

INTERVIEW JAN 17 - WRITTEN BY XUEZHU JENNY WANG

Anina Major: “I could speak to one of many, or be one of many”

“As my hands continuously weave over and under, I am reminded of ocean waves flowing along the shoreline and their ability to capture and release stories of time passed and occurring, simultaneously.”

— Anina Major



Anina Major, a Bahamian-born artist known for working with woven clay and vessel-like forms, imbues her work with a fond reckoning of identity and place. Her textured pieces are as if receptacles of memories, evoking longing, affection, and a tender journey of becoming. In the Armory Show 2024, she presented *The Landing* (2024) with TERN Gallery in the art fair’s Platform section and won the Pommery Prize. And recently, Major is

featured in Phaidon's new release, *Great Women Sculptors*, among the trailblazing women artists who have pushed the boundaries of three-dimensionality. The book, with an introduction by Lisa Le Feuvre, is inevitably confronted with the social, definitional, and linguistic nuances that emerge when terms like “sculptor,” “woman sculptor,” or “woman artist” converge. To this point, Major astutely responds, “I identify with all of them and have the capacity to consume all these identifiers. The beautiful thing about having agency over one's self and viewpoints is being able to decide you know how you want to identify.” In this interview with IMPULSE, the artist discusses her plaiting technique, penchant for categorical fluidity, as well as new explorations ahead.

Xuezhu Jenny Wang: What does your process look like? Where do you find inspiration for your art?

Anina Major: I'm inspired by many things—personal memories, public archives, oral histories, music, poetry, vintage postcards—you name it. My work combines all these influences into a springboard for creative exploration, which often results in questions. My sculptures and installations sometimes reference tropical or Caribbean ecologies, connecting history with a contemporary lens.

Currently, I weave my clay sculptures. I've developed custom clay recipes for this technique since commercial clay isn't suitable. The process mirrors Bahamian straw plaiting, a skill I learned from my grandmother. It involves weaving palm leaves into ribbons, which are used to make items like hats, bags, and dolls that are often sold to tourists. My grandmother used plaiting to support the family and sent my mom and aunt to college. Inspired by her, I roll, cut, weave, and fire clay multiple times, iterating and discovering along the way. My process is incremental and intuitive.



XJW: When you learned the technique from your grandmother, did you want to be an artist?

AM: Not exactly. I always knew I was creative, but I didn't fully understand what being an artist meant. Growing up, there weren't many examples of what an artist's life could look like. I tried painting and other forms of creativity, but they didn't quite resonate with me.

Over time, I realized I was drawn to process and execution. So, while I knew I was an artist, it took years to define what that meant for me professionally.

XJW: A lot of your work borders on the aesthetics of functionality, bringing to mind objects with use value, such as vases and baskets. What's your view on the relationship between fine art and craft, art objects and functional objects?

AM: At this stage, I focus on content and ideas rather than categorization, as labels feel restrictive to me. I admire well-designed objects and am intrigued by works that blur the lines between fine art and craft. History shows these boundaries shift over time, and I find that exciting—it opens space for creative exploration. I think it's exciting when art transcends categories and thrives across different spaces. If my work can do that, it's incredible; that's the essence of creativity, right? Defying classifications.



XJW: Congrats on being featured in *Great Women Sculptors*. How do you feel? And speaking of categories, do you identify as a sculptor, woman sculptor, or woman artist? There's so much nuance to unpack amongst these labels.

AM: Honestly, it's an honor. Being in that book, surrounded by artists I admire, feels surreal. It's a valuable resource—something the younger me would have cherished.

To your second question, I think I identify with all of them and have the capacity to consume all these identifiers. The beautiful thing about having agency over one's self and viewpoints is being able to decide you know how you want to identify. Identities and art forms evolve. I see identity as fluid, and it's freeing to move beyond rigid labels.

XJW: Do you think sculpture faces more gatekeeping compared to other artistic mediums?

AM: Historically, sculpture has been male-dominated, and that bias persists. Many of my mentors and teachers have experienced a more extreme form of bias or haven't received the acknowledgment they deserve. Compared to, say, 20 years ago, it's much easier for me to find references of women working in a three-dimensional way, and I think that is the result of avenues we were opening up. We have more women teaching. Diversifying sculptural materials has also opened doors. My generation benefits from these changes, but the challenge is to keep dismantling gendered perspectives so future generations face fewer obstacles.

Books like *Great Women Sculptors* are a testament to progress. It's about acknowledging that these artists have always been there, and now we have the tools to celebrate them. When someone says, "You can't do this," you can say, "Look, according to this book, there are 10 other women doing this." Gatekeeping is gradually breaking down as we share more knowledge and resources.

It really is an exciting time to be alive. There's still work to do, but we're in a better position now than before, and I'm optimistic about what's ahead.



XJW: In your bio, you mentioned the decision to establish “a home contrary to the location in which [you] were born” was your artistic investigation’s point of departure. Can you elaborate more on what this means?

AM: I was born and raised in the Bahamas and now live in the US, which gives me a unique perspective—not special, just unique. The jumping-off point made me question who I am, how I identify, and what I associate with that identity. My work explores these questions, peeling back layers to ask: What brings me comfort? What makes me happy? What makes me feel distant? What makes me feel like I belong—or not?

Initially, when I started, my work was grappling with the idea of never returning to live in the Bahamas full-time. I wanted to create objects that provided comfort to surround me

and preserved memories of home, knowing it would never be the same. It was about protecting that memory while accepting that home has become something different. My positionality—existing between cultures—shapes my work. I like to think that in some scenarios, I could speak to one of many, or be one of many. And there are other scenarios where my experience is very singular.

XJW: Has your understanding of self and home evolved through your work?

AM: Absolutely. Early on, my work was almost about guilt—processing guilt: Why am I here and not there? Everyone is asking when you are coming home. When you come home, people are asking when you leave. When you are not there, you wish you could be. It's kind of sad. Homesickness is real. Over time, that evolved into admiration, fondness, and love that is expressed from loss. I'm holding onto something that doesn't exist as it once did, but it connects me to my grandmother, my lineage, and a sense of grounding. You can look at it on a simple level and say it's about citizenship. But it really isn't. It's about growing into an evolved human being and this liminal phase of figuring out who you are.



XJW: Do you consider New York home now?

AM: Yes, I've lived in the US longer than in the Bahamas now. But it's also such a rich area to play with creatively, because you don't really know how you will identify.

When I first moved to the US for college, I heard this lady on the bus talking to the bus driver and asked her which Caribbean island she was from. She said, "I'm from Jamaica."

And I said, “Oh, awesome. I’m from the Bahamas. How long have you been here?” And she said, about 30 years. In my head, I was like, you are not from Jamaica anymore. You’ve literally been here for 30 years. Of course, I was really young at the time, and my perspective has since changed. Who am I to decide if she’s from Jamaica or not? It’s about what resonates, what you carry forward, what defines you, and what makes you feel connected, not just legal citizenship.

When I go back to the Bahamas, I sometimes feel like I’m going through another identity crisis because it’s not how I remember it. Parallel evolutions are happening—back home and where I live now. These intersections can be fascinating because of the gaps within this migratory timeline. So I think inevitably, identity is ever-changing based on where and how you grow. There’s an infinite amount of variation in diasporic experiences.

XJW: To conclude, is there something unexpected about you or anything you’d like to add?

AM: People often see me as a clay or installation artist, but I’m also passionate about performance. I love diving deeply into an idea until it’s fully explored, and I’m open to trying new approaches. While I’m focused on sculpture now, I’m interested in expanding into storytelling through performance or outdoor interventions. As my skills and research grow, I look forward to exploring how movement, form, and collaboration can shape narratives or solve problems. It’s like a simmering dish with all the ingredients—I can’t wait for it to be ready for others to experience.



This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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INTERVIEW - IDENTITY - SCULPTURE - FEMINISM - INSTALLATION

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