

**LAURA  
ELLEN  
BACON**  
Chaque Fibre  
de Mon Être

**EXPOSITION MONOGRAPHIQUE**

**TRAM**

Réserve art  
contemporain  
Paris / Île-de-France



**2 MAI - 28 AOÛT 2022**



abbaye de Maubuisson  
01 34 33 85 00  
avenue Richard de Tour,  
Saint-Ouen l'Aumône (95)

# STEMS, RHIZOMES, GROWTH

Laura Ellen Bacon spent six weeks in residence at the Abbaye de Maubuisson to produce two installations, *Breathe* and *The Feeling Remains*.

Laura Ellen Bacon was born in 1976 and lives and works in Derbyshire (England). She holds a degree in Applied Arts from the University of Derby and was shortlisted for the Woman's Hour Craft Prize (V&A, London). Twenty years ago, she discovered willow. Woven and knotted, it has become the starting material for large-scale works, sculptures, and even semi-architectural installations designed and created by the artist *in situ* (Winchester Discovery Centre, Saatchi Gallery, Barrington Court, Chatsworth Garden, Sudeley Castle, etc.). At times compact, nestling in the corner of a room and catching visitors by surprise, sometimes proliferating and embracing, her artworks have the creative power of natural phenomena. As part of the land art movement, the works blend in with the vegetal surroundings or cling to the mouldings of an edifice like the ligneous branches of a climbing plant.

Laura Ellen Bacon spent six weeks in residence at the Abbaye de Maubuisson to produce two installations, *Breathe* and *The Feeling Remains*.

The first, *Breathe*, unfurls its volutes of plant fibres in the visiting parlour. Connected together by hundreds of knots, the willow stems trace aerial curlicues that seem to be trying to escape through the door and the windows. The piece enfolds visitors in its wide-open curves. The discreet fragrance of the willow and its imperceptible rustling awaken the senses. In this room, the only one where nuns were allowed to speak, the stems rise up like the words exchanged by the women. All these shared conversations, questions, injunctions, whispers, breaths, cross time in the same way as the room itself, before eventually evaporating and fading away. Locked inside the memory of the walls, the words materialize in the flexibility of the willow and break free along its meanders. Spirals and scrolls intertwine with the pillars and the gothic vaults of the room. These interlacing patterns conjure up a complete vocabulary of the garden and botany that visitors

can connect with at will: trellises, tendrils, branches, vines, vine shoots. A network of shadows surrounds the stems, fluttering on the walls. Light – an intrinsic component of the installation – slithers between the stems, bringing them to life and revealing their particular vibration. The artist, as she explains it, creates her sculptures with these stems, rekindling the imagination of the den, the burrow, and the nest. Having been invited to create a piece in a specific space, she uses these fibrous sticks to translate the strong connection she feels with the location and the flow of energy between herself and the site.

In the nuns' room, the sculpture entitled *The Feeling Remains* stands out through its density and tightly woven branches and stems. As though embedded in the bowels of the building, the work rises from its foundations. Solid, powerful, it emerges in two halves, abstractly evoking the silhouette of invisible beings. While the artist draws her inspiration from natural shapes, she also strives to give substance to the memories of the nuns. Hidden in its recesses, lights give life to the artwork. They give it a vivid presence: the lingering traces of these women who passed through the abbey from one generation to the next.



*Spatial Place*  
©Laura Ellen Bacon

It is worth remembering that these women used to do needlework in this room. The time-consuming, meticulous, diligent task executed in silence and concentration, along with the lengths of thread employed and the hand progressing over the needlework find a new incarnation in the mass of tightly wound stems that spread and grow in the space. Through this very gesture, the artist has revived the nun's austere activity. Taking a stem, twisting it, weaving it with the others before starting again: the repetitive movement recreates the meditative tension that once guided their work. The nuns' thoughts appear in the intertwining threads,





*Woven space*  
©Laura Ellen Bacon

bound together by the stitches and knots of the structure. They remain unspoken, forming compact nests of darkness, like those left dark by the lighting of the sculpture, as they expand in silence. The words withheld sink into the ground, elongate towards the ceiling, and become gnarled branches.

To complement the willow sculptures, the artist produced a series of charcoal drawings (charred willow sticks). Here again, a repetitive gesture dominates the execution. The broad crosshatching in abstract, plant-inspired forms evokes the marks left over time on the stone wall of the latrines and antechamber where they are on display. The shape of the paper itself wavers, as free as the woven willow, suggesting the water that flows under the latrines' floor. Water, albeit underground, pervades the entire oeuvre of Laura Ellen Bacon: indispensable to the life of the willow, and subsequently essential to soak the sticks, water affects the flexibility and pliability of the vegetal silhouettes that move through the space. Resilient and transient – like the sculptures destined to revert to nature once the exhibition is over – water embodies the time in which the steady flow of actions and the relentless thrust of forms occur.

In this regard, the works of Laura Ellen Bacon bring more to the site than a wealth of vegetal imagery. Bacon's work also acts as a catalyst as it reinforces the architecture with its own exuberance and rustles like water, thus resurrecting the forgotten words of the nuns.

# QUESTIONS TO LAURA ELLEN BACON

**When did  
you first start  
working with  
willow?**

---

When I finished my degree in Applied Arts more than twenty years ago, I became interested in all sorts of materials, including ceramics, wood, and metal. Gradually, I found that I particularly enjoyed using my hands, rather than machines or heat equipment. In this way, I reconnected with my childhood sensations and feelings. My parents had a fruit farm; we lived in the country, and I played in the woods. I really enjoyed being alone and constructing tree houses. That was one of the most creative spells in my life. This memory is where it all began, and I decided to tap into that energy. And now, twenty years later, it still fuels my work.

**Do you use  
other  
materials?**

---

I have used thatch in the past, a characteristic element of English vernacular architecture. I would like to shape it into dune or wave-like forms. I have also worked in stone using a dry-stone walling method to create a feeling of movement, energy and progressive growth. Whether I am contemplating using stone, thatch or willow, the process is strangely similar in that it relies upon the coordination of hand and eye. I have also used felt. At a stage when I wanted to use more colour, I used ribbons that I intertwined and knotted to create cocoons. Sometimes I have also used rope and steel.

## **Does the use of willow reflect an ecological concern?**

---

Initially, I didn't choose willow for ecological reasons. I chose it for aesthetic reasons. But as time went by, I enjoyed using environmentally friendly raw materials. At times I would like to send a stronger message in that sense. But I hope that the mere presence of the works is a message in itself, and that people can perceive the mystery and energy of the natural world within the materials I have used.

## **Could you explain how nature inspires you?**

---

I draw my inspiration from the power of the natural world, particularly when it moves slowly and below ground. Like the vast network of mushrooms that we don't see but that actually controls every form of life. Or the stalactites and mineral formations in caves: the slow accumulation of deposits that create spectacular patterns over thousands of years... Some of my artworks suggest that nature moves in and around us indifferently.

## **How do your pieces of art intersect with the exhibition space?**

---

I can't make an artwork without being familiar with the place for which it is intended, because every space dictates its language. So, I try to capture its energy and tap into it. The sculpture should occupy a site. I love it when visitors are taken by surprise, when they mix up the work with nature, when they ask themselves how it fits in. At times my sculptures seem to 'take over' a building or environment. In reality, it's more a case of nature finding its own way, irrespective of us. I am also interested in the people who have lived through and inhabited a historical area. In this way, I try to recreate a presence in the space: the abstract memory of these people. The artwork and the space that it inhabits interact, and I describe my sculptures as "woven spaces".

## **Is your work akin to architecture?**

---

Not as such, but space and human scale interests me, perhaps because my father was an architect ... There is an architectural dimension insofar as I create my sculptures on location. I often create it from the inside, around me. The sculpture must also be self-supporting; I use very few external elements to support it. The pieces are on a human scale; they are enveloping. Visitors should feel the thrill of being inside a hand-woven space. Instinctively, the viewer physically experiences the artworks, even when just walking past them: they can sense their weight, their size, even in a peripheral vision. The sculptures are almost like entities.



*In The Thick Of It* ©Laura Ellen Bacon

---

**The hand is  
the main tool  
in your practice.  
It's a very  
physical job.**

---

Yes, it is physical, exhausting, repetitive work. The days spent setting up a piece are long and very intense. But I also spend some of this time observing the evolution of the piece. I look at it at length, understanding it as a whole, in harmony with its surrounding environment. When I weave from the inside, I make the physically demanding gesture of grabbing the willow canes one by one. But I must also be attentive, ensuring that the lines bend in the right direction. I become fully immersed in the atmosphere of a place and the experience of creating my work there will usually stay with me for the rest of my life. For me, it is as if the experience and the thoughts I have there find their way into the fibres of the willow and by the end I know exactly where they lie in the sculpture. The title, *Every Fibre of My Being*, says it all.

---

**Your work  
process sounds  
contemplative,  
almost mystical.**

---

When I was a child, my first school was a convent. I was fascinated by the lifestyle of the nuns, their use of time, and the associated constraints: hours spent awake, working, praying. One day, someone told me that the feeling they experienced inside one of my installations was the same as in a church. Although I am not religious myself, I was pleased that this person felt this sense of space and contemplation that I also feel in my manual work. Manual work sets me off into a reverie. Through this, I try to give visitors the opportunity to contemplate the natural world.

# OTHER EXHIBITIONS

## NEW INSTALLATIONS

Natural course  
Chatsworth, Derbyshire  
A new installation at  
Chatsworth using local stone

## PREVIOUS GROUP EXHIBITIONS

### 2021

Mastering the Art: Three  
Leading Women Sculptors  
4-30th June 2021  
Hignell Gallery, Mayfair,  
London

### 2020

Down to Earth, jaggedart,  
London  
The Natural Room,  
Sarah Myerscough Gallery,  
London  
Volume 50: Chronicling  
Fiber Art for Three  
Decades, Browngrotta Arts,  
Connecticut, USA  
Collect, Somerset House,  
London

### 2019

Crop, Sarah Myerscough  
Gallery, London  
"Basketry – Function and  
Ornament", Ruthin Craft  
Centre, Wales

### 2017

Woman's Hour Craft Prize, V&A

### 2016

Along the Lines of Happiness,  
installation for Milan Design  
Week, London, collaborating  
with Sebastian Cox

### 2015

Collect, Saatchi Gallery,  
with Jagged Art  
Watershed, Hall Place, Kent

### 2014

Out of Sight – Drawing in  
the Lives of Makers,  
Contemporary Applied Arts,  
London  
Porto Cervo 2014, FUMI,  
Sardinia  
Space Craft, Platform Gallery,  
Habitat, London  
Sculpture and Mompesson  
House, Mompesson House,  
Salisbury

### 2013

Installation in the Old Kitchen,  
as part of "Make the Most",  
Barrington Court, Somerset,  
opened by Kevin McCloud  
Collect, Saatchi Gallery, London.

### 2012

the nature of things,  
New Art Centre, Wiltshire

### 2011

Material Worlds, A Sotheby's  
exhibition, Sudeley Castle  
Basketry: Making Human  
Nature, Sainsbury Centre,  
Norwich

### 2010

Jerwood Contemporary  
Makers 2010, Jerwood Space,  
London

## PREVIOUS SOLO EXHIBITIONS AND INSTALLATIONS

### 2018

LAIID, Harley Gallery, Welbeck,  
Nottinghamshire

### 2017

Rooted in Instinct, National  
Centre for Craft and Design,  
Lincolnshire

### 2015

Murmuration, installation on  
façade of Holburne Museum,  
Bath

### 2014

Inundation, Ruthin Craft Centre,  
Wales

### 2012

In the Thick of it: A Woven  
Space, The Gallery, Winchester  
Discovery Centre  
Exposed – A Sculptural  
Installation, Blackwell, The Arts  
and Crafts House, Cumbria

### 2010

Into the Weave, Derby  
Museum and Art Gallery

### 2009

Woven Space, installation at  
Chatsworth