



Report: Research trip on Vacoa braiding, Reunion Island

Vacoa is an endemic plant growing on the coasts of Reunion Island. Its leaves are used by artisan, mainly women, to braid baskets. My research during this trip had different steps: connecting with a craftswoman; getting to learn the techniques, from picking the leaves, cleaning to preparing for the braiding and last to appropriate the skill in a way that could develop my own way of doing it.

During my first week of arrival I contacted two artisans. The first one was Madame Payet, located in the beautiful village of Bras Panon in the eastern part of the island. She welcomed me in her yard to initiate me to the first steps. The austral summer was blazing, warm, wet, a christmas tree decorated in the garden and jolly chicken running around the parked car.

Some baskets that Madame Payet created were hung around the workshop table, next to leaves, knives, and other tools. Her atelier is called "Art de la Tresse" (The art of braiding) . It was a one on one class that was really fruitfull. She taught me the waiving basics for weaving the leaves, a beautiful repetitive pattern was blooming under my fingers, and I suddenly recognized the woven mat I used to lay on as a kid, on the beach. The second technique I learnt is called cannage, and it is similar to char making weaves.

My second workshop happened next to the roaring waves of Manapany, petit coin de paradis, we call it. My aunt Nadège Tergemina has her own atelier there, called Vacoamania. She educated me on the art of Vacoa, and wished to pick where it is allowed. She herself learned from her mom. The skill is traditionally passed from one generation to the other, it is quite common for the villagers from the southern part of the island, to keep the knowledge a secret, to not share the small detailed technique that makes a basket perfect. So i felt really happy learning from Nadege. She showed me around the vacoa trees planted on the coast. We could still see marks of craftswomen working their baskets outside: a nail planted in a bark used as a support to braid the leaves. She shared with me her secret, such as cleaning the leaves with Geranium hydrolat, a flower that is heavily grown on the island, for its beautiful scent and marvelous properties. Nadège was a good teacher. She was pushing me to repeat moves until I could perfectly make them. By the end of the session I had a cute bag to take with me.

After this week of learning, I joined the Constellation residency space. They welcomed me in their studio so I could now experiment the technique on my own. I had gathered leaves I would collect after windy days on the shore. The piece I started working on was a vanity table, as a sculpture it was telling the story of the changing landscape in Reunion. $\frac{1}{3}$ made of concrete and sand from the beach, $\frac{1}{3}$ found objects and $\frac{1}{3}$ vacoa. The piece was a prop for a character I invented, a spirit flying through the island, changing forms, looking at its reflection and observing its island.

The vanity table was also functioning as a fountain, delivering Geranium water, used to refresh the skin and for cleansing.

BEAUTÉ PEÏ

kem geranium

dam korwe zat

mémé,

transforma lu

en

sanbon



kam sive zat raca
pou fer beina
a lu et sive zat

no

par fer yali









