



## Samir Salmi: the Sea Artist

Latifa Labsir writes about an enormous ecological installation by the Moroccan artist Samir Salmi, on the southern sea front, where his handiwork integrates with the seascape. Salmi has created, together with a group of children, a work dealing with the ecological hazard resulting from the increased amounts of plastic waste, which has become a threat to the marine environment.

Essay / Latifa Labsir September 11, 2023

Samir Salmi, a poet and artist who has turned the sea into an artwork and a poem, creates spectacularly poetic monumental installations. He has shown work in exhibition spaces in Rabat, Paris, Osaka, and more. He presented his "Les galeries aquariums" installation<sup>1</sup> on the banks of the Seine in northern France. On the seafront in southern Morocco, he constructed the mega-installation *Ephémère*, the subject of this article.

### The Sea Within an Artwork

Recently, Samir Salmi has been presenting his large artworks directly facing the sea, integrating the artwork and the living seascape. He used the breezes in southern Morocco to move a wave of plastic strips he had created and woven together with a group of children to symbolize the increase in the volume of plastic waste, which has become a severe hazard to sea life and the environment in general.

### Craft Works and Sculptures from Sea Debris and Plastic Waste

Salmi constructs his works from fish bones and skeletons, shellfish, seaweed, snails, sand, and salt. This time he added new elements: plastic waste, tin cans, bags, and bottles. The artist has constructed this harmonious installation in the form of large, hollow rings, from which one can take a picture that includes the sea within the work, and observe the beach as it changes between sunrise and sunset, morning and night, calm and noise.

### A Plastics Workshop for the Beach Children

When Salmi presented his enormous installation, he started a workshop for the children of the beach, teaching them how to work with plastic. It was part of the "Sails without Plastics" program by the Mohamed VI Fund for Environmental Protection, which had made it the leading project of its campaign. The artist sought to clean up the beaches, increase vacationers' awareness regarding the dangers inherent in using plastic, and raise consciousness to this chemical material. The children completed the plastics recycling workshop by making a 'wave' out of plastic elements - strips, bottles, and containers.

Through the Wave, moving to the winds and the wet, salty sea currents, the Sea Artist, accompanied by the children, presented his wide-ranging marine installation with its multiple educational, artistic, and environmental aspects. The temporary installation lasted fifteen days, around the clock. It manifested the strength and solidity of the artwork as it withstood the sea, the sun, and the southern winds.



## رؤية من جنب.jpg



[1]Sunset, installation by Samir Salmi, 2019  
Photography: Latifa Labsir

### The Sea Artist and the Marine Environment

Samir Salmi's work may be associated with modern conceptual art – it is based on an idea and a unique vision through which the work reveals its artistic, aesthetic, and technical aspects. In addition to making a work of fish remains, Salmi evokes the sea atmosphere in his exhibitions by painting on the glass facades of the institutions. For instance, at the [Muhammed V National Theater in Rabat](#) [2] and the [Bernanos](#) [3] and Santos galleries in Paris.<sup>3</sup>

Salmi has allowed these translucent plates to vary their shades in response to fluctuating light intensity during the day and night. Moving from temporary installations to performance, he made the sounds, lights, and smells of the sea present, and spread sand and salt as physical means of expression, intended to highlight the echoes and eddies of the deep sea. The artist has turned the galleries into a scenographic base where he integrated music and dance, and the visitors merged with the works, the lights, the sounds, and the odors.<sup>4</sup>

## [4] وقت الغروب.jpg



[5]Sunset, installation by Samir Salmi, 2019

Photography: Latifa Labsir

Samir Salmi's brilliant new work is that same performance he has created in the space open to the southern beaches, accompanied by children – as an extraordinary plastic-ecological experience.<sup>5</sup> He can be described as the ultimate Sea and Environment Artist.<sup>6</sup>

### **Artwork as a Manner of Nature**

From an empirical point of view, we can linger on the characteristics of Salmi's works with pigments, which the artist has titled "works as a manner of nature," bearing the calculated spontaneity of chaotic systems. These art techniques originate in pioneers like Pablo Picasso, who had thought that nature is not to be imitated by transferring the details of its views accurately but rather by attempting to work according to its imagination, in a creative, fluent manner, which re-organizes nature's chaos in unexpected forms.

Thus, and in response to the Andalusian artist's way of thinking, the leaks and the pigments in Salmi's works emerged free and flowing, rich in colors and interactions, saturated with lights, shadows, and slits. All these have merged through the peculiarities of the central artworks of the Sea Artist.

### **The Sculpting and Painting of Marine Elements**

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Salmi made his sculptural and pigment-based works from sea debris he had collected on the beach. With his artistic touch, he has managed to transform it from a state of neglect and decay somewhere on a rock on a forgotten beach into a strong and valuable material shown in respected art spaces and national and international prestigious galleries.

It stems from a philosophy that insists on investing in the available, to the utmost, recycling and creating useful objects from harmful waste.

[تفصيل.jpg](#) [6]



[7]Detail, installation by Samir Salmi, 2019

Photography: Latifa Labsir

### **Paper and Fabric Created by the Artist**

The unique formation of his works out of ocean debris and the remains of humans' consumption of fish and snails was not enough for Salmi. He made a dough from remnants of salt, paper, fabric, and water, adding a powder of seaweed, snails, fish bones, and fibers from the resin of palm trees and other plants. This laboratory-like, experimental work has crystallized into artworks and oddly shaped sculptures with a unique inspiration, which had attracted attention and echoed in art forums in France and Europe in general during a tour of the exhibitions in a meeting of the Centre de liaison des artistes et culture in Paris.[Z](#)



## **The Fronts of Poetry and Art**

An artist of sea and marine environment, large monumental installations, art and poetry. Samir Salmi's works are artistic frontiers that he opens onto the sea, and they look out to the light shimmering on the water, twisting to the rhythm of the wind. From them, he penetrates the harmony of the colors of the sea's horizon. When he bids farewell to the sun at sunset, under the auspices of sand, salt, and seaweed, there settles the idea that shines again with lights, art or poetry, rhythm, bold tones, and a harmony of colors: red, purple, and blue.

[au montage de l'oeuvre.JPG](#) **[8]**



[9]Working on the installation by Samir Salmi, 2019  
Photography: Latifa Labsir



- [1.](#) In the work "Les galeries aquariums," the artist imbues the sea atmosphere in three galleries, erected in the port of Ivry-sur-Seine, on the outskirts of Paris: the colonnade of the depth, the area, and the raging waves. The work was presented in 1999.
- [2.](#) In the exhibition "An Atmosphere of Freedom," Salmi presented his works in salt basins, activating the natural marine impact of wind sounds and sea smells. In addition to the more traditional artwork he presented on the glass façade of the large theater (a 400m2 painting), Salmi was awarded the Hassan II prize for environmental preservation in art and literature for 2001, for his artistic achievements.
- [3.](#) The Bernanos Gallery showed "Oceania I" in 1988, and the Santos Gallery in Paris showed "Oceania II" in 2003.
- [4.](#) I refer in particular to "Oceania I," for which Salmi has cooperated with the composer Guy Cascalés and the Sixth Sorbonne Troupe. Kascalacreated music for the ocean's depths and designed graphics for the scenes and costumes for the dance performance.
- [5.](#) Salmi has conducted environmental creative workshops before, for children in shelters and children with disabilities. The innovation in the last sea workshop was the recycling of plastic at the foot of the enormous installation.
- [6.](#) The title "the Sea Artist" was conferred on Salmi by the director of the Beaux-arts Galerie in Paris, Hélène Ville-fort, following the exhibition "Oceania I." Later, the French magazine Vue sur Mer has also given him this title.
- [7.](#) Salmi participated in many exhibitions as a member of Centre de liaison des artistes et culture in Paris, headed by the artist Solange Sontag. Salmi has won several awards through French-European activities, including the Modern Art Award of the Canne Film Festival in France and the Bruges Festival in Belgium.

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- [2] <https://tm5.ma/>
- [3] [https://espace-bernanos.com/?fbclid=IwAR17wL948uU4g6y1uKlxl5etCY5CU6EcSFeD\\_mLJDOfsoA30m-Tzomi20I](https://espace-bernanos.com/?fbclid=IwAR17wL948uU4g6y1uKlxl5etCY5CU6EcSFeD_mLJDOfsoA30m-Tzomi20I)
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- [5] [https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/%D9%88%D9%82%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8\\_0.jpg](https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/%D9%88%D9%82%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8_0.jpg)
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