

With the earth

AVEC LA TERRE

Since 1991, when she moved to rural Burgundy, Jane Norbury has learned to consider clay in two aspects, raw and fired. She collects her earth samples in nature, which she then uses in site sensitive installations as well as performances. She responds to places, and makes herself as malleable as her material to adapt and resonate to the specificities and history of a site or architecture.

Jane Norbury was captivated by the volumes of the Dimière Barn, by its elevation, by its massive and apparent timber frame and by the fact that, for decades, man has extracted earth from the site to make pots and adobe buildings. She developed her installation to exist in this historically and geologically marked space. She seeks spirituality, emphasizing the fluidity of circulation and the deep and peaceful respiration that results from it.

The appropriation is sober. Few pieces punctuate the space. Long black hangings, sometimes huge, segment the space or lean against the vertiginous walls. These monochrome canvases, with the appearance of primitive tapestries, testify to ample gestures and become the supports for the flows of different slips (raw earth diluted in water), associated for their colour tone and composed from collected earths, including a pale ochre earth from the site.

Facing them and around them, mainly on the ground, revolve rings of fired clay(s). These elementary, magmatic forms, heavy from time immemorial, carry with them the memory of alluvial mixtures; inspire the sudden petrification of a movement in progress.

Les Passeuses, since that is what the artist calls them, are the result of a slow and complex process in which chance has its place and which aims to make people forget not the gesture, but the imprint of the hand. Built from slabs, which are then rolled in a round and constraining matrix, the clay coils fold, breathe, and exhale, creating cavities and highlights. More and more, Jane Norbury adds to these viscera of clay, a second ring of different clay, whose grogged texture and colour, after firing, will contrast with the first. Together, these two associated clays must react in the same way to the firing and have the same degree of shrinkage. The clays merge, as if causing the phenomena of subduction over a long geological period. Despite an extremely strong physical commitment, Jane Norbury seeks to extricate herself from this process which she wishes to be without force. She arranges and leaves the task of activating the space to the clay elements, not without the complicity of the spectator-actor.

Jane Norbury's approach is steeped in nature. His work today finds particular resonance with the emergence of what is called ecological art. But Jane Norbury remains marked by the English sculptural school from which she came, through personalities such as those of Tony Cragg and David Nash, and by this aptitude also to merge with nature in the original spirit of land art. Having become topical again due to the current ecological context, this quest for a frugal artistic expression involving matter and the body essentially leads to a reflection on existence.

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