

BIBRACTE

MONUMENT

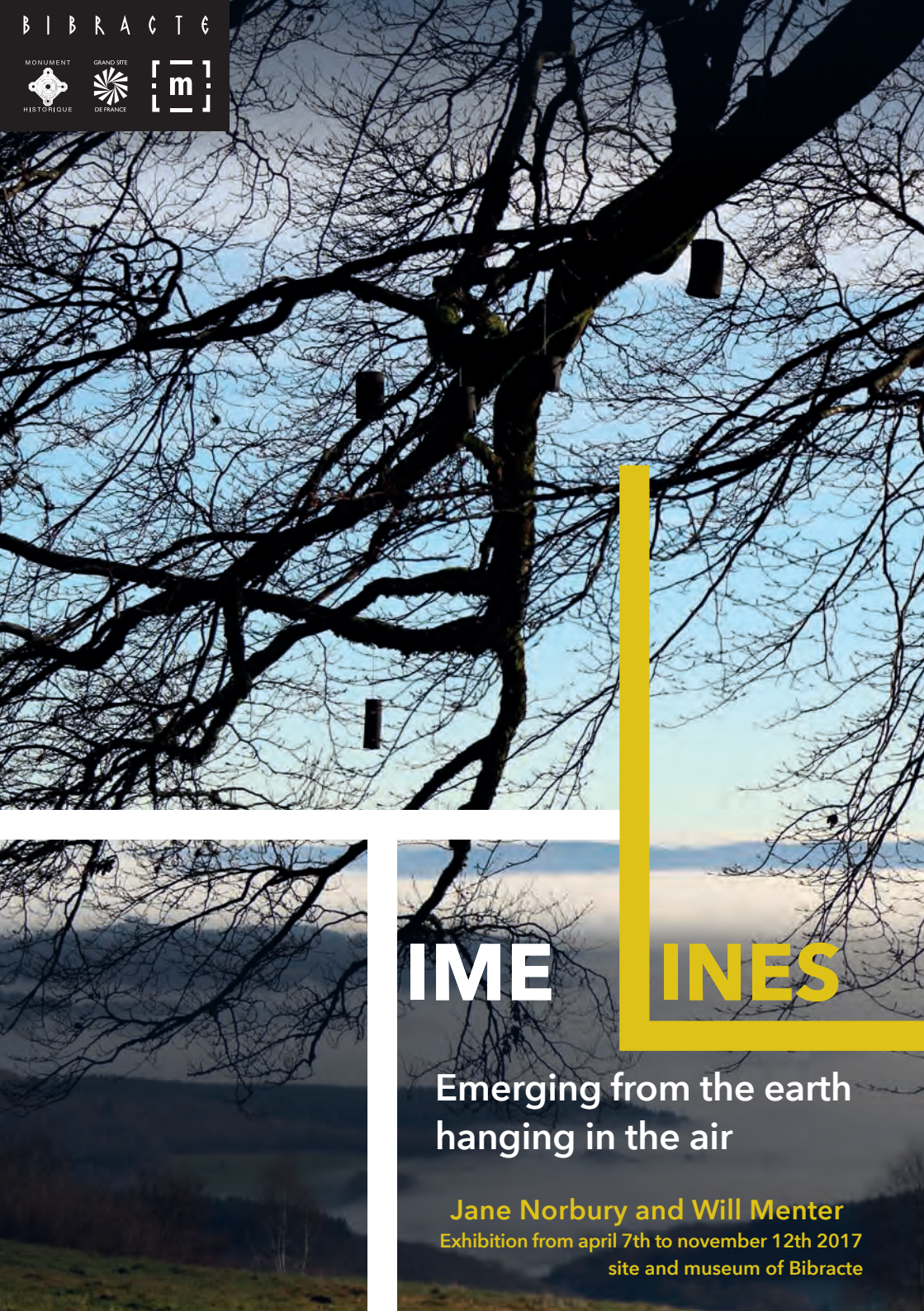


HISTORIQUE

GRAND SITE



DE FRANCE



# TIME LINES

Emerging from the earth  
hanging in the air

**Jane Norbury and Will Menter**  
Exhibition from april 7th to november 12th 2017  
site and museum of Bibracte







The unique works of the two artists presented in this exhibition overlap and resonate to create a universe that is fed by their respective approaches. Jane Norbury is a ceramicist and it is her collusion with clay that has allowed her to develop a multi-faceted body of work. Fired clay sculptures, raw clay paintings, installations, performances: she pushes the limits of her practice and continually invents new forms. Will Menter defines himself as a sound artist and his musical explorations are inseparable from his research of physical form. Wind, motors, spectators, musicians or dancers activate his works which then move and produce sound. Both artists develop their aesthetic language from the base of natural materials. Their installations and performances are born out of a meeting with the context for which they are conceived, awakening the visitors' senses and inviting them to explore the place.

The exhibition's theme stems from the archaeological dimension of Bibracte, whose rich underground contains vestiges of the past that are gradually being brought to light. The **Timeline - emerging from the earth, hanging in the air** - delicately weaves the works together into a coherent whole. From the idea of archaeology, the two artists spin the metaphor: the past is buried in the earth from which it gradually emerges and then launches itself to the heights of the future. But the works presented are also intrinsically linked to the remarkable natural site that hosts them, in dialogue not only with its constituent materials - earth, wood, stone, water, wind - but also with the forms that compose it - particularly the queues, the extraordinary beech trunks that are so characteristic of this place. The works find in the site a sumptuous platform that both welcomes and makes sense of them.

If in places the forest is "so magnificent that nothing can be added" (Will Menter), the Fontaine Saint-Pierre instills an intimate atmosphere, inviting contemplation and focusing your attention. You glimpse a flight of graphic lines, their white mattness capturing the light. It is **Branch Lines**, by Jane Norbury, a hanging river of branches gathered on the site, painted and then positioned horizontally, following the trickling of water. This drawing in space is born above the fountain which it overhangs at its start. It then follows the stream downhill, swooping low before taking its freedom, wending its sinuous path through the forest, branches amongst branches. Light is reflected by the colour of the paint; a mixture of flour, linseed oil and kaolin - the white clay which we know from its use in porcelain. Veering between spectral apparition and abstract writing, the work seems to detach itself from its wooded context in a poetic weightlessness.

Next, it's sound that catches your attention: **Wind Wood** emerges from the ground and surges in to the air. Activated by the wind or, in its lower part, by the visitor, Will Menter's sound sculpture is based on the simplest of principles: pieces of wood that collide and



**Wind Wood**  
Will Menter



produce sounds randomly, often surprisingly. One part is animated while another remains silent, revealing the detailed pattern of air currents. Suddenly, the sound intensifies, evoking the rumbling of a storm. Then calm returns. You can again distinguish the notes produced by the meeting of two pieces of wood of different lengths, and can mentally compose your own melody. The installation unfolds in space, both horizontally and vertically, generating a three-dimensional sound experience. While advances in technology often make it possible to experiment with a sound that is stereophonic, that is to say, which comes from various sources in space, few works explore its vertical dimension.

**L**es *Murmures du vent* proceeds from a similar research of sound in space activated by nature. At La Chaume, Will Menter has hung forty ceramic wind flutes in the branches of a large beech tree. If the wind rises, those that face its direction sing their gentle melodies for you.

**T**hese installations, whether discrete or more expansive, help us to see and to hear better. The materials used are chosen with care, and with great respect for their surroundings. Thus, the branches that make up the aerial drawing of Jane Norbury come from the same type of trees as those that house the work: hardwoods. As for *Wind Wood*, it finds its home amongst the softwood conifers from which it is made. So it is quite fitting that at the point in the forest where the two species meet, the sculptures of the two artists also encounter each other.









On the south-east and south-western terraces of the museum, Jane Norbury presents her new series of sculptures, **Queules**, inspired by these strange vegetal formations characteristic of Mount Beuvray, beech trees formerly interwoven in layed hedges which have subsequently broken free again. The burgeoning forms of certain of these sculptures contrast with the rigour of the architecture for which they were conceived. At first glance, they remind us of these woody excrescences, but the process of creation itself reflects this botanical history. Indeed, just as the Morvan beech grows between the constraint of the form imposed by the hedge to which it belonged and its fiercely free nature, the formal dynamism of these sculptures arises from the contrary forces which shape them. The work of creation is articulated in a dialogue between the artist and her favoured material, fired in reduction between 1050 and 1100 degrees. If preparatory works, in the form of maquettes, fix the initial idea, the nature of the clay when worked then imposes its own direction. Jane Norbury, a fine connoisseur of ceramic techniques, chooses here to experiment and to allow the matter to surprise her. For the first time, she uses a clay from the Landes, whose resistance allows her to create large scale works. However, the dimensions of the pieces sometimes lead to unforeseen reactions of the material, which she welcomes as a challenge from which to improvise.

The **Queules**, all resolutely organic, differ in their forms, in turn mineral, vegetal or almost animal. If the first of the series seem smooth and polished, roughness soon appears. The clay is pushed from inside to outside, creating a rugged bark-like surface. The texture is obtained by scraping; the small stones and the grog (crushed fired clay) present in the clay scratch the surface, a white slip then sometimes underlines these asperities. The more controlled forms of the first sculptures are shaken by an energy that seems to come from within. Little by little, they emancipate themselves and stand up. Here, the Timeline is to be found in the entire series, each of its ten sculptures marking an evolution, inseparable from the time that has elapsed.

On the North-West terrace the visit is completed with three of Will Menter's sound sculptures. **River Shaped** is made from boulders formed by the aquatic erosion of the River Durance where the artist collected them. A sturdy oak structure carries their weight with steel cables. They are literally "hanging in the air" in a visual oxymoron. The public can manipulate the work to set off the movement of the stones and hence their sound. The piece is massive and may make you expect a resounding clang but this collision of minerals sings a gentle and mat song. Gradually each floating rock joins the dance, leading and responding mutually. Then, after the apparent disorder a regularity emerges, which seems to leave nothing to improvisation.

**Downpour** and **Water Line** are made from the same materials (slate, ceramics, metal, water) and work with the same system. A pump lifts water from the museum's pond and releases it high above a slab of slate. But despite this similarity the contrast is striking. **Downpour** sees the liquid in strong jets



**River Shaped**  
Will Menter



**Queues n° 5**  
Jane Norbury

strike a vast rectangular slate, producing a loud, enveloping sound. Will Menter compares it to "white noise", sound in which every frequency is present with the same intensity, analogous with "white light", a balanced mixture of different colours that cancel each other out. It results in an inability of the ear to separate the origin of different auditory stimuli merged in to a single "noise". A movement detector starts up the piece when a visitor approaches but stops after a few seconds pointing out the nuances in the apparent chaos. The artist concludes, "It also sounds good when it stops".

The calm that returns creates the right ambience to discover the delicacy of **Water Line** unfolding in front of the sumptuous landscape that encircles the terrace. A geometric metal structure supports a set of slates, rectangular but more modestly sized, which are poised above ceramic cylinders. This time the water falls on the slate drop by drop.



The sound has a crystalline quality, the note being defined by the length of the tube, each slate then having been tuned to the corresponding note with a grinder. The rhythm of each note is regular but the resulting sequence of the whole is aleatoric. In this work Will Menter shares with us "the minimalist pleasure of the perception of simple sounds which become complex in the musical experience that each person makes of them".

**D**ownpour, in its percussive intensity perhaps enables a fuller appreciation of the peacefulness of **Water Line**. The contrast that separates them underlines the reach of the field of the possible explored by Will Menter in his musical career, influenced by jazz from the freest to the most contemplative.

**F**ruit of a constant exchange, the works of Will Menter and Jane Norbury are directly linked to their shared rapport with the world by which they each enrich the other. After numerous collaborations from Burgundy to Canada to Scotland the exhibition at Bibracte presents for the first time, in a project of this stature, the inter-related works of these "magiciens de la terre". Their poetic dialogue almost seems like stichomythie this special form of Greek verse, which fuses form and meaning, rhythmically balanced between two voices.

### Anne Yanover

Art historian

Find the making of in the Bibracte Gazette:

[www.bibracte.fr](http://www.bibracte.fr)

For further information about the artists:

[www.willmenter.com](http://www.willmenter.com) and [www.janenorbury.com](http://www.janenorbury.com)

