

# Hans Christian Andersen Award 2024

## Catherine Louis

Illustrator

Candidate for the Swiss section of IBBY



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# 1. Biographical information

## A life spent creating

Catherine Louis was born in 1963 in La Neuveville, a small town in the Bernese Jura (Switzerland). She grew up in a large house nestled in the vineyards, in a family with a penchant for manual labor and artistic creation. Her father, Jean-Pierre Louis, was a winegrower and did pottery in his off hours. Her mother, Monique Stalder, was both a dancer and gem cutter.

Credit goes to a neighbor for young Catherine – she was six or seven years old at the time – developing a passion for drawing. Art student Josiane Guillard had a workshop in the cellar just beside the Louis family cellar. Catherine often took refuge there; she watched Josiane carefully from a chair at her own small table, sometimes imitating Josiane’s work, or entertaining herself with drawing, painting, cutting, gluing, making crafts... in short, these were her first forays into artistic experimentation.

In 1978, after finishing her compulsory schooling, Catherine Louis began studying at the École d’arts visuels in Bienne (Switzerland), where she tried her hand at a variety of techniques. A long-term devotee of literature for young people, she decided to illustrate a children’s picture book for her final degree project.

In 1984, following advice from illustrator Jorg Müller, in whose workshop she had been an intern, Catherine Louis traveled to Strasbourg to take classes at the École des arts décoratifs as an independent student. Her studies there were less academic than in Bienne, more intuitive. With the help of Claude Lapointe, Catherine spent two years honing her skills in character drawing.

1988 marked the beginning of a publishing adventure: Catherine Louis saw her first “real” picture book for children, *Die Möwe Fridolin (Fridolin the Seagull)*, published in German. Everything happened very quickly in the months that followed. Professionally-wise, many of Catherine Louis’s books were published by renowned French editors such as Casterman, Milan, and Le Seuil. On a personal level, she got married and gave birth to her first daughter, Mona.

Catherine Louis’s journey is punctuated by both artistic and more personal encounters. From one thing to another – or rather, from seminar to literary salon – she became connected with a small circle of authors whose work she particularly enjoyed and with whom she would often collaborate to make books: first Bernard Friot, then Azoug Begag, Gardi Hutter, and, a little later, Marie Sellier.

The early years of the new century would see a change in Catherine Louis’s aesthetic approach. This is when she began exploring Chinese calligraphy and started collaborating with Picquier. *Liu et l’oiseau (Liu and the Bird)*, in 2003, was one of the first children’s titles published by this imprint, an Asian literature specialist. It was followed by *Mon imagier chinois (My Little Book of Chinese Words)* in 2004. Her “chinoiserie”, as she calls them, garnered her serious critical recognition: *My Little Book of Chinese Words* was selected for the White Ravens Catalogue (2005), won the prestigious Prix Sorcières (2006) and was exhibited at the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava (2005).

Catherine Louis's work has been exhibited numerous times, both in Switzerland and internationally. In 2003, for her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, the illustrator designed an exhibit for the museum in La Neuveville, which then moved on to a circuit of French-speaking Swiss pedagogical schools, continuing to make the rounds for eight years. In 2017-2018, the library of La Chaux-de-Fonds, the city where Louis lives and works, organized an important retrospective of her work to celebrate its thirty year anniversary.

From her earliest steps in the world of children's literature, Catherine Louis has come a long way! She has now completed numerous books for children and teenagers – 130 in all, including collective works – and many have been translated into multiple languages. At the same time, she has worked for the press, created posters for cultural events, illustrated theatre programs, as well as held workshops and courses for children and adults.

A multifaceted artist, indeed, but whose unique style sets her apart from the rest.



Portrait of Catherine Louis by © Mario Del Curto

## Four visions of Catherine Louis

"I've realized that many projects are born out of encounters with people. I love discovering the world, I'm open to new projects and this is a real opportunity."<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Louis

### **Claude Lapointe**

Catherine Louis met Claude Lapointe in 1984 at the École des arts décoratifs in Strasbourg. The professor encouraged his young student to explore her "faults" (overly long feet and noses in her character drawings, for example) as a way to find her own style. A cathartic and liberating approach for Catherine Louis.

"Every time a book comes out, I think of him [Claude Lapointe] and of the road he helped me set off on, because without it, I would not be an illustrator today."<sup>2</sup>

Catherine Louis

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<sup>1</sup> Collectif, *Raconte-moi une image: Catherine Louis*, Le Locle: G d'Encre, 2017, p. 110

<sup>2</sup> Collectif, *Raconte-moi une image: Catherine Louis*, Le Locle: G d'Encre, 2017, p. 100



### **Bernard Friot**

Author Bernard Friot entered Catherine Louis's life in 1987. Beyond their artistic collaboration, they have become very good friends. This dynamic duo conceived the large exhibit dedicated to Catherine Louis in her hometown of La Neuveville in 2003.

"So there we have it: Catherine Louis, an artist of the world, in the movement of the world. Eyes open and watching, in her unique way. More than anything, an open heart. It is no surprise her images resonate with tension and affection, images that are joyful, strong, funny or tender, biting, too. Generous, truthful images. Like her, like Catherine Louis."<sup>3</sup>

Bernard Friot

### **Azouz Begag**

Catherine Louis and Azouz Begag met for the first time in 1989 at a conference in Switzerland. Through Begag's books, Catherine Louis was introduced to and developed an understanding of Algerian culture, which is also her husband's background. Azouz Begag and Catherine Louis have collaborated on seven works, including *La force du berger (The Strength of the Shepherd)*, which was awarded the prestigious Premio Europeo di Letteratura Giovanile Pier Paolo Vergerio.

"The books I've created these last years with Catherine Louis are a lovely example of what I call "working together." This is more than "working", this is making, constructing, inventing, building, coloring, filling in... all while respecting each other's differences, while wondering about how to fit each other's sensitivities together. At its heart, making a children's book with someone is a lovely lesson in humanity."<sup>4</sup>

Azouz Begag

### **Marie Sellier**

Marie Sellier and Catherine Louis: two names often paired together on the cover of a picture book! They have been friends and colleagues for 15 years, and have published books on Chinese culture together, including *Le rat m'a dit (What the Rat Told Me)* in 2008, and *Le petit chaperon chinois (Little Chinese Riding Hood)* in 2010, but also more philosophical works – *Mô et le maître du temps (Mô and the Master of Time)* in 2013, and *Les mots sont des oiseaux (Words are Birds)* in 2020 – as well as picture books on disabilities and differences – *Les yeux de Bianca (Bianca's Eyes)* in 2018, and *L'île de Victor (Victor's Island)* in 2020.

"Creating a book with Catherine is a party. An intense moment of joyful sharing and productive research."<sup>5</sup>

Marie Sellier

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<sup>3</sup> Collectif, *Catherine Louis: illustratrice*, Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2003, p. 75

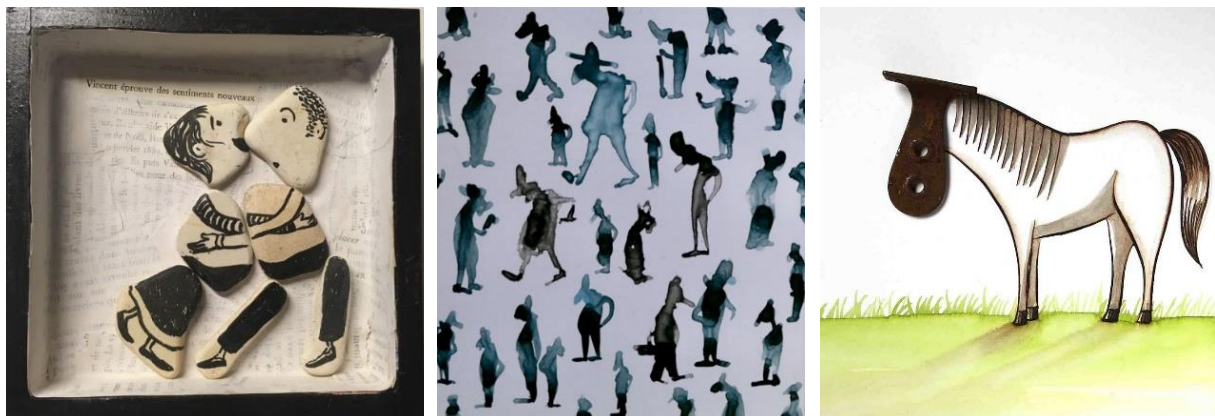
<sup>4</sup> Collectif, *Catherine Louis: illustratrice*, Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2003, p. 59

<sup>5</sup> "Biographie par Marie Sellier", online: <http://catherinelouis.ch/Biographie/par-Marie-Sellier>, last accessed 18.01.2021

## 2. Catherine Louis and children's literature: a portrait in questions

### If Catherine Louis were an insect... ...she would be a bee

At least this is what her friend and colleague Marie Sellier claims: "Catherine is a bee who gathers sustenance from everything that surrounds her"<sup>6</sup>. The illustrator, whose creative antenna are permanently alert, is also a keen observer. For her, everything is a source of inspiration and a pretext to create an image: a spot of ink, a handful of stones gathered in the forest, a piece of iron, a shirt button, a word, an ideogram, an emotion, a fable, an anecdote, an encounter...



"A spot of ink, a handful of stones gathered in the forest, a piece of iron": inspiration is everywhere!

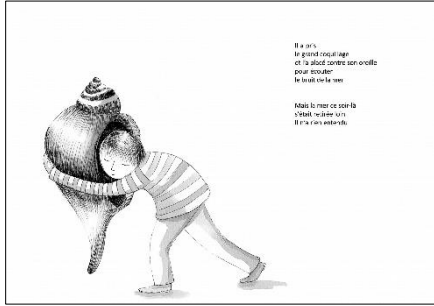
This extraordinary creativity is obvious in Catherine Louis's books for children, which set themselves apart by their aesthetic quality and their diversity. A diversity of genre, first of all. Far from confining herself to a single type of work, Catherine Louis has never stopped exploring new forms throughout her thirty year career: illustrated storybooks, collections of poems, picture books, *leporellos*, books as objects, song collections, early reader books, and even artist's books. Catherine Louis's bibliography embodies an ideal library, a mirror of the richness and marvelously eclectic nature of literature for children and adolescents.

Next, a diversity of illustrative techniques (line drawings, collage, paper cutouts, linocuts, digital work...). Like a bee, Catherine Louis is a seriously hard worker and she "forages in all kinds of fields"<sup>7</sup>. It is clear that she has a taste for experimentation, for artistic adventure, and that she is constantly looking to reinvent herself. "Only once in my life did I make three picture books using the same technique and I could not wait to finish the third one. [...] I do not like repeating myself"<sup>8</sup>, the artist confesses. And, indeed, when her 130 works are laid side by side, there is no mistaking that Catherine Louis is a consummate artist whose style – far from being redundant – has developed and refined itself over time.

<sup>6</sup> "Biographie par Marie Sellier", online: <http://catherinelouis.ch/Biographie/par-Marie-Sellier>, last accessed 18.01.2021

<sup>7</sup> "Biographie par Marie Sellier", online: <http://catherinelouis.ch/Biographie/par-Marie-Sellier>, last accessed 18.01.2021

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Philippe Cadert. "L'invitée: Catherine Louis, à lire avec les doigts" [radio program], in *Vertigo*, RTS, 42 min., online: <https://www.rts.ch/play/radio/vertigo/audio/linvitee-catherine-louis-a-lire-avec-les-doigts?id=10043412&station=a9e7621504c6959e35c3ecbe7f6bed0446cdf8da>, last accessed 18.01.2021



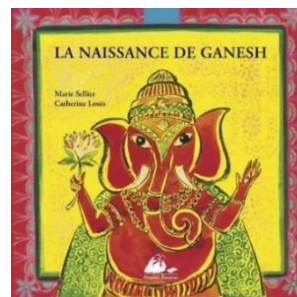
A collection of poems in line drawings (*Les moutons de la mer / Sheeps of the Sea*), a picture book in linocuts (*Mon imagier chinois / My Little Book of Chinese Words*) and a leporello in paper cutouts (*Le petit chaperon chinois / Little Chinese Riding Hood*): diversity in Catherine Louis's creation

## If Catherine Louis were an exclamation... ...she would be “Surprise!”

Opening a book by Catherine Louis is like coming home on the evening of your birthday and switching on the light to discover your nearest and dearest united in a bold cry of “Surprise!”. Catherine Louis’s illustrations produce the same effect. What the Swiss artist considers interesting about illustrating is, precisely, “not to illustrate, but to open other doors, other perspectives. The text is there, it is not necessary to repeat things. Creating surprises is a game I find so fascinating<sup>9</sup>.” The artist’s illustrations are never identical restatements: they work in dialogue with the text, complete it, enrich it, provide a contrast, and sometimes work in opposition. And so Catherine Louis’s images draw the reader in, ask questions, have their own fun, make the viewer think and dream, but more than anything, they broaden the horizons of young readers and take them on fabulous journeys.

## If Catherine Louis were a household object... ...she would be a suitcase

What else is needed for a journey, apart from a suitcase? This is perfect, since Catherine Louis has an entire collection of them. Every time she publishes a book, she also creates a matching suitcase (containing the sketches, first models, games, decorations, recordings...). This suitcase is meant for her school visits. Transmission is a fundamental aspect of Catherine Louis’s work, as she absolutely loves meeting with children and sharing her passion for drawing and books with them.



The Elsewhere in Catherine Louis's books: Chinese dragon (*La naissance du dragon / Legend of the Chinese Dragon*) and Ganesh (*La naissance de Ganesh / Ganesh's Birth*)

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Ferla. “Catherine Louis. Créer des surprises”, Plan-Fixes, 2020, 49 min., online: <https://www.plansfixes.ch/films/catherine-louis/>, last accessed 27.01.2023. This film by Patrick Ferla wonderfully portrays Catherine Louis and her creations.

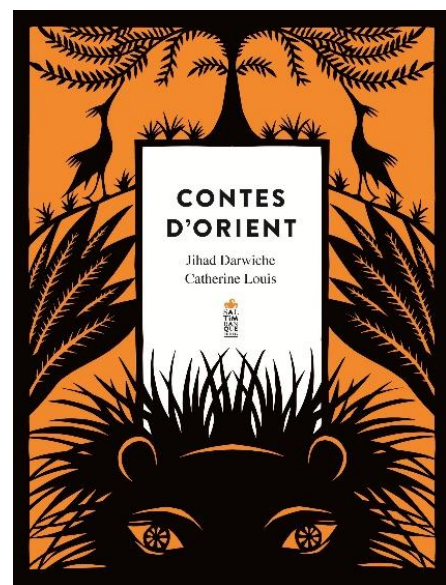
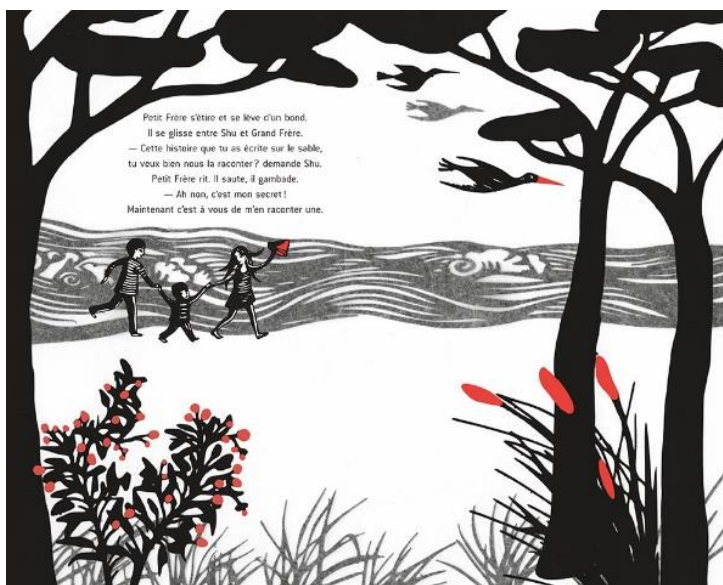
But the suitcase is also a metaphor for an opening to an Elsewhere that characterizes Catherine Louis's body of work. Many of her books, like flying carpets, transport young readers far from home – into space and into time – to discover China (its legends and traditions, its writing and even that highly symbolic creature, the dragon), ancient India (with the brightly colored legend *La naissance de Ganesh / Ganesh's Birth*), or the Magreb (especially Algeria).

## If Catherine Louis were a concept... ...she would be Otherness

More than Elsewhere, Catherine Louis invites children to explore the idea of the Other, in all its complexity. Her recent picture books published with Loisirs et Pédagogie, *Les Yeux de Bianca (Bianca's Eyes)*, on visual impairment, *L'île de Victor (Victor's Island)*, on autism and *Roule, Sasha! (Roll, Sasha!)*, on physical disability, reveal a more social dimension of her work. Without any militancy, but with great care, she motivates children toward respect, empathy, tolerance. To succeed in transmitting fundamental values to the adults of tomorrow through fiction, texts, and images: this is also the power of literature for young people, for which Catherine Louis is a first rank ambassador.

## If Catherine Louis were a contrast... ...she would be black and white

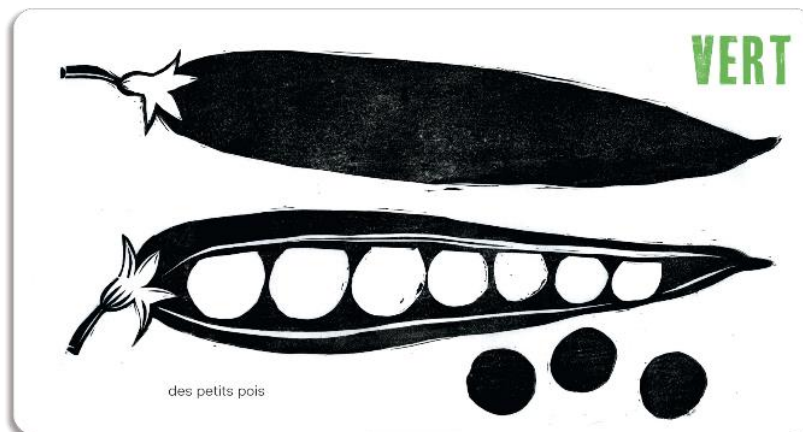
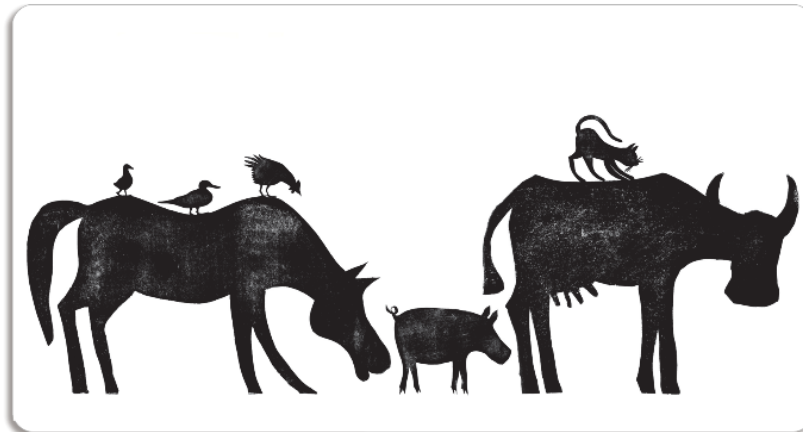
Far from being out of ideas in terms of technique and discoveries, Catherine Louis particularly enjoys exploring the contrast between black and white in her later works. To emphasize this contrast she uses different techniques, such as paper cutting (*Contes d'Orient / Tales of the Orient*), engraving, or even linocut (*Oh! Colette, Eh! Colette, Hue! Colette*), proving once again the diversity and richness of her creations. The colour nevertheless makes brief intrusions, while still remaining sober and solid (touch of red in *Les mots sont des oiseaux / Words are Birds*). These scattered touches of colour are still part of the contrast, emphasizing it all the more.



The scattered touches of colour in Catherine Louis' black and white contrast in *Les mots sont des oiseaux (Words are Birds)* and *Contes d'Orient (Tales of the Orient)*



The distinction between the black of the paper or ink (depending on the technique) and the white of the page also allows Catherine Louis to create works intended for very young children. In her recent series of cardboard albums *Oh! Colette*, *Eh! Colette*, and *Hue! Colette*, the contrast between black and white (obtained thanks to the technique of linocut), provides an aesthetic of sobriety and shows an economy of means. The black shadows of the animals and objects on the white paper are particularly suitable for the visual understanding of small children.



The contrast between black and white in *Hue! Colette* (up) and *Oh! Colette* (down)



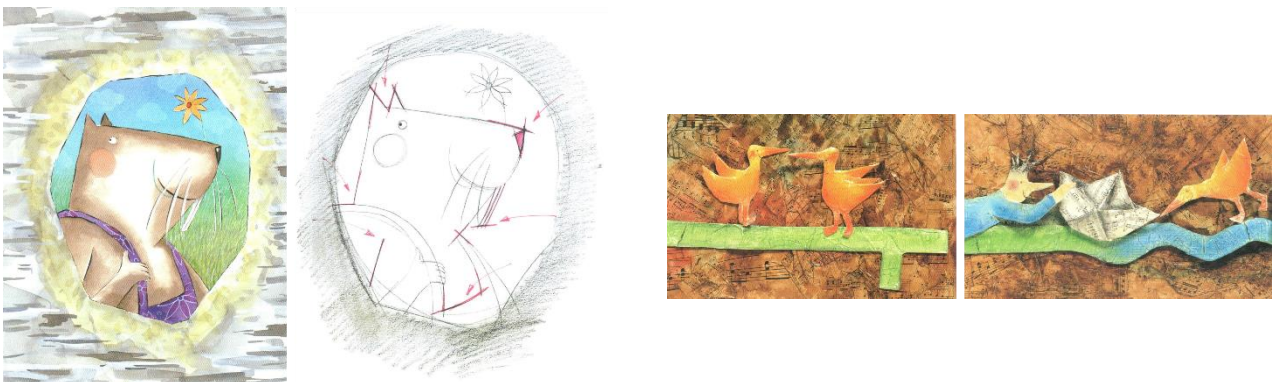
### 3. Appreciative essays and a filmed interview of Catherine Louis

#### Catherine Louis, the round and the sharp By Bernard Friot

What interests me, when I consider an artist, is to discover the underlying motifs that generate his or her work, and which, ultimately, enable that artist to rise above the rest with a unique voice. By “motifs” I mean both meanings of the word: the reasons which push an artist to select a particular style and then refine and hone it until it becomes a tool that hits the right note when struck up against the artist’s tuning fork; and “motifs” also in the sense of recurrent themes, developed over and over across the most diverse tonalities and textures.

Catherine Louis’s style and line are immediately recognizable. What first stands out is a dynamism, a movement, almost an instability that grabs and surprises. Catherine’s illustrations are not comfortable. It is almost impossible to keep a steady gaze on them, to rest one’s eyes on them. They always appear to be right at the edge of imbalance, cut through by an inner fracture that emanates a joyful and nervous energy.

Two shapes are constantly at war: the round and the sharp, the line and the curve, the angle and the circle. Not only in the drawing itself, but also in the lines that organize each composition. Look at Fernand the beaver: portly, with elegant curves, does he not look like a charming good-for-nothing, happy and carefree? Yes, except that his nose, with its 90 degree angle, and his pointy ears both belie his apparent nonchalance. Conversely, in *Amours (Loves)*, the straight line of the bench seems just about ready to ripple, to falter beneath the burgeoning passion of the birds, to dance along with these waltzing paramours.



The beaver from *Fernand fainéant (Lazy Fernand)* and pictures of *Amours (Loves)*

Round and sharp seem to be the basic elements of Catherine Louis’s artistic vocabulary. Her syntactic logic is not about how they fuse together but how they are opposed. It is this opposition that creates the movement inherent in all her work and which is captured each time at a moment of instability. It feels like everything – character and background – might upend itself, be thrown from one side to the other.

For this very reason, one image always gestures toward at least two others: the one that precedes it in the mind of the illustrator and the reader, and the one that follows. Almost like a film, the single

image is actually nested into a suite, into a narrative. In other words, for Catherine Louis, illustration is not about contemplation, but about action.

Yes, truly, the image tells a story. It has its own writing. Better yet, it replaces the writing after having broken and reformed the original lines: the round and the sharp, the line and the stroke, primary elements of the letters of the alphabet. In a way, Catherine is not illustrating texts, she is re-writing those texts in images. Her work develops out of its complicated and painful relationship to language. A very talkative individual, she bends the spoken word to the rhythm of her breathing and her emotions; she knows how to weave it into dialogue with the words of the people she speaks with. But she refuses the discipline of writing. She throws words onto paper, attentive only to transcribing their flow instead of looking to freeze them with syntax.

This tension between round and sharp, a dynamic principle that twists the images time and again to make them speak, is perhaps a refusal (a fear?) of establishing a fixed meaning and thus exposing its fault lines, an anxiety that only movement can dispel. But also reveal. In Catherine's illustrations, I love the lack of discipline, the instability, and also the slight bitterness, hints of an inner oscillation between discontent and zest for life.

I also like the temptation of silence that books like *Ma Maman est devenue une étoile* (*My Mom Became a Star*) or *Un train pour chez nous* (*A Train to Home*) translate, when Catherine refuses the line and illustrates uniquely through shapes, colors, collages. No more round, no more sharp, no words, no movement: a time for silence and for pause. For only an instant.

Catherine has a multitude of things to say. And to keep to herself.



Bernard Friot, "Catherine Louis, le rond et le pointu", in Collectif, *Catherine Louis: illustratrice*, Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2003, pp. 60-61

# Catherine Louis, “illuminartist”

## By Sophie Van der Linden

Despite her discreet profile in francophone children’s literature, Catherine Louis boasts some “significant figures” – almost thirty years of renowned creation with over 100 published titles – that translate into one of the most consequential bodies of work in an only fairly recently expanded publishing sector.

Why this paradox? No doubt because the limelight continues to shine on authors despite the fact that, in this field, the image is truly king. And although Catherine Louis has created both the texts and images for some of her works, her career favors – and claims – her illustrator work as primary. Yet the common perception of this sector is still generally limited to the definitions established two hundred years ago when it borrowed the word *illustrare* from Latin, meaning “light up, illuminate; bring to light, make apparent; give brilliance, shine”, therefore positioning illustration as subordinate to the text.

Which is why it is so marvelous to see in this new work, like a happy twist of fate, a number of major authors creating their texts from her universe, from her images, their work thus echoing her own, just as editors have so often requested she take inspiration from the words of others. It must also be said that no one rivals Catherine Louis in terms of how she has created a circle of authors she can call on and who are faithful to her, thinking first of Marie Sellier and Bernard Friot.

### **A turning point: China**

Her thirty year body of work is marked by a before and an after, and the hinge sits just about the time that one century closed and a new century opened.

The before period includes collections of small picture books, like *Ciboulette et Léon (Ciboulette and Léon)*, and fruitful collaborations with the top-quality Geneva publisher La Joie de Lire – the latter arriving on the children’s literature scene at the same time as Catherine Louis. There are also numerous illustration jobs with a number of beloved authors like Azouz Begag and done in a variety of styles that garnered praise, like the magnificent reworked photographs in *Un train pour chez nous (A Train to Home)*, Thierry Magnier, 2001. Milan, Le Seuil Jeunesse and Nord-Sud are just a few of the publishers who have sought out her talent.

The after period dates from early 2003, when Catherine Louis enters the Philippe Picquier catalogue – at that point the publisher was launching a children’s literature imprint – with a solo work, *Liu et l’oiseau (Lui and the Bird)* for which she would invite a Chinese calligrapher to collaborate with her: Feng Xiao Min. A year later, she publishes *Mon imagier chinois (My Little Book of Chinese Words)* and its success continues to this day with subsequent reprints. Taking a great distance from European readers by going toward the world’s oldest continuous culture is what eventually brings her back to them. Three books for learning the Chinese language follow, and then a series of ontological stories in collaboration with Marie Sellier who excels at evoking the poetry of Asian culture through the magnifying framework of a carefully honed language...

### **Two aesthetic focuses**

In the first part of her journey as an illustrator, Catherine Louis favored line drawings, relying on a highly varied and bright color scheme. In her monograph, *Catherine Louis, Illustratrice (Catherine Louis, Illustrator)* LEP, 2003, she includes several of her childhood drawings, done in markers, in which hardly any white space is left on the page. Her early enchantment with color is already clear.

In terms of style, her characters are slightly caricatural, similar to children's comic books. In the same monograph, Catherine Louis aims to reveal her illustrator work in detail by taking us through her studies in creating characters, scenography, and the narrative of the image. The picture book *Mamma Mia! Ma mère est une sorcière (Mamma Mia! My Mother is a Witch)*, Nord-Sud, 1997, is certainly the most indicative of this substantive, free style and its warm images overflowing with fun to observe details. Although *Amours (Loves)* Thierry Magnier, 2001, differs slightly by its use of cut and pasted colored backgrounds, the book still remains an example of this caricatural and bright style.

Beginning with *Liu et l'oiseau (Liu and the Bird)*, the use of black becomes more and more marked. Her discovery of calligraphy, a letter-based work that also involves drawing and gesture, may have been what enabled her to connect with her graphic design training, something she seems to imply in her introduction to *Le grand imagier chinois (The Great Book of Chinese Words)* Picquier, 2008: "My training as a graphic artist means that I have always been interested in signs and symbols." In *Le rat m'a dit (What the Rat Told Me)* Picquier, 2008, she relies on the stark contrast of black (the ink), white (the paper), and red (life), to create highly visual images. This is her most graphical work as an illustrator: the shapes are pure and efficient, with a streamlined quality that is perfectly in line with the same economy inherent to calligraphy. Over time her work in black will become more pronounced and will come to occupy a central place in her contemporary work.

### **The black Oeuvre**

Clearly, the use of black in her illustrations is intimately linked to the Chinese aesthetic. Thus, when she collaborates with Marie Sellier on a children's book about Indian culture in 2007 (*La naissance de Ganesh / Ganesh's Birth*, Picquier), the black almost completely disappears, becoming nothing more than a reference color, no longer the structuring element of the through-line.

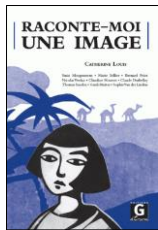
While calligraphy is a major source of her stylistic inspiration, it is also clear that paper cutouts are an important medium. It is interesting to note that, historically, the art of paper cutting is as firmly anchored in China as it is in Switzerland. This creates a bridge between Chinese culture and Catherine Louis's everyday Swiss culture. The art of Chinese *jianzhi* goes back as far as the 6<sup>th</sup> century and remains a very popular art form in many provinces. In Switzerland, the *canivet* is also part of an ancient folkloric tradition notably present in the Pays-d'Enhaut region. Paper cutting is also very solidly anchored in the history of illustrations done for children. Already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the genre was being born, Arthur Rackham was using silhouette characters for the first illustrations of the Grimm brothers' fairytales. Fascinating shared focal points between Switzerland, China, and children's culture are thus involved in the technique of paper cutouts and silhouette drawings.

Aside from its actual influence on Catherine Louis's work, the artist has offered an impressive contribution to the technique with her *Petit chaperon chinois (Little Chinese Riding Hood)* Picquier, 2010. Coming to life in an ingenious *leporello* binding, cutout figures either stand out on the red background of the back side of the paper strip, or dance like shadows when opened up. The meaning of the composition, the elegance of these silhouettes (done via laser cutout), and the play of motifs against the background, all bolstered by an intriguing texture work, position this book in the top tier of the illustrator's oeuvre.

### Bringing it all together

The most recent collaboration between Marie Sellier and Catherine Louis, *Le Jardin de Madame Li* (*The Garden of Madame Li*), offers an interesting synthesis of the artist's different aesthetic orientations. The story takes the shape of a moral tale whose light-hearted and sparkling spirit is enhanced by an elegant and musical prose. The book's images combine both directions that Catherine Louis has taken throughout her career: with the silhouette of the little girl, her impishly pointy nose, her wild hair, and her windblown clothes, but also with the bright colors shimmering with textures, she reaches back toward her first illustrative vein; at the same time, with the use of blacks and pure-lined drawings of animals and nature, she maintains her aesthetic of graphic artistry.

The end of a cycle or the birth of a new one? – only the future will tell us what place this title will take in the artist's journey. One thing is certain: the book is a timely declaration, highlighting Catherine Louis's exceptional and charming work.



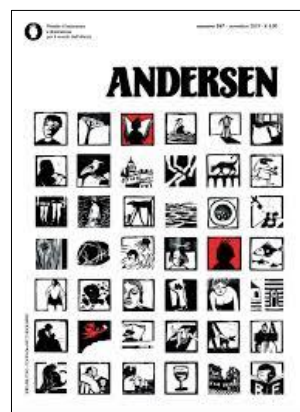
Sophie Van der Linden, "Catherine Louis, illuminartiste", in: Collectif, *Raconte-moi une image: Catherine Louis*, Le Locle: G d'Encre, 2017, pp. 12-21





posture, an expression...). Then, opening her eyes, the illustrator slowly proceeds, relying on the drippings, on random little cues; and so, as if by magic, the small blotch becomes a character: first a bent old man, then a hurrying bellboy, now an elegant young lady.

Yet blotches are only one of the elements of her research, and even in these Genoese days, which she should devote to blotch work, she winds up alternating techniques, materials, and tools, and so she shows me notebooks brimming with impressions and pencil sketches of the city; she shows me possible storyboards for books in progress, laid out in ink and colored in; and finally she shows me the engravings that fill her planner for the months here in Italy (*Gênes que j'aime*) and that in part constitute the cover image for this issue of "Andersen." They are the result of ideas sparked by people, architecture, and natural landscapes made into engravings, effectively synthesizing the daily life of Catherine Louis.



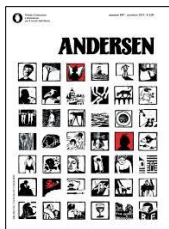
Catherine Louis's engravings that constitute the cover image for the n. 367 of "Andersen"

In her Ligurian engravings – in the style of the tradition of this art (and here I imagine them in dialogue, at least for geographical and cultural affinities, with those of the adopted Genoese Tranquillo Marangoni and the Swiss Florence Faval) – as well as in the color treatment of some boxes (in which our Little Hans with his triple-tufted hair appears) we can also recognize, though rendered in a different technique, one of Catherine Louis's most editorially known styles in Italy. That is the wide, black, yet soft marks that distinguish works such as *Il mio ABC cinese* (Ippocampo, 2019); the new edition of a book released by the same publisher in 2007 and in its original French in 2004 by Éditions Philippe Picquier), *Il viaggio di Liù* (Ippocampo, 2007; originally Éditions Philippe Picquier, 2003), and *Il giardino di Nonna Li* (Ippocampo, 2019; originally Éditions Philippe Picquier, 2016), the latter based on a text by Marie Sellier with calligraphy by Wang Fei. All are books that refer to Chinese culture. And this is no coincidence: Louis's love for and attentiveness to China are the concatenation of beautiful and only initially fortuitous occasions: Tai Chi practice in her youth, the arrival of a Chinese babysitter, the making of a memory game with ideograms, meetings with Wang Fei and Jane Pache, travels to China... But the illustrator's Orient does not stop at the land of the dragon (one of which is the protagonist of other titles worth at least mentioning: *Le petit chaperon chinois* in 2017, again with Sellier and for Picquier); it extends to India (with *La naissance de Ganesh*, 2007, same co-author and publisher) and the Middle East with the very recent *Racconti d'Oriente* (ElectaKids, 2018) by Jihad Darwiche.



Two illustrations from *Il giardino di Nonna Li* (Ippocampo, 2019 / Catherine Louis)

And her work isn't limited to the East – beyond her numerous collaborations with Bernard Friot, with whom we are familiar, yet which are almost completely unpublished here – so much so that the first Italian publishers to take on the illustrator date back to the turn of the millennium, first in the 90s with the publication of a title by Edizioni Lito, then with some titles from the “Mamma mia” series written by Gardi Hutter and published in Italy between 1999 and 2001 by Nord-Sud.



Anselmo Roveda, “Catherine Louis. Un’illustratrice svizzera in continua ricerca: tra libertà, tecniche e senso”, in *Andersen: Rivista mensile di letteratura e illustrazione per il mondo dell’infanzia.*, n. 367, November 2019, pp. 7-9

## Catherine Louis, Illustrator. Creating surprises

### By Patrick Ferla

Since 1977, the association Plans-Fixes has been making filmed portraits of personalities from French part of Switzerland following a simple and effective concept: filming in black and white and without retakes. Alongside great names from the world of science (e.g. the Nobel Prize winner in chemistry Jacques Dubochet), politics (e.g. former Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin) and music (e.g. Claude Nobs), there are also many representatives of literature. As a leading figure in the world of Swiss children and youth's literature, Catherine Louis was given an episode in 2020, filmed in her studio in La Chaux-de-Fonds. In a dialogue with journalist Patrick Ferla, Catherine Louis talks about her background, her rich career, her sources of inspiration and her future projects.

The documentary, in French, can be viewed in its entirety by clicking on the following link: [https://vimeo.com/463873553?embedded=true&source=vimeo\\_logo&owner=23035635](https://vimeo.com/463873553?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=23035635)



## 4. Awards and distinctions

1993

**Premio Europeo di Letteratura Giovanile Pier Paolo Vergerio** (Pier Paolo Vergerio European Prize for Children's Literature) for *La force du berger* (*The Strength of the Shepherd*).

1996

*Ma maman est devenue une étoile* (*My Mom Became a Star*) appears in the **White Ravens'** selection, with a special mention.

1997

*Léon et Ciboulette: le livre* (*Léon and Ciboulette: the Book*) appears in the **White Ravens'** selection, with a special mention.

1998

The book series *Léon et Ciboulette* (*Léon and Ciboulette*) is on the **IBBY Honour List**.

2005

*Mon imagier chinois* (*My Little Book of Chinese Words*) appears in the **White Ravens'** selection, with a special mention.

2005

*Mon imagier chinois* (*My Little Book of Chinese Words*) and *Liu et l'oiseau* (*Liu and the Bird*) are nominated for the **Biennial of Illustration Bratislava**.

2006

**Prix Sorcières** for *Mon imagier chinois* (*My Little Book of Chinese Words*).

2006

*Liu et l'oiseau* (*Liu and the Bird*) is on the **IBBY Honour List**.

2008

**Prix des Incorruptibles** for *La naissance du dragon* (*Legend of the Chinese Dragon*).

2009

*Le rat m'a dit...* (*What the Rat Told Me*) is nominated for the **Biennial of Illustration Bratislava**.

2022

*L'île de Victor* (*Victor's Island*) is on the **IBBY Honour List**.

2023

*L'île de Victor* (*Victor's Island*) is on the IBBY **Selection of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities**.



## 5. Bibliography of children's books by Catherine Louis

### Books originally published in French<sup>10</sup>

*L'escargot et le papillon (The Snail and the Butterfly)*. Bern: Librairie de l'État de Berne, 1982

*Les petites lettres ont pris la fuite (The Small Letters Ran Away)*. Text by Jean-Pierre Fily. Champigny-sur-Marne: Lito, 1987

*Les quatre saisons du renard (The Four Seasons of the Fox)*. Paris: Editions Flick Flack, 1989

*Le balcon d'en dessous (The Next Balcony Down)*. Text by Véronique Borg. Brussels: Editions Casterman, 1989

*Les voleurs d'écriture (The Writing Thieves)*. Text by Azouz Begag. Paris: Seuil, 1990

*Les sept Mamm-goz et la pâte à crêpes (The Seven Grandmothers and the Pancake Batter)*. Text by Chantal Covi. Toulouse: Milan, 1990

*Le 89<sup>e</sup> chaton (The 89<sup>th</sup> Kitten)*. Text by Eleonor Nilson. Toulouse: Milan, 1990

*Fifine et le fantôme (Fifine and the Ghost)*. Text by Miette Marsol. Toulouse: Milan, 1990

*Mon journal à l'hôpital (My Hospital Diary)*. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1990

*Danger d'amour (Love Danger)*. Text by Sarah Cohen-Scali. Brussels: Editions Casterman, 1991

*La force du berger (The Strength of the Shepherd)*. Text by Azouz Begag. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1991

*Mozart et moi (Mozart and I)*. Text by Véronique Borg. Paris: Seuil, 1992

*Mon journal en avion (My Diary on the Plane)*. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1992

*Une bouffée de bonheur! (A Breath of Happiness!)*. Text by Anne-Lise Grobéty. Zürich: OSL, 1992

*Rudi la Truffe, cochon de course (Rudi the Truffle, Race Pig)*. Text by Uwe Timm. Toulouse: Milan, 1993

*Mon journal à la poste (My Diary in the Post)*. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1994

*Une semaine à Cap Maudit (A Week in Cap Maudit)*. Text by Azouz Begag. Paris: Seuil, 1994

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<sup>10</sup> Several books by Catherine Louis were published simultaneously in French and German. In the following bibliography, where appropriate, we have opted for a classification according to the original language of the author of the book.

*Le temps des villages (The Time of the Villages)*. Text by Azouz Begag. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1994

*C'est Noël (It Is Christmas Time)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Paris: Hachette, 1994

*Ma maman est devenue une étoile (My Mom Became a Star)*. Text by Azouz Begag. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1995

*Symphonie pour piano et patins à roulettes (Symphony for Piano and Roller Skates)*. Text by Catherine Challandes. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1995

*Léon et Ciboulette: le bateau, le bouton, le fil, la peinture, l'ombre, le livre (Léon and Ciboulette: the Boat, the Button, the Thread, the Paint, the Shadow, the Book)*. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1996; Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2006 (reprint)

*Mona et le bateau-livre (Mona and the Book-Boat)*. Text by Azouz Begag. Plantagenet: Le chardon bleu, 1996

*Encore des histoires pressées (More Stories in a Hurry)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Toulouse: Milan, 1997

*Escalier pour la terre (Stairs for the Earth)*. Text by Catherine Nesi. Neuchâtel: Département de l'Instruction publique du canton de Neuchâtel, 1997

*Jojo et son pot, Jojo n'a pas sommeil, Jojo à l'école, Jojo et Ouistiti (Jojo and His Potty, Jojo Is Not Sleepy, Jojo at School, Jojo and Ouistiti)*. Text by Nathalie Beau. Toulouse: Milan, 2000; Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2006 (reprint)

*Fernand fainéant (Lazy Fernand)*. Zürich: Nord-Sud, 2000

*Le montreur d'ours (The Bear Showman)*. Text by Janine Bruneau. Zürich: OSL, 2001

*Amours (Loves)*. Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2001

*Un train pour chez nous (A Train to Home)*. Text by Azouz Begag. Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2001

*L'arbre éléphant (The Elephant Tree)*. Text by Jonier Marin. La Roque d'Anthéron: Vents d'ailleurs, 2001

*Amidou (Amidou)*. Text by Marie-José Auderset. Strasbourg: Callicéphale, 2002

*Liu et l'oiseau (Liu and the Bird)*. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2003

*Mon imagier chinois (My Little Book of Chinese Words)*. Calligraphy by Shi Bo. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2004; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)

*Mon premier livre de chinois (My First Book of Chinese)*. Text by Lisa Bresner. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2004

*Pour vivre (To Live)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Paris: La Martinière, 2005

*Presque poèmes, écriture poétique (Almost Poems, Writing Poetry)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Lonay: NK éditions, Paris: La Martinière, 2005

*La naissance du dragon (Legend of the Chinese Dragon)*. Text by Marie Sellier, calligraphy by Wang Fei. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2006; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2012 (reprint)

*Petit clown. Et pourquoi ? (Little Clown. And Why?)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Toulouse: Milan, 2006

*Petit clown. Moi, je veux ! (Little Clown. I Want!)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Toulouse: Milan, 2006

*Petit clown. Tu veux être ma maman ? (Little Clown. Do You Want to Be My Mommy?)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Toulouse: Milan, 2007

*Petit clown. Non, non et non ! (Little Clown. No, no and no!)*. Text by Bernard Friot. Toulouse: Milan, 2007

*Oh Lila ! (Oh Lila!)*. Text by Marina Janssens. Strasbourg: Callicéphale, 2007

*La naissance de Ganesh (Ganesh's Birth)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2007

*Mes premières leçons de chinois (My First Chinese Lessons)*. Text by Lisa Bresner. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2007

*La fanée (The Faded Girl)*. Text by Thomas Sandoz. Le Locle: G d'Encre, 2008

*Le petit cochon qui se prenait pour un frisbee (The Little Pig Who Thought He Was a Frisbee)*. Text by Claude Darbellay. Le Locle: G d'Encre, 2008

*Amours, coffret (Loves, Gift Set)*. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2008

*Le rat m'a dit... (What the Rat Told Me)*. Text by Marie Sellier, calligraphy by Wang Fei. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2008; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)

*L'atelier des émotions et des sentiments (The Workshop of Emotions and Feelings)*. Collective work under the direction of Catherine Louis and Marie-Anne Didierjean. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2010

*Le petit chaperon chinois (Little Chinese Riding Hood)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2010; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)

*Dragons & Dragon (Dragons & Dragon)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2012

*Mô et le maître du temps (Mô and the Master of Time)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse 2013; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2018 (reprint)

*Theo à La Tchaux (Theo in La Chaux-de-Fonds)*. Text by Karina Queijo. Bern: Gesellschaft für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte, 2014

*Le grand imagier chinois (The Great Book of Chinese Words)*. Text by Claudia Berger. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2015

*Mah-Jong: le jeu (Mahjong: The Game)*. Collective texts. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2015; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2020 (reprint)

*Le jardin de Madame Li (The Garden of Madame Li)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2016

*Les moutons de la mer (Sheeps of the Sea)*. Text by François David. Alençon: Éditions Møtus, 2018

*Contes d'Orient (Tales of the Orient)*. Text by Jihad Darwiche. Paris: Saltimbanque, 2018

*Les yeux de Bianca (Bianca's Eyes)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2018

*Les yeux de Bianca, cartes pédagogiques (Bianca's Eyes, Teaching Cards)*. Text by Seraina Utiger. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2018

*L'île de Victor (Victor's Island)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2020

*Les mots sont des oiseaux (Words are Birds)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Amboise: HongFei Cultures, 2020

*Mémé Jardin (Grandma Garden)*. Text by Véronique Deroide. Strasbourg: Callicéphale, 2021

*Hue ! Colette (Giddy-up! Colette)*, Amboise: HongFei Cultures, 2021

*Roule, Sasha ! (Roll, Sasha!)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2021

*Oh ! Colette (Oh! Colette)*, Amboise: HongFei Cultures, 2022

*Eh ! Colette (Eh! Colette)*, Amboise: HongFei Cultures, 2022

## **Books originally published in German**

*Die Möwe Fridolin (Fridolin the Seagull)*, Text by Barbara Haupt. Zürich: Atlantis chez Pro Juventute, 1988

*Maximilian und seine Reise ans Ende der Welt (Maximilian's Journey to the End of the World)*. Text by Hans Peter Scheier. Zürich: Atlantis chez Pro Juventute, 1989

*Ein Bazillus namens Greorg (A Microbe Named Gregor)*. Text by Barbara Haupt. Cologne: Parabel Verlag, 1992

*Mamma mia, lass das Zaubern! (Mamma Mia, Stop the Magic!)*. Text by Gardi Hutter. Zürich: Nord-Süd, 1997; Zürich: Orell Füssli, 2016 (reprint)

*Mamma mia, was haben wir geweint (Mamma Mia, How We Cried)*. Text by Gardi Hutter. Zürich: Nord-Süd, 1999; Zürich: Orell Füssli, 2016 (reprint)

*Mamma mia, geh nicht weg (Mamma Mia, Don't Leave)*. Text by Gardi Hutter. Zürich: Nord-Süd, 2001; Zürich: Orell Füssli, 2016 (reprint)

*Mit Theo in Bern (With Theo in Bern)*. Text by Magdalena Schindler. Bern: Gesellschaft für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte, 2012

*Theo in Zug (Theo in Zug)*. Text by Claudia Leitha. Bern: Gesellschaft für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte, 2015



# 6. Bibliography of translated books

## From French into other languages

Translations of *Fernand fainéant* (*Lazy Fernand*)

- **German**, Nord-Süd, 2000
- **Slovenian**, Založba KRES, 2000
- **Dutch**, De Vier Windstreken, 2000
- **Chinese (Taiwan)**, 3 & 3 International Education Institute, 2000
- **Chinese (China)**, Dolphin Media Co., Ltd., 2010
- **Korean**, AGA WORLD Co., Ltd., 2001

Translations of *Liu et l'oiseau* (*Liu and the Bird*)

- **English**, North-South, 2006
- **German**, Nord-Süd, 2006
- **Italian**, L'Ippocampo edizioni, 2007
- **Dutch**, Tutti, 2009
- **Korean**, Rh Korean Co., LTD, 2015

Translations of *Mon imagier chinois* (*My Little Book of Chinese Words*)

- **Italian**, L'Ippocampo edizioni, 2007; 2019 (reprint)
- **English**, North-South, 2008
- **German**, Nord-Süd, 2008
- **Dutch**, Tutti, 2010

Translations of *La naissance du dragon* (*Legend of the Chinese Dragon*)

- **English**, North-South, 2008
- **Galician**, Kalandraka, 2009; 2019 (reprint)
- **Spanish**, Faktoria K de Libors, 2009; Kalandraka, 2019 (reprint)
- **Portuguese**, Companhia das Letrinha, 2010; Kalandraka, 2019 (reprint)

Translations of *Le rat m'a dit...* (*What the Rat Told Me*)

- **Italian**, L'Ippocampo edizioni, 2008, 2015 (reprint)
- **English**, North-South, 2009; 2014 (reprint)
- **Portuguese**, Companhia das Letrinha, 2011

Translations of *Theo à La Tchaux* (*Theo in La Chaux-de-Fonds*).

- **German**, Gesellschaft für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte, 2015

Translations of *Le jardin de Madame Li* (*The Garden of Madame Li*)

- **Italian**, L'Ippocampo edizioni, 2019

Translations of *Contes d'Orient* (*Tales of the Orient*)

- **Italian**, Electa Kids, 2018

## From German into other languages

Translations of *Maximilian und seine Reise ans Ende der Welt* (*Maximilian's Journey to the End of the World*).

- **French**, Atlantis chez Pro Juventute, 1989

Translations of *Ein Bazillus namens Greorg* (*A Microbe Named Gregor*)

- **French**, Seuil jeunesse, 1992

Translations of *Mamma mia, lass das Zaubern!* (*Mamma Mia, Stop the Magic!*)

- **French**, Nord-Sud, 1997; G d'Encre, 2010 (reprint)
- **Italian**, Nord-Sud, 1999
- **Dutch**, De Vier Windstreken, 2000
- **Chinese (Taiwan)**, Taiwan Interminds Publishing Inc., 2001
- **Korean**, KOREA ANDERSEN Co., 1997; AGA WORLD Co., Ltd., 2001 (reprint)

Translations of *Mamma mia, was haben wir geweint* (*Mamma Mia, How We Cried*).

- **French**, Nord-Sud, 1999; G d'Encre, 2010 (reprint)
- **Italian**, Nord-Sud, 2000
- **Chinese (Taiwan)**, Taiwan Interminds Publishing Inc., 2001
- **Korean**, KOREA ANDERSEN Co., 1999; AGA WORLD Co., Ltd., 2001 (reprint)

Translation of *Mamma mia, geh nicht weg* (*Mamma Mia, Don't Leave*)

- **French**, Nord-Sud, 2001; G d'Encre, 2010 (reprint)
- **Italian**, Nord-Sud, 2001
- **Chinese (Taiwan)**, Taiwan Interminds Publishing Inc., 2001
- **Korean**, AGA WORLD Co., Ltd., 2001

## 7. From the printed books to the animated films: two examples of adaptation

Beyond language translation, some of Catherine Louis's children's books have been “translated” into lively images. Indeed, animation is another form of adaptation that truly brings the illustrations to life. Going from the printed book to the animated film requires an understanding of the story but above all a closeness to the image, emblem of children's literature.

La Cabane à Histoires is one of the television series for children that lends itself to the exercise of adaptation. Since 2017, this French program has featured children (Lisette, Fanny, her little sister, and other children) who meet after school in a hut in the trees to read stories. The illustrations of the books they are reading are animated as one of the children tells the story aloud. The animation is interspersed with short passages where we discover the reactions of the children to the story. Each episode is dedicated to a specific children's book.



La Cabane à Histoires on Canal Plus

La Cabane à Histoires is currently composed of four seasons, which animate famous authors and illustrators of children's literature such as Albertine, Grégoire Solotareff, Serge Bloch, Carl Norac, or even Beatrice Alemagna. In the last two seasons, La Cabane à Histoires has animated two stories by Catherine Louis: *Le jardin de Madame Li* (*The Garden of Madame Li*) and more recently *Les yeux de Bianca* (*Bianca's Eyes*).

In the animated film about *Le jardin de Madame Li* (*The Garden of Madame Li*), the black silhouettes of the characters Madame Li and little Yun come to life and stand out from the landscape that unfolds like a theatre in the background. The mouths of the characters are animated during the dialogues, themselves told by the children in the tree hut. The animation of Catherine Louis's illustrations does not remove the sensation of the textures, but on the contrary emphasizes the work with different materials and papers by making it alive.



Madame Li's silhouette progressing along the landscape on the left, and the paper textures on the right.

In *Les yeux de Bianca* (*Bianca's Eyes*), the illustrations' textures also play an important role since the book has been designed to be accessible to blind children. In the film animation created by La Cabane à Histoires, the children are playing and experimenting the textures of the pages, the relief patterns of the drawings, and the feeling of braille under the fingers. Beyond the animated illustrations, it is also the book itself that comes to life in the little hands of the children.



The children who discover the drawings in relief and a colourful image extracted at the end of the film.

Finally, animation of illustrated children's books does not ruin the feelings and emotions transmitted by the book itself. In the case of Catherine Louis, the importance she places in textures and in the different techniques (paper cutting, painting, collage, engraving, etc.) is not diminished by animation, but is instead underlined as the characters truly come to life and progress through the landscapes of the illustrations.

## 8. The ten most important books by Catherine Louis

- 1 *Léon et Ciboulette: le bateau, le bouton, le fil, la peinture, l'ombre, le livre (Léon and Ciboulette: the Boat, the Button, the Thread, the Paint, the Shadow, the Book)*. Geneva: La Joie de Lire, 1996; Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2006 (reprint)
- 2 ***Mon imagier chinois (My Little Book of Chinese Words). Calligraphy by Shi Bo. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2004; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)***
- 3 *La naissance du dragon (Legend of the Chinese Dragon)*. Text by Marie Sellier, calligraphy by Wang Fei. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2006; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2012 (reprint)
- 4 ***Le rat m'a dit... (What the Rat Told Me). Text by Marie Sellier, calligraphy by Wang Fei. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2008; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)***
- 5 *Le petit chaperon chinois (Little Chinese Riding Hood)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2010; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)
- 6 ***Mô et le maître du temps (Mô and the Master of Time). Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse 2013; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2018 (reprint)***
- 7 ***Contes d'Orient (Tales of the Orient). Text by Jihad Darwiche. Paris: Saltimbanque, 2018***
- 8 ***Les yeux de Bianca (Bianca's Eyes). Text by Marie Sellier. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2018***
- 9 *Les moutons de la mer (Sheeps of the Sea)*. Text by François David. Alençon: Éditions Møtus, 2018
- 10 *Les mots sont des oiseaux (Words are Birds)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Amboise: HongFei Cultures, 2020

The books in blue were sent to the jurors.

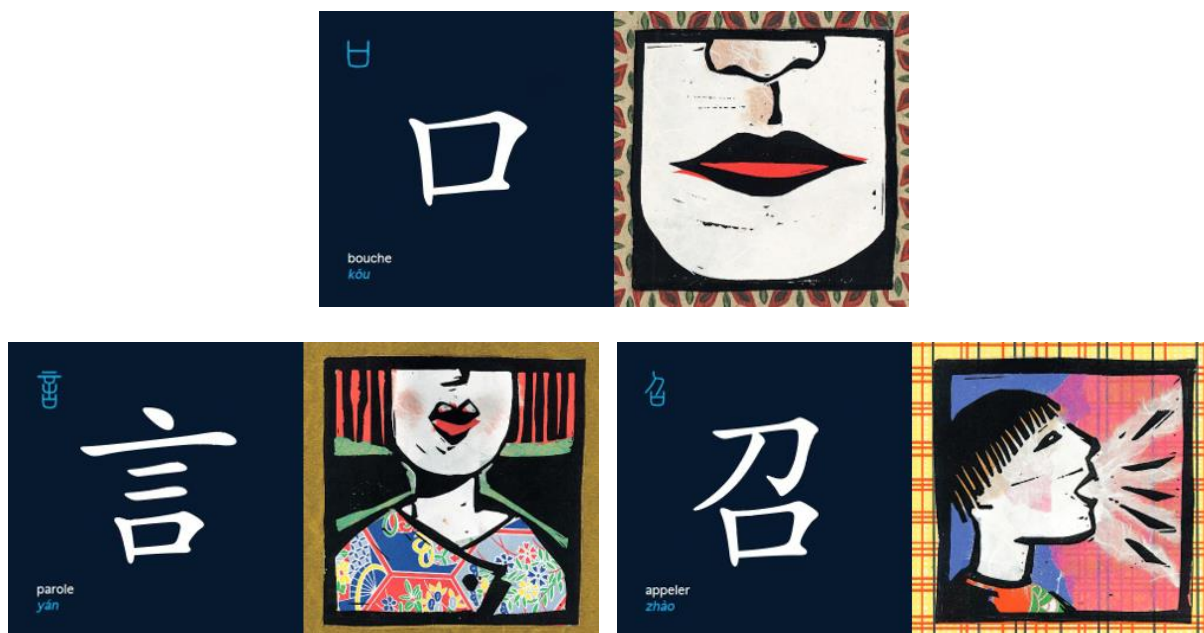


## 9. Presentation of Catherine Louis's five books submitted to the jury

### *Mon imagier chinois (My Little Book of Chinese Words)*

Catherine Louis began her exploration of Chinese characters with this small square book. Each two-page spread features a word or a concept and is presented in the following way: on the left is the standard character (large and centered) along with the traditional character (in smaller print), the simplified character (if different from the standard character), the pronunciation, and the French translation<sup>11</sup>; on the facing page is an illustration corresponding to the word and which sometimes even parallels the shape of the Chinese character.

The one hundred selected words come from everyday vocabulary (parts of the body, animals, household objects, actions...) and follow a logical progression, in terms of both the vocabulary and the logograms. As such, the terms for “word” and “to call” are part of a short series and both contain the symbol for “mouth”.



*My Little Book of Chinese Words* is a multifaceted work. Not only is it – as its title indicates – a picture book allowing little ones to name the world that surrounds them, it is also a reference and a gamebook for older children, who will enjoy discovering another writing system, comparing the characters (traditional, modern, and simplified), analyzing how they are combined, and observing how they were translated into images by Catherine Louis.

Illustration technique: linocut and colored paper collage

*Mon imagier chinois (My Little Book of Chinese Words)*. Calligraphy by Shi Bo. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2004; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)

<sup>11</sup> The first edition made no distinction between the standard character and the standard simplified character.



## Le rat m'a dit... (What the Rat Told Me)



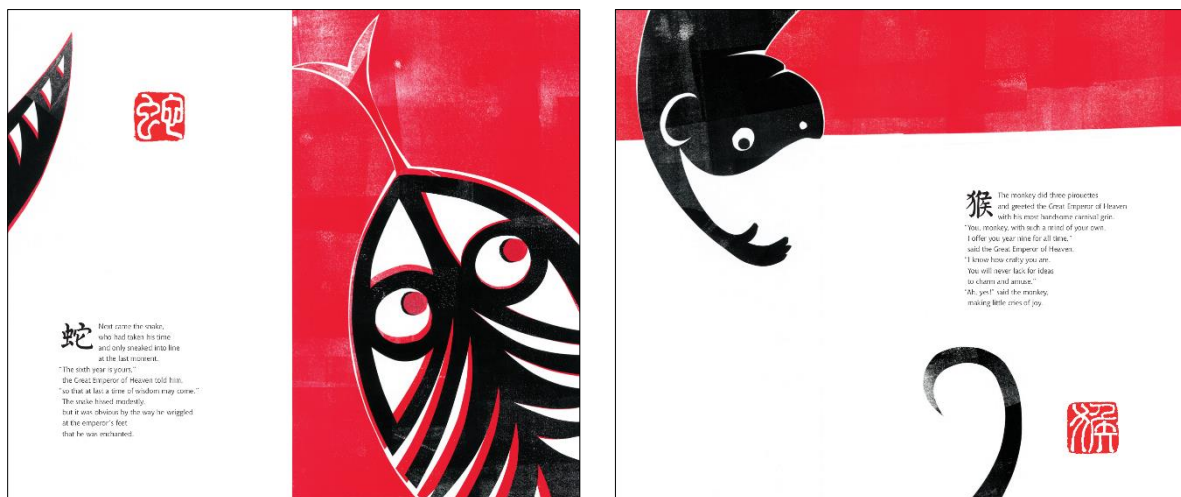
This picture book, which revisits the legend of the Chinese Zodiac, is the result of a collaboration between three artists: Marie Sellier (for the text), Catherine Louis (for the illustrations) and Wang Fei (for the stamps and calligraphies).

Three is also the number of colors that readers will find in the book. White, red, and black are skillfully combined to represent the twelve animals of the zodiac. Each animal – whether noble and powerful like the dragon, or more humble in character or appearance like the hare – is featured across a two-page spread. The words attributed to the Great Emperor of Heaven describe the character and qualities of the different signs: the rat is “lively and clever”, while the tiger stands out by its courage and strength. In her illustrations, Catherine Louis decided not to show the animals in their entirety (except for the rat): by exploiting what is out of view, she infuses the images with dynamism and flexibility and leaves it to the reader-viewer to recreate the unseen elements. Only the head and the tip of the snake’s tail are visible,

but we can imagine the rest of its body writhing just off the page. And we see only the upside-down head of the mischievous monkey: is he hanging from the branch of a tree?

It is hard not to spend hours with this delicate and refined bestiary.

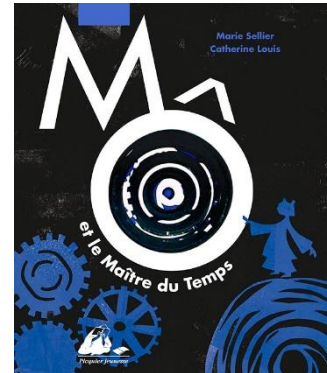
Illustration technique: Japanese *washi* paper roller painted and then cut out according to a drawn model



*Le rat m'a dit... (What the Rat Told Me)*. Text by Marie Sellier, calligraphy by Wang Fei. Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2008; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2017 (reprint)

## ***Mô et le maître du temps (Mô and the Master of Time)***

“Having plenty of time”, or “in no time at all”, and “from the dawn of time”: there are so many expressions about time in this picture book, which focuses on how individuals subjectively experience time. The reader follows the young Mô on a coming-of-age quest that will lead her “all the way to the ends of the Earth”. As Mô encounters different people – the Great Weaver of Good and Bad Moments, the Guardian of Seconds, Madame Memory, and the wise Master of Time – the little girl will be granted answers to her questions and will learn the value of living in the moment.



At the visual level, the book’s central motif is a circle. “Central” in the sense of “principal”, at first. Catherine Louis’s illustrations are made primarily of rounded shapes, curves, and sinewy lines. Symbols of all this roundness are the many clocks and their gears that little Mô must go around or climb in order reach her goal.

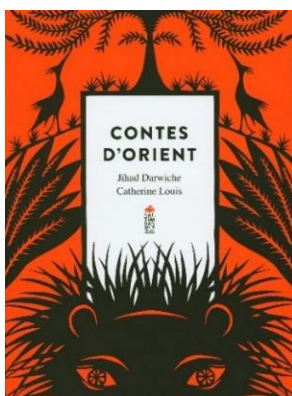
But the word “central” can also be considered in its fundamental meaning: each page is also perforated at its center. The circle thus created becomes smaller and smaller until it disappears completely. Is this “the great black hole of forgetting” mentioned by one of the characters? Or is this emptiness a metaphor for the ennui initially felt by the book’s heroine, and that will slowly diminish? It is up to the reader to decide. What is sure is that Catherine Louis plays with these cutouts, all of which often parallel an element of the image: the center of the Earth, the eye of a bird, the dot of a musical note...

A book object done all in blue, black, and white which will get both children and adults thinking.

Illustration technique: Japanese *washi* paper roller painted and then cut out according to a drawn model

*Mô et le maître du temps (Mô and the Master of Time)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Arles: Picquier jeunesse 2013; Arles: Picquier jeunesse, 2018 (reprint)

## ***Contes d'Orient (Tales of the Orient)***



This carefully crafted book contains ten Oriental tales written by Jihad Darwiche and illustrated by Catherine Louis. Featuring both human characters and talking animals, the stories in this collection constitute little lessons in wisdom: they are about patience, greed, cunning, humility, and altruism. These short, incisive, and captivating texts transport us to a Middle East that lies outside of time, inhabited by camels, date palms and arid deserts.

Each tale is told over two double-page spreads and structured along the same principle. First spread: on the left is the title with a small illustration, followed by a proverb that echoes the story; our eyes are then drawn to a painting in black paper cutouts superimposed on a colored background, which functions as a kind of “trailer” for the story that follows.

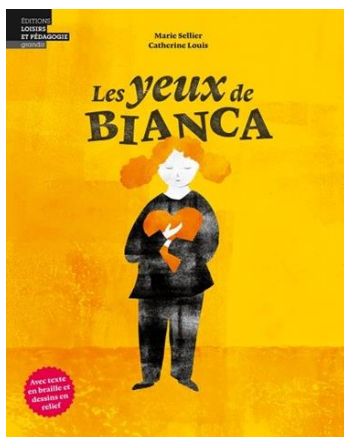
Second spread: the text, starting with an oversized initial letter, spreads across the center of each page; the illustrations extend all around this, even sometimes vanishing into the background. A shadow puppet theatre which nevertheless lights up Jihad Darwiche's words with a special light that is both soft and powerful. Located in marginal spaces, like the white sides and the center fold, the images involve geometric effects like repetition and symmetry, all while emanating an impression of order, discipline, and serenity.

Illustration technique: paper cutouts



Contes d'Orient (Tales of the Orient). Text by Jihad Darwiche. Paris: Saltimbanque, 2018

## Les yeux de Bianca (Bianca's Eyes)



Bianca is a lively, curious child whom the reader follows for several years, from her birth to the moment she starts school without her parents. Accompanied by her faithful rabbit (maybe a toy, maybe an imaginary friend), Bianca asks questions about and marvels at the world that surrounds her. A world that the little girl, blind since birth, “sees” through her other senses and which is adorned in the colors of her moods and her imagination.

This picture book, signed by Marie Sellier and Catherine Louis, is a graceful introduction to disability. The lyrical and poetic text plays with synesthesias to explain how Bianca experiences color: “Yellow smells of hay and summer”. Printed both traditionally and in braille, the text is accessible to both the sighted and the visually impaired<sup>12</sup>. These two printings are not superimposed, however, thus making it possible to read the book in pairs. The inside back cover features the braille alphabet, offering the sighted a chance to learn something about reading with their fingers.

<sup>12</sup> An audio version of the story is also available.



The illustrations were also conceived for a dual readership. The elements of each image are slightly raised (using silkscreen printing) in order to be felt via touch. This was a challenge for Catherine Louis who discussed with several visually impaired individuals in order to adapt her illustrations in the best possible way to codes she knew nothing about. “Having spent my entire life making images and then meeting with people who see nothing and who had to touch my illustrations, this was a very emotional experience”<sup>13</sup>, the illustrator admits.

The first pages of the book primarily use black, white, and shades of gray, and then the colors slowly make their appearance. The book’s final image repeats the different motifs (the cat, the sunflower, the orange...) and the colors encountered throughout the story, and shows Bianca stretching her hand out to a friend. A conclusion radiant with joy and hope for a picture book whose text and images call on readers to share and discover their differences.

Illustration technique: silhouette figures, scans of materials and figures, computer graphics

*Les yeux de Bianca (Bianca’s Eyes)*. Text by Marie Sellier. Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Loisirs et Pédagogie, 2018

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Philippe Cadert et Lara Donnet, “‘Les yeux de Bianca’, le livre en braille de l’illustratrice Catherine Louis”, in *RTS Culture*, online: <https://www.rts.ch/info/culture/livres/10063993--les-yeux-de-bianca-le-livre-en-braille-de-l-illustratrice-catherine-louis.html>, last accessed 25.12.2020.

## 10. Published reviews of Catherine Louis's books submitted to the jury

### **Review of *Mon imagier chinois (My Little Book of Chinese Words)* by the *White Ravens***

The China Year in France (2003/2004) has also left some marks on French children's literature. In this picture-dictionary, even the youngest children are introduced to Chinese characters and their origin. On the left-hand pages, calligraphies of the old and the modern characters, as well as their meaning and pronunciation, are displayed. On the corresponding right-hand pages, the ideograms are interpreted through linocuts on colored paper that have a striking resemblance to the real character. Readers will be fascinated as they follow the path of the original object from its early character to the present one. The fact that Chinese characters do not represent sounds but refer to concrete concepts will certainly arouse the readers' curiosity about Chinese writing and culture.

Extract from: *International Children's Digital Library*, online:  
<http://www.childrenslibrary.org/servlet/WhiteRavens?searchText=catherine+louis>, last accessed 18.01.2021

### **Review of *Le rat m'a dit... (What the Rat Told Me)* in *La revue des livres pour enfants***

What immediately strikes is its tall format, followed then by the beauty of a book done in only red, white, and black. *What the Rat Told Me* takes twenty double-page spreads to tell the story of a walk taken by twelve animals to heed the call of the Great Emperor of Heaven and who become the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. A kind of great day out that winds up doubling as an origin story! This is a beautiful book, even soothing because it elicits a slow and calm perusal: readers spend a good moment on each double-spread page to look at the splendid drawings of each animal, to read the short text that pushes the story forward, to then look at the end of the book to find which animal matches the reader's birth year... a lovely story to read alone or with others. Readers will pick it up again and again, as much for the story as for the pleasure of enjoying the artwork.

Extract from: *La revue des livres pour enfants*, n. 241, June 2008, p.18

### **Review of *Mô et le maître du temps (Mô and the Master of Time)* on *Ricochet***

This book is both a marvelous object with a studied, finely crafted aesthetic, and a highly philosophical story. A balance of form and content. *Mô and the Master of Time* speaks of the passing of time and the moments to save "by living them with our entire heart", as Aunt Lola explains to her niece. It is meticulous and elegant. At the center of each page sits an empty circle that grows smaller as the pages turn. This graphical device is a reference to the cavern of eternity described by Marie Sellier in this story of a little girl curious about her feelings of boredom, of a life



more or less busy, of a pace that speeds up and slows down: “Why does time go so slowly for me / and so fast for others?”. The illustrations are the genius outcome of a study of the circle, evoking in turn, as the story progresses, the Earth, a clock, the eye of a bird, a stomach, etc. Illustrator Catherine Louis chose to work in only a few colors: white, black, blue. The latter to broaden horizons, add a touch of life, of wisdom, of serenity.

Extract from: Pascale Pineau, “Mô et le maître du temps”, on *Ricochet*, online:  
<https://www.ricochet-jeunes.org/livres/mo-et-le-maitre-du-temps>, last accessed 19.11.2020

## **Review of *Contes d'Orient (Tales of the Orient)* in *Le Temps***

### **Stories of other lands**

The author, Jihad Darwiche, was born in Lebanon where he grew up amidst the region’s traditional stories. After moving to France and after a period spent teaching, he became a professional storyteller. For his *Tales of the Orient*, he selected ten short and snappy stories full of mischief and common sense, each one lasting only a page or two. Despite this, the reader has a feeling of a much broader narrative as the “staging” of the images that accompany each text is so studied, so theatrical and suggestive.

### **Shadow puppets and echo chambers**

An old man plants a date tree and harvests three purses of gold, a mouse and a lion sign a mutual-help pact, a rich merchant tries to trick a lumberjack but is outwitted: these stories are all introduced by an Arabic, Persian, or Kurdish proverb, to which Catherine Louis offers a kind of shadow puppet theatre by superimposing, not gluing, black laser cutouts over brightly colored backgrounds. The effect is sumptuous, resonant, and offers an echo chamber to the texts that then accompany other dark silhouettes.

The book’s polished writing and unusual pictorial refinement combine to create a first-class work of art.

Extract from: Sylvie Neeman, “Histoires d’ailleurs”, in *Le Temps*, online:  
<https://www.letemps.ch/culture/histoires-dailleurs-0>, last accessed 09.11.2020

## **Review of *Les yeux de Bianca (Bianca’s Eyes)* in *Prismes***

### **Touching as seeing: *Bianca’s Eyes***

“One sees well only with the heart; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”  
*The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

A little girl awakens to her life and discovers the world’s magic with each new step. Her name is Bianca... a child like any other child but for one small difference: she was born blind. And so it becomes our turn to rediscover the world through her eyes, a universe filled with singing, vibrating colors that can be tasted and that perfume the very air.

The duo behind “Bianca’s Eyes” – Marie Sellier with her pen and Catherine Louis with her colored pencils – have delicately and powerfully signed a perfect jewel of a book, a bilingual book for the sighted and for those who “see” with their fingers, noses, ears, and tastebuds. The Lausanne-



based publisher Loisirs et Pédagogie has also achieved a new editorial feat, in which braille texts and raised images are combined with pages printed in shimmering colors and a robust all-black font.

A poetic and sensitive way to enter into someone else's universe, to promote the integration of visually impaired students into the classroom, to create an encounter with the girls and boys who "don't see like us", and to glimpse the mysteries of the braille alphabet that sighted children, just like young decoders, love to decipher from one page to the next...

Younger sister to the Little Prince, a delicate feeling trails in the wake of Bianca's story, something we would readily call a state of grace.

Extract from: Barbara Fournier, "Touchez pour voir...: *Les yeux de Bianca*", in *Prismes*, n. 25, December 2018, pp. 44-45