the first museums.

Soukaina intends here to create links, using plastic as a tool of accumulation. Seen that this material is considered in emerging countries or rather the “Global South” as a way towards development and a sign of modernity - a major step following western ideals. Despite the environmental disaster that is a direct result of our carless plastic production and consumption, this material seems to have become almost essential to our way of living as we find it in everything and everywhere. Creating this installation, the artist doesn’t necessarily want to show her position, however, she points to the viewer the amount of plastic accumulated without ever noticing or even understand what it is. Today’s spectator is put in the same situation as one of an old cabinet of curiosities: they are faced with unprecedented “artworks-objects”, sometimes bearing strange shapes, for which they try to give meaning: where are they from? What are they used for? By the multiplication of shapes and states, the artist recreates this idea of accumulation of a cabinet with all kinds of transformed plastics becoming themselves “curiosities”. Soukaina presents hand-woven plastic panels reminiscent of carpets or tapestries, pressed plastic sheets allowing light through to better understand composition, as well as heat-treated plastics sculpted as one would clay. Thus, the spectator is confronted to their own reflexion on this material for which only they can understand the implications by observing with their eyes.