



FONDATION OPALE

- ≡ Cultural foundation
- ≡ Exhibition

Press release

Fondation Opale presents BREATH OF LIFE

Fondation Opale in Lens/Crans-Montana is taking up the challenge of an exhibition of sound. And not just any sound: the original sound of the earth. From mid-June, the foundation will be in tune with the didgeridoo for an exhibition on a completely unprecedented scale with around one hundred works, including a remarkable ensemble of 70 instruments. Faithful to its mission, Fondation Opale will give a central place to contemporary artistic expression, particularly in digital form, still in perfect harmony with the deep ancestral lines of the Aboriginal tradition.

Much like the kangaroo and the boomerang, the didgeridoo has become a true symbol of Australia. But for most of us, our knowledge of the instrument rings rather hollow. Hence the desire to explore this unique and complex instrument, with all the multiplicity of its sound, visual manifestations, and diversity of artistic, cultural and spiritual implications. Generally associated with the entire island continent given its global success, the didgeridoo originates from north-east Australia in Arnhem Land, home of the Yolŋu people. For at least 1,500 years, men have selected eucalyptus trunks dug by termites for the beauty of their sound before carving and decorating them. This instrument, called the *yidaki* by the people who first created it—the term didgeridoo being an onomatopoeia that appeared only later—is invested with the power of ancestral beings at the origin of the creation of the universe in Aboriginal culture, in the *Dreaming*. With percussion sticks, it accompanies ceremonial songs and dances. For the initiated, its sound vibration has a healing power that transcends space and time. More than an instrument, the *yidaki* occupies a central place in daily Yolŋu life. It is given different names according to the region, the clans that give it its exclusive ornamental motifs, and its uses.

Immersive installations

Welcomed by the virtual presence of Djalu Gurruwiwi, spiritual leader and eminent custodian of the *yidaki*, visitors will discover the instrument's sonic, vibratory and visual capacities. They will discover how it is made, its various types, and its specific uses. The exhibition does much more than play a didactic role, however. True to its mission to promote contemporary Aboriginal art, Fondation Opale presents two immersive multimedia installations designed especially for the exhibition.

Using sculptures by artists Malaluba Gumana and Bulthirri Wunumurra, the Mulka Project, a collective of Yolŋu artists and multimedia specialists whose vocation is to perpetuate and disseminate culture, will recreate traditional ceremonies. The first installation focuses on the Rainbow Serpent, the original creator ancestor, in the waters of Garrimala.

The second creation, associated with a sacred yidaki called dhadalal, brings to life sculptures representing the Mokuy spirits who communicate with the deceased in the sacred territory of Balambala. Around the sculptures, these spirits come to life and dance through a monumental video mapping installation.

Repurposing: homage to the Earth

The exhibition also highlights the productions of Gunybi Ganambarr, a respected yidaki player and former construction worker who holds a special place among contemporary Aboriginal artists. While he, too, is deeply attached to tradition, in full respect of the Law and the songs of his clan, he renews tradition in a very personal way by putting the materials he recovers on the mining sites of his region at the service of ancestral motifs.

From June 13th, 2021 to April 17th, 2022, the echo of an unusual horn will sound in the Alps, beyond the mountains and seas. This sound bridge will once again allow Fondation Opale to demonstrate the value of cultural exchange, by highlighting the deeply creative wisdom, rooted in the present, that Aboriginal artists excel in perpetuating and that they generously share with the world. The voice of the yidaki carries within it the soul of the Earth. Its breath has the breadth of totality. To allow its vibration in is to connect with everything that lives. It is to be alive.

Exhibition BREATH OF LIFE, from June 13th, 2021 to April 17th, 2022. Art gallery open from Wednesday to Sunday, 10 am to 6 pm. L'Opale restaurant: open Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday, 9:30 am to 7 pm; Friday and Saturday 9:30 am to 11 pm.

This exhibition is curated by the curator of Fondation Opale, Georges Petitjean, and the professor John Carty, head of humanities at the South Australian Museum (Adelaide, Australia) and director of the national centre for Aboriginal languages and music at the University of Adelaide.

The exhibition BREATH OF LIFE presents works from the Collection Bérengère Primat as well as works on loan from the Christian Som, Michiel Teijgeler, Willi Grimm and Arnaud Serval Collections and the quai Branly Museum in Paris.

Due to the uncertain health situation, please check Fondation Opale's website for specific events: www.fondationopale.ch

Fondation Opale

Established in December 2018, Fondation Opale is the only contemporary art centre dedicated to promoting Aboriginal art in Europe. It fosters dialogue between cultures and peoples through art. The foundation is based on the Collection Bérengère Primat which counts more than 1,100 works by nearly 250 artists, constituting one of the most important collections of contemporary Aboriginal artists in private ownership.

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