

4.2
Négociation 180 – Sol vivant, 2026
Sound recording of the activity of organisms living in the soil, their movements, and their interactions with organic matter.
Length: 30min
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

All around the obelisk of *Négociation 109 – Croître en silence*, a sound composition plays the discreet activity of organisms living in the soil. Movements, friction, shifts, and transformations of organic matter compose a score normally imperceptible to the human ear. Beneath our feet lies a teeming world upon which much of life on Earth depends. Soils are home to nearly two-thirds of the planet’s living organisms and constitute one of the most biodiverse environments. Bacteria, fungi, insects, worms, and countless other organisms contribute daily to the formation, aeration, and fertility of soils. By allowing us to hear a tiny fraction of this subterranean activity, this art work invites us to attend to what most often remains invisible: the multiple forms of life inhabiting the soil and participating, for millennia, in the cycles of transformation upon which the landscapes we inhabit today depend.

5.1
Négociation 182 – Soma, 2026
Vidéo
Length: 22 min 16
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

With *Négociation 182 – Soma*, the artist proposes a shift in how we perceive matter. Rising particles of peat filmed as they climb upward form a blazing cloud of substances within which the viewer becomes immersed. In Greek, “Soma” means “body” or “cellular body,” while in Hinduism, the term refers to the god of the Moon, who gives life to plants. Through shifts in scale and movement, these fragments of matter become, in turn, landscapes, constellations, or organisms in transformation. As they appear and disappear, they invite us to shift our perspective and perceive soils and living environments as a network of relationships, circulations, and metamorphoses of which we ourselves are a part. The work thus opens a contemplative space focussed on the depth, fragility, and vitality of life itself.

Le Voyage à Nantes and Caroline Le Méhauté would like to extend their thanks to the team at Passage Sainte-Croix for their hospitality. For the works in the series *Ancrer le réel* and *Chaque limite en dissimule une autre*, they would also like to thank the staff at the Tourbière de Logné peat bog, the Parc naturel régional de Brière, the Bois des Anses farm in Nantes, the Ferme des 9 Journaux farm in Bouguenais, and JAVA, the vegetable farm and event venue in Les Sorinières.

 In the garden of Passage Sainte-Croix: **Achronie 39** by Marion Verboom



To discover the full itinerary and cultural agenda of Le Voyage à Nantes:
www.levoyageanantes.fr

Located in a former priory built by 12th-century Benedictine monks, Passage Sainte-Croix is a space devoted to artistic expression, culture, and dialogue founded by the diocese of Nantes. It is managed by the Association Culturelle du Passage Sainte Croix, whose mission is to support and organize cultural and artistic activities in its different spaces: garden, indoor patio, exhibition, and conference rooms. In only a few years, Passage Sainte-Croix has become an essential fixture in Nantes’ cultural landscape. It has developed partnerships with the Pays de La Loire Region, the Musée des Beaux-arts de Nantes, Le Voyage à Nantes, Stereolux, La Folle Journée, Angers Nantes Opéra, La Maison de la Poésie, Les Arts Scènes, the Petits et Grands Festival, Musique Sacrée à la Cathédrale de Nantes, the Quinzaine Photographique Nantaise, and many more...



Find the full programme for Passage Sainte-Croix: www.passagesaintecroix.fr



PASSAGE SAINTE-CROIX

CAROLINE LE MÉHAUTÉ

Ce que la terre retient (“*What the Land Retains*”)

Poetic, philosophical, scientific, and political, Caroline Le Méhauté’s work explores the multiple interactions between humans and their environment. Many of her pieces are entitled *Négociations*, which evokes both humanity’s perpetual and universal bargaining with nature and the sculptor’s own, more personal dialogue with her materials.

Natural elements such as peat, coconut fibre, stone, cork, clay, beeswax, and mycelium form the substance of her sculptures and installations, as well as her drawings and videos. Whether through research and creative residencies, or in close proximity to where she lives, the artist investigates soils – their composition, their history, and their future. Soil occupies a central place in both her work and her thinking: it spans ages, connects temporalities without opposing them, and constitutes the living foundation shared by all forms of life. Le Méhauté thus invites us to consider earth or land, not as a simple support, but as a living environment in constant interaction with all the beings that depend on it.

In most of her works, “earth is raised to a human level; a paradigm shift occurs where the horizontal ground – usually trampled underfoot and rarely seen or felt up close – rises vertically to face us. Hierarchical distinctions are erased. We gradually become aware that we belong to this soil, to this matter from which we ourselves are made.”¹

For her exhibition *Ce que la terre retient* at Passage Sainte-Croix, Le Méhauté brings together a number of brand-new works connected to Nantes – created from various peatlands, market garden and forest soils – alongside earlier works resulting from research and past experiments with soils.

Caroline Le Méhauté was born in 1982. She lives and works in Brussels. She graduated from the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Marseille and holds a Master’s degree in Visual Arts from l’Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès. Recipient of the Prix Art Collector prize (2020), the Prix Carré sur Seine prize (2021), Honourable Mention for the Marie-Louise Jacques pour la sculpture contemporaine award (2022), and Honourable Mention for the Transformative Territories du Prix COAL prize (2024), she exhibits regularly in France, Belgium, and internationally.

¹ Tamara Beheydt, exhibition text for *Into the Distance*, Whitehouse Gallery, Leuven, Belgium, 2021

1.1
Graphein 3, 2019
Cyanotype on Arches paper
80 x 60 cm
Courtesy of the artist

1.2
Graphein 4, 2019
Cyanotype on Arches paper
80 x 60 cm
Courtesy of the artist

1.3
Graphein 6, 2019
Cyanotype on Arches paper
80 x 60 cm
Courtesy of the artist

In her *Graphein* series, Caroline Le Méhauté reflects on humanity's relationship with their environment, and their role in the sometimes disproportionate transformation of the landscape. *"These satellite views, presented as negatives, depict vast circular agricultural fields in the United States (Graphein 3 and 4) and Saudi Arabia (Graphein 6). Measuring up to three kilometres in diameter, these fields are emblematic of Agriculture 2.0 and reflect the hyper-exploitation and overproduction of contemporary societies. Some appear lighter than others because, in those places, the soil has become exhausted. Using the cyanotype process, where the photographic image is developed using sunlight, this series may be understood as the trace we leave upon the world, both individually and collectively,"* explains the artist. As is often the case in her work, Le Méhauté chooses titles with double meanings that describe both the actions involved in creating the work and the symbolic messages they convey. In Greek, the primary meaning of graphein is "to make incisions" but it can also be translated as "to engrave characters," to write, or to draw.

1.4
Ancrer le réel XXVI, 2026
Peat from Parc naturel régional de Brière, Loire-Atlantique, Pays de la Loire
80 x 60 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

1.5
Ancrer le réel XXVI, 2026
Peat from the Logné peat bog, wetland in northeast Nantes, Loire-Atlantique, Pays de la Loire
80 x 60 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

As part of her ongoing research and work to raise awareness concerning ecosystems, Le Méhauté met with the stewards of two exceptional protected sites in the region: the Logné peat bog, a 4,000-year-old regional nature reserve closed to the public, and the Parc naturel régional de Brière, France's largest peatland by surface area, dating back 7,000 years. Exceptionally, a minute quantity of peat was collected from these sites in keeping with the artistic intent of the project. Le Méhauté used this to complete *Ancrer le réel XXVI* (i.e., "*Anchoring the Real*") and *Ancrer le réel XXVII*. After drying the sample for several weeks, she meticulously sifted it, then used the peat as a pigment, applying it in successive layers to form two dense, material-rich panels. The result is: "*A density of existence enriching the laborious construction of a rare and precious microcosm. Faced with the immensity of what precedes us, along with humanity's grip on the future, taking a stance – and thereby redoubling the act of confrontation – appears to be a necessity.*"².

1.6
Négociation 179 – Ce qui résiste se sème, 2026
Stoneware vessel containing fescue, orchard grass, sainfoin, and phacelia seeds, with a written letter to the visitor
8 x 30 x 30 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

Tellus Project is a long-term work that brings together a set of experimental works combining thought and action through sculptural and performative acts developed in collaboration with citizens. Through collective initiatives, the artist promotes phytoremediation – i.e., the use of "hyperaccumulator" plants, such as mustard, rapeseed, or calendula – to absorb pollutants present in soils. Le Méhauté invites visitors to participate in this project by taking home grass seeds (like fescue and cocksfoot) and nectar-producing plants (like phacelia and sainfoin), contained in the stoneware vessels she created. These seeds may then be used to care for a parcel of land chosen by each visitor.

2.1
Chaque limite en dissimule une autre, 2026
Vegetable garden soil from the Bois des Anses farm
45 x 35 x 3 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

2.2
Chaque limite en dissimule une autre, 2026
Soil from the 9 Journaux farm
45 x 35 x 3 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

2.3
Chaque limite en dissimule une autre, 2026
Vegetable garden soil from the JAVA farm
45 x 35 x 3 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

2.4
Chaque limite en dissimule une autre, 2026
Sandy soil collected from an intensive vegetable-growing area
45 x 35 x 3 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

For many years, Caroline Le Méhauté has created "soil portraits," allowing viewers to directly confront the textures, densities, and colours of this vital matter upon which we tread every day. Through them emerge the singular identity of each patch of soil, but also the unique characteristics of the territories from which it originates. The Nantes region's market-garden and agricultural soils are celebrated here through the series *Chaque limite en dissimule une autre* ("*Every Boundary Conceals Another*"). The title refers to the many borders crisscrossing all territories. Alongside the visible boundaries of different plots, land uses, or farming practices, lie other, more subtle limits: geological boundaries, the history of soils, agricultural practices, or the circulation of water and organic matter. Within a single territory, sometimes over only a few hundred metres, soils can display remarkably different characteristics. Three organic farmers – from Bois des Anses farm in Nantes, JAVA, a vegetable farm and event venue in Les Sorinières, and 9 Journaux farm in Bouguenais (a dairy farm) – each agreed to entrust the artist with a small sample of their soil. The densities, textures, and colours of these "soil portraits" are presented alongside a fourth portrait made from a sandier soil collected from an area of intensive market gardening located within the same geographical zone.

Despite their proximity to one another, these soils reveal distinct compositions, histories, and management practices, highlighting the often unsuspected diversity of the types of earth that make up a single landscape.

2.5
Négociation 178 – Dans sa peau, 2026
Fabric and alluvial soil from the Loire basin
200 x 10 x 15 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

Négociation 178 – Dans sa peau consists of a large strip of earth-infused fabric suspended in a space. Created using alluvial earth from the Loire River basin, this sculpture evokes a soil of travel and displacement, since alluvial soils are formed by sedimentary deposits of organic matter successively transported by rivers. As it dried, the soil gradually conformed to the fabric's folds and suppleness. Suspended in space, the work reveals a cracked surface that could be reminiscent of skin, bark, or a stretch of land. Somewhere between mineral matter and organic presence, it blurs the boundaries between the body and the ground. And like a sensitive membrane, its surface seems to bear the traces of the movements, transformations, and time that have passed through it, recalling the deep connections that bind our bodies to the environments from which they originate.

2.6
Négociation 181 - Petrichor, 2026
Glass and soil from the Touffou Forest
Edition 1/3
9.5 cm X 16,5 x 11 cm
A Le Voyage à Nantes production

Petrichor is the distinctive smell released by the ground when rain falls after a dry spell. At once familiar and fleeting, this fragrance emerges from the encounter between water, soil, and the microorganisms inhabiting it. Often associated with summer rain, it is one of the subtlest and most precious manifestations of soil life. With *Négociation 181 – Petrichor*, Caroline Le Méhauté evokes this elusive scent through a glass sculpture made from soil collected in the Forêt de Touffou in Vertou, near Nantes. Created in collaboration with Nantes-based company Arcam Glass, this work combines glass and forest soil, fusing two materials that seem to be polar opposites. Its shape suggests a collecting vessel: a container intended to preserve what usually eludes conservation. This glass vial contains air carrying the forest's petrichor, collected after a thunderstorm a few days before the exhibition opened. As an attempt to capture the intangible, it invites visitors to summon the memory of that characteristic smell that rises from humus-rich soils after rain.

3.1
Négociation 95 - Décoloniser les imaginaires, 2018
Earth, motor oil, and mixed media
78 x 75 x 175 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Work created during a residency at 2ANGLES in Flers, Normandy

The persistence and impact of human activity on the environment runs through Caroline Le Méhauté's work. This concern is addressed in particularly direct terms in *Négociation 95 – Décoloniser les imaginaires* (2018), which the artist created from materials found at an illegal dumping site in Normandy. "*Among the various discarded materials, thick engine oil had pooled at the foot of a mound of earth that had itself been dumped like rubble. The resulting form of the work evokes a bathtub, a feeding trough, a watering basin, and a sarcophagus all at once. The earth containing the oil is cracking. On the verge of giving way, it is thirsty. This sculpture refers to contemporary issues surrounding land and water: the impoverishment of the former and the scarcity of the latter. Yet both are essential, vital, and primordial. The title, 'Decolonizing Imaginaries', draws inspiration from the work of economist Serge Latouche, who highlights the absurdity and danger of an economic system that creates wealth by producing poverty. The way we view our own reflection in this dark, dense, and oily substance reflects the complexity and paradoxes of our contemporary society.*"

4.1
Négociation 109 - Croître en silence, 2021
Peat from Normandy and wood
450 x 60 x 60 cm
Courtesy of the artist
This work was produced with the support of La Fondation L'Accolade - Institut de France and the Centre Wallonie Bruxelles in Paris

Peat occupies a prominent place in this exhibition. Caroline Le Méhauté first encountered it in Ireland, on Ben Bulbin mountain, during a research residency in 2013. She claims to have felt the density of the material in her body, as though holding a fragment of history in her hand, and has since created numerous sculptures from it. In doing so, she highlights the importance of peatlands, ecosystems capable of storing atmospheric carbon.

Created in 2021, as part of the residency programme «Rien n'est vrai tout est vivant» ("*Nothing Is True, Everything Is Alive*") organised by La Fondation L'Accolade, *Négociation 109 – Croître en silence* is on display in the inner courtyard of Passage Sainte-Croix. Like a monument inviting us to look upward while simultaneously grounding us in the earth, this over four-metre-tall obelisk – a symbol of permanence and stability, and a means of dialogue with the celestial world – is made from organic, fossilized peat from the Baupré region in Normandy, formed some 15,000 years ago. Formed through the extremely slow accumulation of plant debris in waterlogged environments, peat embodies a depth of time rarely perceptible on a human scale. In Le Méhauté's work, it becomes a witness to the deep temporalities that shape landscapes. Today, this peatland stands at a turning point. After nearly eighty years of industrial exploitation, peat extraction is scheduled to cease permanently in late 2026, paving the way for the gradual restoration of these ecosystems at the heart of the regional natural marsh parks of Le Cotentin and Le Bessin.

