



## **Bon Repos Artist in Residence - Trevor Leat**

Trevor: Bonjour. Yes, I was invited by, by the Abbey to come over to make a sculpture connected through my website mostly, been making large sculptures in Europe and, uh, well, in Britain as well and recently in Germany and also France earlier on for a few years in my career. They invited me over to make this sculpture, talked about diverse designs and gave me an option of whereabouts to, to create the piece in the ruins of, over by, I saw the cloister and that was an obvious, obvious palette for me to build onto framed by the lovely old buildings all around it. I've chosen to make a wishing tree, it's, uh, I've sort of researched a wee bit and I picked up a brochure while I was here on medieval design and there are some lovely old trees in that. But in Scotland, particularly where I, where I live, there is a tradition, called, and the tree is called the Cloutie Tree, which is a sort of Scots word, not Gallic, but Scots word for cloth, and the idea is that these trees will be in rural settings in villages and people would go and tie a cloth, a shred of a fragment of a garment onto the tree, and they would make a wish or a prayer for someone, a relative who's ill or a loved one they would like to meet, all sorts of things. It would be a wish, and a hope, and this, this is traditional also I've travelled in Nepal and India recently and I saw many Cloutie Trees. In Scotland near where I live there is a Tibetan temple, the biggest Tibetan temple in, er, British temple in Europe I believe and they have a Cloutie Tree there so it's, it offers prayers, wishes, all sorts and er, so I thought I would build a wishing tree in, in the cloisters.

Elaine: Can you tell us, what material you use? Willow and bark, is it?

Trevor: The tree is made, the tree is made predominantly out of willow which the abbey have resourced so its, it's grown, I think it's about 200 kilometers - you probably know the name of the area.

Elaine: I think it's the, I think I was told it was the Indre-et-Loire, department, because there is some in Brittany but not enough for your purpose.

Trevor: Yeah, we've used quite a lot and there is also another project at the, the Roche Jagu I'm doing. So the willow is very good, lovely colours, and we first of all built a steel armature so at the abbey they have a great team of volunteer helpers that come in, and together we have built this lovely armature, welded steel, and under which we are going to weave layers, or have begun weaving layers of willow to create form and movement. The steel isn't really visible, and its transformed from being a skeleton, which is what the steel is, the armature, next time we put on the flesh, the tree has grown branches and roots and spread out into the ground. And the helpers have been very, very obliging and very helpful, friendly and learning the techniques to weave the willow in. We are not using any sort of traditional basket willow weaves, I know France has got an amazing basketry tech, er tradition, so we have gone for a more random, more natural organic kind of weave so it tends to flow rather than be jaggedly woven in, into a regular pattern.

Elaine: Your, your particular designs that you do, they reflect movement, do they?

Trevor: I try to capture movement, yeah, it's mostly figurative animals or mythical creatures.

Elaine: Extraordinary. And then you set fire ....

Trevor: They will be stuffed with, as I make them, they will be stuffed with straw.

Elaine: Right.

Trevor: And they will be then, it's like, music festivals or big public performance events and it will be the culmination will be fireworks, and we will burn the sculpture which is, a lot of people ask me how do I feel about the sculpture..

Elaine: You've done all that work and then..

Trevor: It could take three, three weeks to make, or more.

Elaine: It's like building a house and then demolishing it.

Trevor: In 20 minutes and it's gone.

Elaine: Extraordinary.

Trevor: But the image that it gives to people, it's quite spectacular but quite moving for people because we try to make a very beautiful, beautiful figures and it's just the drama of it all. The fireworks, and the smoke and it's often the midnight, middle of the night or ..

Elaine: So do you work on a commission basis?

Trevor: Mostly to commission, yeah, in fact nearly all to commission these days. They're not all big figures, I make sort of stags and animals and all sorts of smaller ones and figures, smaller figures but every year there's two or three or four large, large scale pieces of work that used to be regular. In Scotland I used to make three every year, but they've changed.

Elaine: Do you sell them sometimes, or are you loathe to part after putting so much..

Trevor: Not when I sell them as a commission people ..

Elaine: Of course.

Trevor: So they've got a large garden or an estate and they, and I make it and it's theirs and then they do what they want with it, but it normally just stays. But willow for doing a figurative work it's like, I always describe it as like drawing. Each piece of willow is like a pencil stroke so you are actually drawing with willow. It takes a bit longer obviously but it's like you're shading in and trying to get muscle definition. If you imagine us, our bodies if you took the flesh away, we're full of these lines and wires and arteries and tubes and veins and vessels and that's what I try to create so it lends itself, 'cause it's so fluid and...

Elaine: Lends itself to a movement, so even if it's not moving, it appears to be.



Trevor: Yeah, and you can get some nice, yes you can get very quite detailed if you've got time and the patience, which is something that volunteers have to learn, that it doesn't happen straight away and you're building up layers so that first of all, it doesn't look very much and then gradually bringing in muscle definition.

Elaine: So your, but your sculpture will stay here.

Trevor: Yes, that's right.

Elaine: And you just move on.

Trevor: Yeah, the sculpture's here for, well it's here, I think the opening's, but it will be here for everyone to see and there will be events planned around it, I think, and I can see a future in the winter Christmastime and they will maybe put lights on it, decorate it, I hope so.

Elaine: A fairy, a little Breton fairy on the top.

Trevor: Yeah, but I would like to, to, to mention that the idea is that people will, of course there is two holes in the tree, and people are invited to write something on, and post it into the tree. A wish, or whatever, a prayer for world peace maybe, or... the branches are a bit high, I'm not sure about climbing on it, but you're invited to tie a piece of the cloth and I think there will be bits and pieces here for people to do that.

Elaine: Excellent.

Trevor: And, it will be, as I say, it will be here certainly for winter, I imagine. There was some talk about it being here next year as well.

Elaine: And what a beautiful situation, I mean, just amazing.

Trevor: Yes.

Elaine: It just fits, doesn't it.

Trevor: It does.

Elaine: It's like that little courtyard there was waiting for you.

Trevor: Yeah. It's a perfect, perfect sort of palette. And maybe that's a sort of another dimension to the abbey.

Elaine: Thank you very much.

community radio

# AIKB

ASSOCIATION INTÉGRATION KREIZ BREIZH

HERE TO HELP · AIDE ET CONSEIL

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

## Spotlight on Brittany

