

# FRANÇOIS ROCA

## ILLUSTRATOR



NOMINEE FOR  
THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS 2020

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## BIOGRAPHY

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François Roca was born in Lyon (France) in 1971. He studied in Paris at the National School of Applied Arts Olivier-de-Serres, then in Lyon at the Émile-Cohl School; he graduated in 1993. He devoted himself a time to painting and then exclusively to illustration. He particularly illustrates the texts of his accomplice Fred Bernard, with whom he builds an imaginary universe renewed with each album. Since 1996, this "feather-brush" association allows him to visit themes rarely dealt with in children's literature. An album marks a turning point in their collaboration: *Jésus Betz* wins the 2001 Baobab and Goncourt Jeunesse 2002 awards. That provides them with the freedom to tell stories for older children: *The Bonsai-man*, *The Indian of the Eiffel Tower*... François likes to give life to characters close to those who made him dream as a child, characters he met in the cinema or in front of the television. He also produces covers for novels and magazines and collaborates regularly with American publishers.

Heir to the painters he loves and admires (E. Fromentin, E. Hopper, F. Remington, J. W. Waterhouse, N. C. Wyeth, Vermeer...), he pays tribute to them in his albums; he cites them with winks or transpositions that allow to build bridges between artists over time. Literary and cinematographic references also nourish his works where the skies, lights and the "clairs-obscurs" excel. In parallel to his activities in the press, in publishing or in communication, François Roca paints and exhibits regularly his oil paintings representing portraits of women.

*"I don't make sketches of all the images, I just write the title of the drawing, as it is done with paintings. According to the text, I directly see what I want to draw, without necessarily having a fixed idea already. I keep these titles and I forget about the text, the word-for-word. I rely on what I feel. Sometimes, I make a mistake. But when Fred [Bernard] sees the image, he tells me what I forgot. (...) I create all my images and he watches how they evolve. The first one is very important. I hate making all the sketches of an album and then painting them. I begin directly with the first image of the book. I start from a white page, I draw, I sketch, and then I paint. Sometimes, I fail and I start again. This first image will give the tone; it will determine who the main character is. It's not necessarily the first image of the book, but I have to "feel" it well. It has to be the image we're making the book for. More and more often, I start with the cover. If it's good, then all the rest will follow. Sometimes I need a whole month just to find the first picture. But when I finally have it, everything else is unlatched. While I finish the rendering, I think about the second image, and so on and so forth. I immerse myself in the book. It's like going on a trip; I don't know where I'm going. The publishers were a bit worried at first, but now they got used to it".*

*"I don't necessary have an image in mind directly. I gather documentation on each theme, with photos, pictures... I like to travel through the documents".<sup>1</sup>*

*"I am not a sketch artist, for me painting, colour and material are essential to feel fully at ease. The drawing is only a preparatory phase that disappears under the layers of paint".<sup>2</sup>*



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<sup>1</sup> (Fred Bernard & François Roca) Créateurs d'aventures, Albin Michel jeunesse, Paris, 2016, pp : 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reseau-canope.fr/savoirscdi/societe-de-linformation/le-monde-du-livre-et-de-la-presse/auteurs-et-illustrateurs/entretien-avec-fred-bernard-francois-roca.html>

## NOMINATING FRANÇOIS ROCA: THE REASONS BEHIND THE CHOICE

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François Roca is one of those illustrators with such a personality that one recognises his albums at first sight. He puts his virtuosity as a painter and artist at the service of illustration. Each of his images is a painting and the power that emerges from it inevitably brings the reader into the depths of the book's universe. His images have a very strong evocative power and immerge the reader immediately in the worlds he is representing, be it the circus (*Jésus Betz* [Jesus Betz], *Le Fantôme du cirque d'hiver* [The Ghost of the winter circus]), the far west (*Cheval vêtu* [Painted Horse], *Calamity Jane*), a fantasy world (*Anya et Tigre blanc* [Anya and White Tiger]), adventurous lands (*L'Homme-Bonsai* [The Bonsai-Man], *La Fille du Samuraï* [The Samurai's daughter]) or even in more classical works (*Le Papa de Simon* [Simon's dad] by Maupassant), to name just a few titles. His images have such evocative force that, not surprisingly, Nathan editions asked François Roca to illustrate all the covers of the *Contes et légendes* [Tales and Legends] collection.



With the same exigency that his long-time accomplice Fred Bernard has in writing, Roca creates the means to help children step into literature. He believes that children have the potential to understand and interpret the diverse world they live in. The books he creates with Fred Bernard are not based on "easy" themes that could please everyone, they are demanding and challenging. They don't avoid dealing with handicaps, differences, the destructive madness of men, freaks... Their books also empower the readers by providing them with stories of strong men and women, who fight to accomplish their goals and who surpass themselves in the course of the story. Their books render well the complexity of our world, through demanding texts and magnificent illustrations.

Along the years, Fred Bernard and François Roca have rooted a genre in children's literature: the picture books for the older children, who are sometimes considered "too grown-up" to have pictures presented to them in fiction books. They bring children's literature to a higher level.

## INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES

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### FRANÇOIS ROCA & FRED BERNARD SYMBIOTIC

Interview by Malika Person, November 17, 2016.

*"Making books that you don't want to get rid of when you move house". The project was an ambitious one, with only two men working together to achieve their goal. Twenty years and 23 albums later, we can only say that they have succeeded. We talked to one of the most likable duos in children's and young people's literature. We would politely request that Fred Bernard forgives us for having, in this transcription, focused on the answers of his illustrator-partner.*

**Malika Person:** *How have you managed for 20 years to successfully bring your projects, which are based on the same principle, with one person writing, the other illustrating, to a successful conclusion?*

**François Roca:** We never do the same thing, and we don't use the same characters. We change epochs and geographical locations, and that's why we never get bored, because we're always trying to do different things and do them better. We met each other 25 years ago at the Emile Cohl School. We were friends and I knew that Fred wrote. So we started to work together on *La Reine des fourmis* (Queen of the ants). It was our very first book, with animals because I thought that to make a beginning as an illustrator in children's literature animals would be a good, childlike thing. Even if red ants are a bit particular. And then I also decided that everything would happen in the jungle, and in the end it was set in the Natural History Museum in Lyon, where there were animals, but stuffed ones. I have childhood memories of lots of rainy afternoons there, and there was the whole ethnological section with Indian mummies like in *Tintin*, which I loved, even though it frightened me. In terms of illustration, I always prefer old things. Old films, old museums ...



**And you, Fred, you're also a designer. How do you negotiate the fact that your role in the partnership "only" involves writing?**

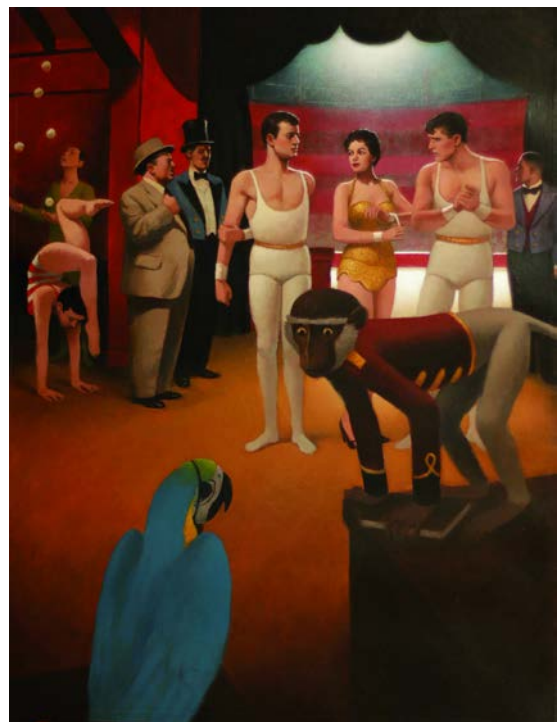
**Fred Bernard:** As François said, he's the one who took the first step. We never said that we would work together, but I've never made a distinction between writing and drawing. I went to art school, but I wanted to study science. I like to write and I like to draw, but always with the same energy and while focusing on themes that always reference things that left an impression on us when we were kids and teenagers.

**In fact, what influences or events have inspired each of you in your work?**

**F.B.:** The first thing I say to myself is that you shouldn't simplify the text, you shouldn't sacrifice it. As soon as you've got a good story, you can add anything to it you want. That's why I always place the bar fairly high depending on what the story requires. Everyone has their own linguistic demands.

**And in regard to the illustrations, François Roca, we know that the art of quotation has always existed; for example, in *Le Fantôme du Cirque d'Hiver* there's a scene which seems familiar, that comes from a film.**

**F.R.:** It's done on purpose. Yes, it comes from *Trapeze*, an old film with Tony Curtis, Burt Lancaster, and Gina Lollobrigida that I saw as a child. It is one of the old films we saw on TV in *La Dernière séance d'Eddy Mitchell* (Eddie Mitchell's last screening), a very important programme in terms of my knowledge of film. And *Trapeze* was filmed at the Winter Circus. Also, Fred had included it in the text, so it was obvious that I was going to do a homage. I took the image of Gina Lollobrigida with the head of the circus, added some characters, and played around with it to adapt it and create an image that reflected the story, but which retained the original reference, for those who understood it. You can recognise the actors. I don't start from nothing at all. It's like Fred when he writes. We research the theme. In this case, it was clearly the Winter Circus. For *The Phantom of the Opera*, we didn't need to travel too far, just to a four-hour visit to the Opéra with a fireman. I took 400 photos! Afterwards, we had to find the characters. That was something else. The fact that we create a new universe for every album means that I don't have to be stuck with the same style; I can use multiple references and keep on discovering new things. I have a realistic style, and realism is based on the real. To draw the tiger in *Anya et Tigre blanc* (Anya and White tiger), I wasn't going to just invent it. I wanted to do a realistic tiger. So, I used photos of tigers, but, for the needs of the story, I made it bigger vis-à-vis the character. The same thing for horses. I can draw a horse spontaneously, but it won't be the way I want it, I always need a model.



Thomas Gomez and Gina Lollobrigida in "Trapeze" by Carol Reed in 1956, and the scene from *Le Fantôme du cirque d'hiver* inspired by the film.

**Is it true that you base the horses, and even your Indians, on the work of American painters, including Pyle and Whyte?**

**F.R.:** Yes, for a while they were my biggest influences. I was a fan of theirs, they are incomparable masters, and they're far better than I am, but I used them, for sure. For *Soleil noir* (Black sun), for the girl, I needed an Aztec Indian, a Mexican in any case. I based my approach on Terrence Malick's *The New World*, which has a very beautiful young woman in it. I couldn't have made her up. In any case, for *Soleil noir* I wanted to make a film for myself.

**F.B.:** Making a book is like making a film. And readers, in turn, do the same thing.

***Today's children bathe in a flow of images. Do you think that your pictures still feed the imagination?***

**F.R.:** The role of my pictures is just to create time. Because today everything happens very quickly; for example, in action films everything happens a lot faster than in the films of our youth. And, after all, interpreting an image with an accompanying text demands a certain amount of time. And in our albums, which are aimed at older kids, there's a fair amount of text. Which I need. Three lines wouldn't give me a lot to work on. And if someone reads the words to you, then you really have the time to look at the pictures.

***The pictures in your albums have an undeniably poetic dimension, but they also imply a more complex level of interpretation and your readers experience that complexity. How would you define them? As beautiful images?***

**F.R.:** Well, I hope so. You know, I try to make them as beautiful as possible. The important thing is to link form and content. Well, for me, as an illustrator; generally, to create beautiful images you need a good text. You know, as an illustrator, I need a story that sweeps me along, that enthuses me, that presents problems that oblige me to rise to the challenge of the text. The most striking example is *Jésus Betz*, where the text is so strong that it doesn't need any pictures. The first time Fred read my work, I didn't know whether it would be good enough, and that's what encouraged me to go further. In hindsight, I think it's our best album; it's our favourite anyway. And even in terms of the pictures, there aren't any that I think are failures, which isn't the true of other albums.

**F.B.:** We're also working for people who are developing, a process that lasts a lifetime, by the way. But the way in which children "receive" our albums depends on their education and their level of general knowledge. We know nothing about how our albums are received. I think that a good picture is a picture that can leave a trace on us without us asking why, nor what techniques have been applied by the painter, in the same way as when you read something you don't tell yourself that the words are made up of letters, or ask yourself how the author put them together. And insofar as we're concerned, text and images are intrinsically linked because we do everything together, the editing, and the storyboard. Not many albums are made that way.

***If looking at pictures is a contemplative act, when you read a text you enter a world of action. In L'Homme-Bonsaï, the main character is a man with a tree growing out of the top of his head. Without the text, you wouldn't be able to understand his story.***

***The text takes us into another domain, that of worry ...***

**F.B.:** A text that reflects François's drawings. What's more, in the beginning we frightened people. They said it was too sombre, too dark ... People asked François to do things that were a little lighter. Luckily, Lucette Savier and Marion Jablonsky from Albin Michel, with whom we have worked for many years, don't ask us those kinds of questions.



**Has François ever come up with any pictures that forced you to change your texts?**

**F.B.:** Technically, I get rid of everything “dispensable” when there are pictures. And then there are two albums I wrote based on pictures that François did: *Monsieur Cloud nuagiste* (Mister Nuage, cloud artist) and *Le Train jaune* (The Yellow Train).

**F.R.:** It was for an illustration competition at the Bologna Book Fair. They needed five pictures, and I’d created a character who was followed around by a little cloud all the time. Fred started from there. It was the same for *Le Train jaune*, but this time the initial pictures don’t appear in the book.

**F.B.:** We began to publish our albums in a period where we had to try things out. There have been two major periods in which children’s albums were open to a multitude of influences, the 1970s and the 1990s, where a breach was opened that shook up a lot of things, notably thanks to albums for adults. The publishing landscape had to be opened up; publishers encouraged us in this sense. We were able to surf that wave because economic considerations were less central then. *Jésus Betz* emerged in that context, as did *L’Homme-Bonsai* (The bonsai man). It was a big opportunity because, before then, it was impossible to publish stories like those, and now it would be more difficult.

**F.R.:** It’s the loyalty of the people who follow us that enables us to go on.

**F.B.:** We know that it’s a fragile kind of freedom. There aren’t many people doing albums for grown-ups. There’s François Place. Everything important is happening in albums for young children. But that means we have to bang our heads together and solve problems. It’s fascinating.



**François, when Fred gives you a text, do you visualise the pictures straight away? Do you sometimes get artist’s block?**

**F.R.:** For *Jésus Betz* (inspired by the universe depicted in the film *Freaks*, on which I wrote my final year dissertation at the Emile Cohl School), I had the characters, the monsters, all of that, but how was I to approach it? Like I did with *L’Homme-Bonsai*. A little man with a little tree growing out of his head can quickly become ridiculous, but if he’s a big guy, with tattoos and everything, it can work. Either I have precise ideas from the outset, or I have to look for them, like for *Rose et l’automate de l’Opéra* (Rose and the automaton of the Opéra), which I couldn’t start before visiting the Opera House in Paris.

**F.B.:** In the end, there are only 15 pictures. You have to be careful choosing them. When you close the book you have to have the feeling that you’ve seen 200. There are also all the drawings done by François that aren’t in the book but that the reader is going to “see”. When I write, I have François’s images in my head. Not mine, not a friend’s, but François’s. So that influences my writing.

**Among your recurrent images is that of the tree. There is a bonsai in La Fille du Samourai; there’s even one in Le Grand match, illustrated by Jean-François Martin.**

**F.B.:** It’s always later that we see whether there are any links between the albums. I like trees, and I like the idea of time that they suggest. It takes a long time to make a beautiful tree.



***And then there are women. Fred, you used Jeanne et le Mokélé in a solo comic book project.***

**F.R.:** Yes, Fred had fun with his comic book version of *Jeanne et le Mokélé*. He could let himself go and draw erotic scenes. I'm a bit jealous. It's something you can't do in children's books. In the album, sensuality and sexuality are taboo subjects. In *Soleil noir*, I pushed sensuality furthest, it's when I placed the hair in front of the young lady's breasts, but that still has quite an effect in the classroom. In *L'Indien de la Tour Eiffel* (The Indian of the Eiffel Tower) there's the kiss on the cover. It was a risky thing to do. It could have been a bit Mills & Boon.

***François, you also address the theme of women in your work as a painter.***

**F.R.:** Yes, because it's a great subject. I started displaying original press illustrations, and I exhibited a few paintings I'd done when I was a student. Women. There's a very strong Hopper influence; they're always waiting, we don't know what for; they're more or less nude. Kind of like pin-ups, but with an interior life. In fact, I don't have a particular subject. I'm just taking a break. I base my work on photos. The background changes constantly as does the picture. I can add a window, or erase one. I can just paint a curtain with a play of light. There's also a David Lynch thing going on.

***Is the colour palette very different from your album illustrations?***

**F.R.:** A little, but it's mostly the format that changes. A canvas is 1.30m by 90cm, so it's almost life-size. When I paint a woman I try to instil life into her. The technique's the same; it's oil paint, except that the illustrations are designed to be reproduced, while the paintings aren't. The objective of the illustrations is to accompany a text and tell a story. The objective of the paintings is to be framed and exhibited.

***Do you both work in the same way?***

**F.R.:** No. When I paint I'm standing up; when I do my illustrations, I paint sitting or lying down, on fairly large plates, but the largest format is a "raisin" format, which is more or less 55cm by 40cm, and that changes a lot of things. I get the impression I'm doing miniatures, while in painting you enter the picture, physically. I'm standing up, I work with an easel, the canvas is bigger than I am, and the way of painting isn't the same, it involves your whole body, and it's not the same feeling. Since I use a lot of detail in my illustrations, I don't want to do it in my painting. It's always in an enclosed space. I like the fact that you don't know what's going to happen, you can tell a story, to yourself as much as to the spectator. However, when I displayed my paintings and illustrations, they didn't work together. Now, I only exhibit my paintings.

***In La Fille du Samourai (The Samurai's Daughter), there's a portrait of a woman that's fairly close to a painting, in which you see the detail of her tattoos.***

**F.R.:** Yes, it's in the text, and it wasn't obvious because the girl was supposed to be tattooed with all the precepts of the art of handling the Samurai sword written by her father. We found a translation of a Japanese manual, and I tried to reproduce phrases extracted from the text. But it didn't work, it didn't look Japanese, it was odd. You know, it didn't correspond to our vision of the thing. So I did a bit of messing around, reproducing the ideograms that were visually most appropriate.

***And what's great about it is that it doesn't disfigure her. She is no less pretty than before.***

**F.B.:** It's her father who tattoos her, he pays attention!

**F.R.:** Yes, he's gentle with his daughter, especially with her eyelids. In fact, I drew a picture with a "perfect" face, and then I really "tattooed" it. But I had to think about it first, because if it didn't work I would have had to redo the whole drawing. I was trembling like a tattoo artist.

***We haven't talked yet about the places in which your stories take place. Do you travel much?***

**F.B.:** I would have liked to travel for a living. The pictures I bring back from my journeys are the only ones I do just for myself. For fun, like when I was a child. It's also a field of experimentation because no one's going to tell me "oh no, that's not going to work". And I love all exotic adventure writers. But I found them frustrating in regard to women because they were almost entirely absent. In Conrad and London they're insignificant.

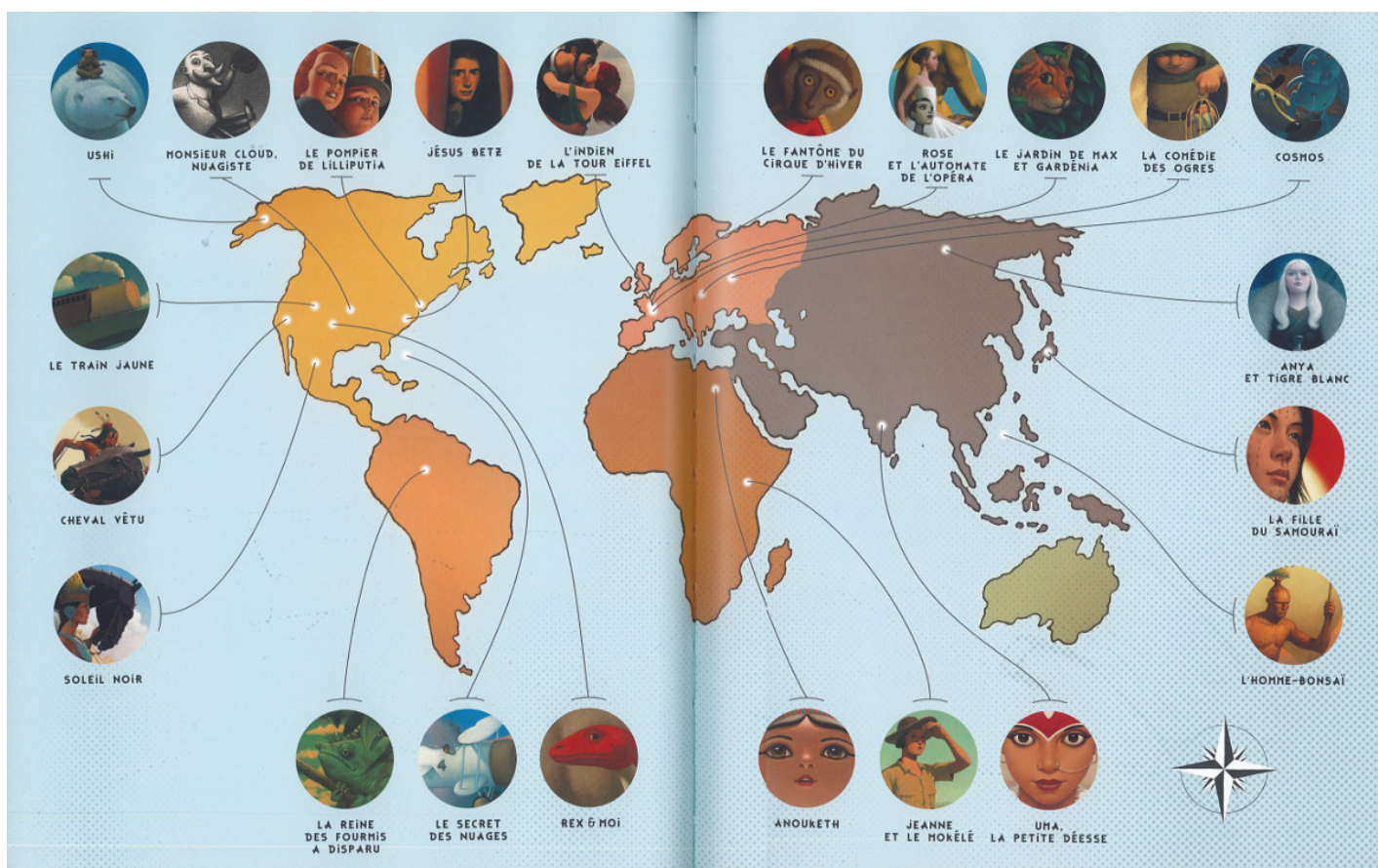
**F.R.:** On the other hand, I don't draw. Well, not like Fred, like that, with a pencil, it's not remotely the way I express myself; everything I find interesting about the job is to do with painting.

***You mean that you don't do preparatory drawings?***

**F.R.:** I do, but the drawings disappear under the painting; I sometimes lose it completely, I have to find it again using a different approach. With painting. Volume, colours, values ... But I don't have a style, I have no "writing" technique, I haven't worked on it, and I've never had a spontaneous interest in it. Even if, in painting, you're always drawing, but in a different way.

Malika Person, « François Roca & Fred Bernard. En symbiose », in *Secrets d'illustrateurs*, La Revue des livres pour enfants, Hors-série n° 4, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2018, pp. 127-134. Translated by Michael Lavin.

**A MAP OF THE STORIES**



## FRED BERNARD FRANÇOIS ROCA TWO VOICES, SEVERAL VISIONS



*In biology, symbiosis is the long-term, reciprocally beneficial association between two living organisms. The sea anemone and the clown fish provide a good example. As do Fred Bernard and François Roca who, for exactly twenty years, have been doing impressively original and ambitious work in the field of children's literature. Gifted tellers of beautiful stories, the two symbiotic partners told us theirs.*

### ***From a very early age?***

**François:** At the end of the third year I decided to enrol in a technical high school in Lyon, my home town, which offered a Technical Diploma in Book Design. This track led to the fields of graphic design and illustration pretty much applied to advertising via a design/studies track that I came across at an exhibition of student work. I was stopped dead in my tracks by a hyper-realistic, aerograph drawing of a ski shoe, and I said to myself that that was what I wanted to do. From that point on, I had the impression that I'd found my calling. I've never regretted not having chosen the general education stream, which was something that I could also have done (I was a good student). I like telling that story to the children I meet. You don't have to be a bad student to like drawing. And I've always liked drawing. After the three-year course, logically enough I did a BTS at the Olivier-de-Serres National Advanced School of Applied Arts in Paris. There again, the courses involved applying illustration and graphic design to the world of advertising which, I began to understand, wasn't really my thing. Besides, I was rubbish at it. What I liked was drawing ... My parents wanted me to enrol in the Émile Cohl School (which was already a very expensive private school at that time). But in vain. I went back to Lyon and met Mr Bernard. I was twenty years old.

**Fred:** People always told me that I should either be a builder (my father's profession), or a wine grower (my mother's profession), and up until I went to college I never really asked myself any questions. I was the oldest of all my cousins, so it was difficult to think about other options. But I was fascinated in animals and I wanted to be a vet. Since I liked drawing, I also did evening courses at the Beaune School of Fine Arts, but I never thought that it would be anything more than a hobby. It was the teachers at the School who encouraged me to sit the entrance examination. My parents knew nothing about it. When I told them I'd passed my mother was a bit panicked. She thought it was a school full of drug addicts. To reassure them, I said I was going to get into advertising (in reality, for me, advertisers come just after arms dealers). But at

least it bore some resemblance to a real profession. After two years at the School of Fine Arts I realised what interested me was painting rather than narration. That's how I changed direction and ended up at the Émile Cohl School.



### ***So, in 1991 you met up once again at the Émile Cohl School ...***

**Fred:** I'd been there for a year when François arrived.

**François:** Since it was expensive and I had a good academic background, I asked to enrol directly in the second year ...

**Fred:** François already had an illustration fanzine – *Odieux* – and that brought us closer. Whenever students had to work in pairs, we always got together. We went on holiday together. After graduating, I lived in England for a year. I took the opportunity to show English publishers a few stories that I had translated.

**François:** Meanwhile, I was in the army. I could tell you about it if you like! I worked in the meteorological service in the Air Force.

**Fred:** We met up again later, when we were both starting to contact publishers, with our boxes of drawings under our arms.

**François:** My background wasn't very "children's books". It was more Egon Schiele than *Martine à la plage*. And we had both realised that publishers were, more than anything else, looking for projects including both words and pictures. That's why I asked Fred if he would give me a story. For children. A story about animals seemed a good idea to me. So, we went with a story about ants ...

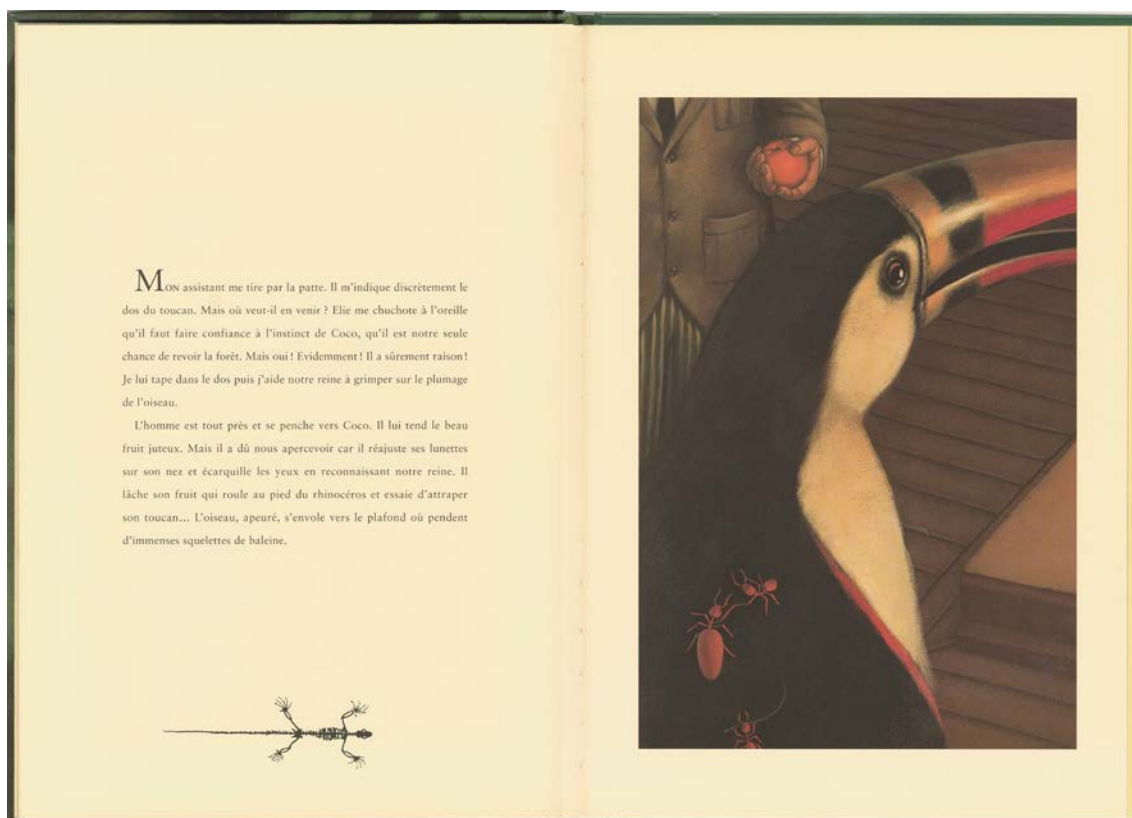
**Fred:** François gave me a list of the ingredients he wanted, like a cook going to the market before getting to work in the kitchen. He wanted a forest, but he also wanted an American-style city, a museum, and a plane, a plane with a propeller. Our point of departure was animals who travel without even wanting to, like the snail on my motorbike.

**François:** Although the story wasn't really finished, I did five drawings. We thought that was enough for publishers to base a decision on, and this time we approached them together. Albin Michel, Mango and Le Seuil, because those publishers did albums we liked. The first two showed an interest. At the time, Albin Michel was headed by Frédéric Houssin, along with Cédric Ramadier, Anne Bouin, and Françoise de Guilbert. All of them wanted to do *La Reine des fourmis* (The Queen of the ants) right away. That was in November 1995 and they wanted the album for the following September.

**Fred:** Frédéric Houssin's enthusiasm for the project, the speed with which he took decisions, those were great times. He provided intelligent advice and allowed us to take the risks we wanted to take (double pages with 100% text, for example). It was our first book, we didn't have any experience, but we had the feeling that we were being listened to and that, at the same time, we were learning. And Frédéric found the title for us too. Our working title was "À qui le poil?" (Who's hair) or "Poil de quoi?" (Hair of what?). But the album was a serious inquiry, which needed a more dramatic title. It became *La Reine des fourmis a disparu*. (The Queen of the ants has disappeared) When you look at it now, from a graphic point of view, it's an album very much of its time, very Creative Education<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> An American educational publishing house founded in 1932, The Creative Company, originally known as the Creative Educational Society, would become, in the 1980s, an important actor in children's and young people's literature. It was under the influence of Rita Marshall, the Creative Director of the company's offshoot, Creative Editions, that Roberto Innocenti's earliest albums, and Sarah Moon's *Little Red Riding Hood* saw the light of day.



La Reine des fourmis a disparu, Albin Michel jeunesse, 1996

**In fact, all your albums have something in common: a traditional, elegant design ...**

**Fred:** Our book designs owe a lot to the talent of William Boni, but we'll talk about that later ... We try not to get too caught up in fads. We like to make books that you wouldn't want to get rid of when you move house...

**François:** Even though, for our twentieth anniversary, Albin Michel is going to republish *La Reine des fourmis* with a new design (a slightly lighter background colour, and full-page illustrations).

**At the same time you were working on La Reine des fourmis with Albin Michel, you were also involved in projects with Le Seuil ...**

**François:** At Le Seuil, Jacques Binsztok and Brigitte Morel were interested in our work but not in our ant story. Meanwhile, I was showing my illustrations to other publishers; I had my final year work on *Freaks*, which people told me was totally not for children. Apart from Jacques Binsztok. And that's the way that the adventure story, *Jésus Betz*, began, even if it took a lot longer than *La Reine des fourmis*.

**And, at the same time, both of you began to publish books independently of one another.**

**François:** Frédéric Houssin gave me the job of illustrating a text by Anne Jonas called *Solinké du grand fleuve*, (Solinké of the great river) which came out three months before *La Reine des fourmis*.

**Fred:** And I published *Mon ami crocodile* (My crocodile friend) in the Zéphyr collection. At Le Seuil, I also illustrated a text by Philippe-Henri Turin, *Une aventure de Wharf le pirate* (An adventure of Wharf the pirate). All of that happened at the same time.



Le Secret des nuages, Albin Michel jeunesse, 1997

### **Which children's books inspired you in that period (1995/1996)?**

**Fred:** We were still at the Émile Cohl School when *The Last Giants* by François Place came out. Immediately, that album for adults made me think: "Why aren't there more albums like that?" Why deprive children of 8 years of age images, strong stories, albums really made for them? The publishers said that it wouldn't work, but Place's original book certainly did!

**François:** Anyway, we didn't feel at ease with the world of very young children. The album that really took my breath away was Mattotti's *Eugenio*. A complex story with incredibly beautiful pictures. And Michael Sowa as well.

**Fred:** My mother was a volunteer librarian in the village, so I was able to borrow whatever I wanted! I didn't feel able to do things as simple and powerful as Kazuo Iwamura's *The Mouse Family*. For me, that was the high point of tenderness for small children. We want to be with them. Without the sentimentality of *La famille Passiflore*.

**François:** With us, it was more the collections of Perrault's tales, with old school illustrations. You could say that I didn't have any background in modern children's literature.

**Fred:** When you take a close look, it's really the ideas developed in the field of children's literature that are taken up in advertising and graphic design. For example in the late 1990s, with the setting up of Editions du Rouergue. You can also see it in festival posters. Emmanuelle Houdart, who started in children's literature, now has a much wider sphere of influence.

**But, on the other hand, artists working in the advertising industry are looking for a new kind of freedom in illustrated books for children and young people. We saw an example of that in our interview with Frédéric Marais<sup>4</sup>.**

**François:** Today, there are illustrators in children's literature, like Dedieu and Courgeon, who've spent twenty years working in advertising, but I wanted to go directly to children's literature. It was probably harder and less well paid but, for me, the choice was very clear. Anyway, apart for covers for novels, there aren't very many other fields that need illustrators. And I didn't want to do comics. Working together meant that we could focus on the subjects we really wanted to work on.

**Fred:** There's a militant aspect to working for children, to creating readers. Every one of us, working away in our own little corner, has, in the end, made the same choice. In the beginning, we tried to work alone. Binsztok suggested I write for Mattotti, and Loustal, while Albin Michel suggested that François provide illustrations for Bernard Werber and Bernard Clavel. But we both refused, without talking to one another

<sup>4</sup> See our feature on Thierry Dedieu in *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, No. 286.

about it. We wanted to do things that only we could do. Books that nobody else but us could do. Cute, isn't it?

***Fred, you began with pictures and, at a given moment, you opted for words. How did this change come about?***

**Fred:** Well, I never stopped drawing. I think that pictures and words are two ways of telling stories, two ways of writing. At the outset, I believed I could think up my stories and illustrate them all on my own like a big boy. But the success of *La Reine des fourmis* encouraged us to keep working together. For me, working for older children meant that we could add a string to our bow in terms of what we usually proposed to children. It was an opening towards literature and the pictorial arts.

***When you talk about reaching out towards the pictorial arts it brings to mind the visual quotations we find in François's work. Is that based on an intention to educate?***

**François:** No, that's not the intention. My background is painting. I started with acrylics before moving on to oils, and my objective, really, is to create beautiful images, some of them referencing particular artists. That's true of *L'Île au trésor* (Treasure Island) which is a homage to the great American painter-illustrators like N.C. Wyeth. It was the first book I did with oils, in 1999. For me, the book was a turning point. With oils, you go a lot further, as if you had more pixels available to you. And I always work in a slightly larger format. Making designs smaller enables you to reduce the number of mistakes. You become more precise.

***So, it's the turn of the century, you're work is well received by the critics ...***

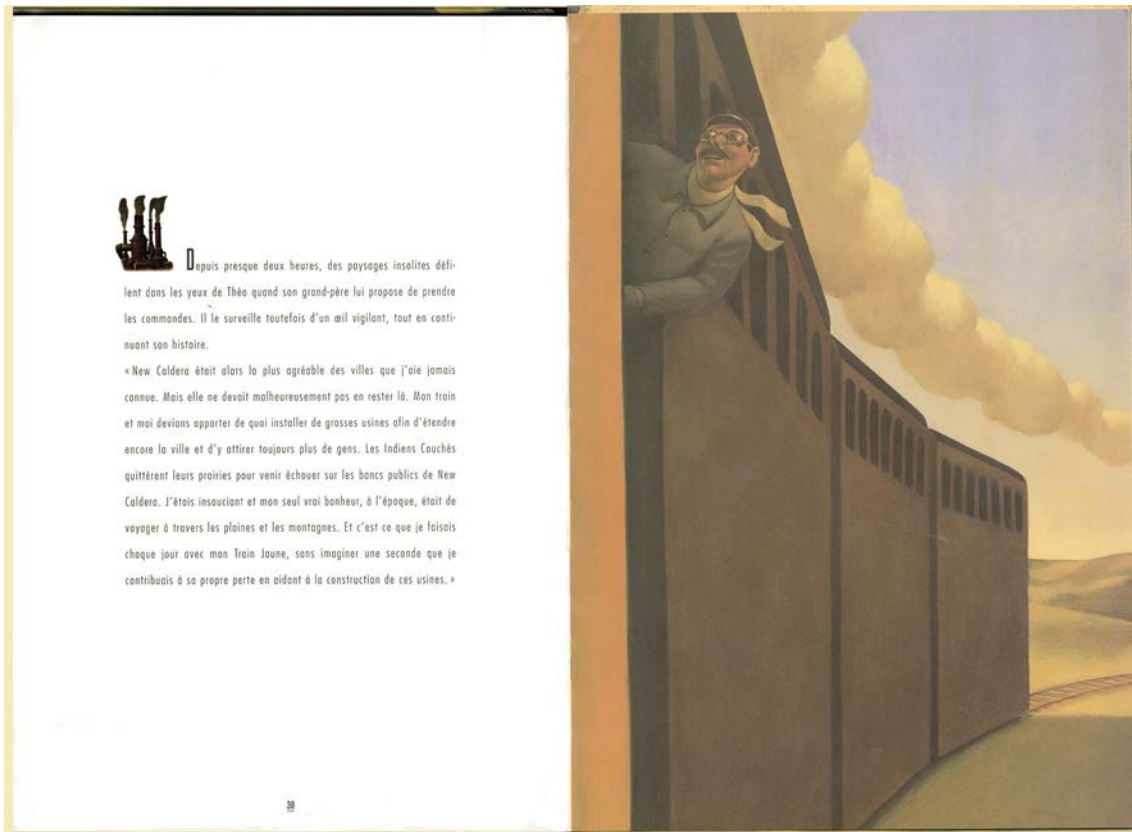
**François:** Our first albums didn't really sell that much, but they won prizes, which was a real encouragement to us. The Goncourt Jeunesse Prize, the Sorcière Prize organised by bookstores specialising in literature for young people ...

**Fred:** We soon realised that our symbiotic relationship worked well, like the relationship between a clown fish and a sea anemone. It meant that François could draw what he wanted, while my stories didn't correspond to my drawings, but, rather to François's. You can tell any kind of story with his drawings! Animals, explorers, pirates ... We soon started work on *Le Secret des nuages* (The secret of clouds, Albin Michel, 1997), *Le Jardin de Max et Gardénia* (Max and Gardénia's garden", Albin Michel, 1998), and *Le Train jaune* (The Yellow Train", Le Seuil, 1998).

***A marriage of convenience?***

**Fred:** But no, we had already been mates for five or six years. The difference was that, while we'd previously just messed around together, now we were actually working together. We already had great chemistry, and we had the same attitude to money. You don't become friends by chance. François can change my words, I can react to what he draws, and the relationship between words and pictures in our albums is constructed in that way, from beginning to end. When there are two of you, the thing can't work unless you accept criticism from the other guy. To develop our partnership, we both put egotistical concerns to one side. We struggled in the beginning, but we soon understood that this approach gave us a great deal of creative freedom.

**François:** We were criticised too – Fred's vocabulary was too complicated, my illustrations were too dark, the whole thing wasn't really "children's literature". When our publisher asked us for simpler stories and jollier drawings so that it all worked better, we said no. *Le Secret des nuages*, for example, is an album that we did in our own way. But it didn't sell very well. So then we decided that we were going to do moggies; that's where *Max et Gardénia* came from, even if cats aren't my favourite thing. We thought that our cat story was going to work really well and that our *Yellow Train* was going to be more difficult. But it happened the other way round, at least in the beginning. The moral being that if you make calculations you always get them wrong.



Le Train jaune, Seuil jeunesse, 1998

**Listening to you, it's easy to understand that the initial spark is always a theme.**

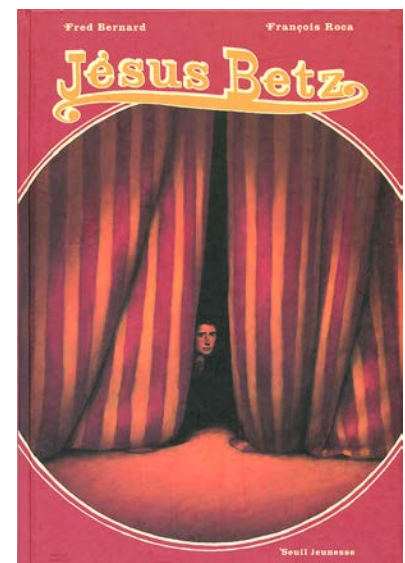
**François:** An Indian in the city. We start from there, we work on it, and it becomes *L'Indien de la Tour Eiffel*. But *Le train jaune* started with the drawings I'd done for the Bologna competition. The story was developed afterwards. We also did *Cosmos* (1999) during that period. It's our homage to the series *Cosmos 1999*, and to *The Fourth Dimension*. And my farewell to the airbrush. Even if, at the same time, I was doing *L'Île au trésor* in oils. It was a fairly "Sputnik" approach to SF, with a nod to *Forbidden Planet*. We had a lot of fun doing it, but it didn't really take off. It took us two years to sell 5,000 copies. *Monsieur Cloud, nuagiste* (Mister Nuage, cloud artist) came out in the same year as *Cosmos*, and, like *The Yellow Train*, it started with pictures that I'd done for Bologna, but these ones in black and white on scratch card (a crazy amount of work). I wasn't selected, but Jacques Binsztok, who was on the jury, wanted to make a book out of them.

**Fred:** It's one of the few short texts I've written that I really like. But it's a very unusual book.

**François:** Only graphic artists bought it.

**Where would you situate the end of your trial-and-error period?**

**François:** I think it was with *Jésus Betz*, which was published by Le Seuil in 2001. Based on my final year project on *Freaks*, Jacques gave us *carte blanche*, telling us to "really go for it". But getting the rights for a film adaptation turned out to be very difficult, and, after all, what could we add to that perfect film? So, based on that universe, Fred started to write an original story. Jacques Binsztok didn't care if it was children's literature or not.





**Fred:** Jacques Binsztok is a gambler. Whereas Albin Michel told us “Be careful, guys”, Jacques said “Go for it, lads, we’ll see how it works out”. If you don’t bet, you don’t win. Recently, he told me that *Jésus Betz* was one of the five books that he was proudest of having published.

### ***In fact, Jésus Betz isn’t a very easy album ...***

**François:** And it wasn’t very easy to do either. When Fred read me his story, it didn’t need any pictures. It was already full of really strong mental images. There was an incredible level of emotion to it.

**Fred:** I didn’t really agree with that. I found that, on the contrary, it needed François’s pictures to soften it. There were no descriptions in the text. Seeing *Jésus Betz*, with his honest face, makes the whole story possible.

**François:** I needed a lot of time before starting work on it ...

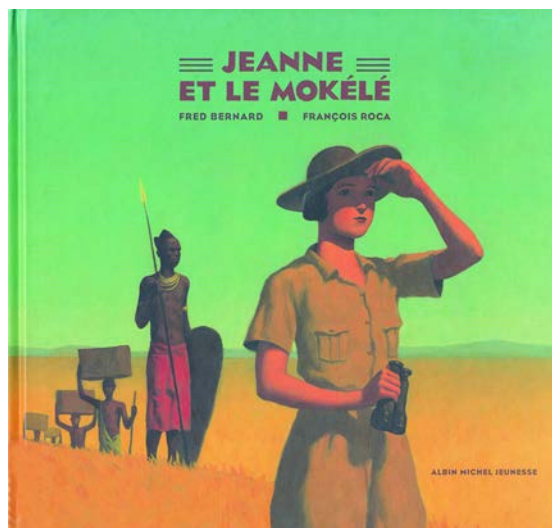
**Fred:** The pictures gradually calm the text down. As we advance through the album, as the character climbs the social ladder, there is more and more light.

**François:** We start as Charles Dickens and end up as Hopper.

### ***Which corresponds to a period that we often find in your work.***

**François:** The time when painters, especially American painters, brought their talent to the field of illustration for the first time, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the techniques of Impressionism enabled Wyeth, Rockwell and the others to become active in the world of book publishing. As an illustrator, Gustave Doré had to use engraving. In his exhibition at the Orsay, he was able to display the work of a painter informed by an entirely different sense of freedom. In the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, those two worlds met, first in black and white, then in colour. Before the great years of graphics, with Cassandre and Savignac, once again turned approaches to illustration upside down. This painterly illustration also echoes our knowledge of the cinema; not the films that came out when we were young, but the films we saw on TV. Johnny Weissmuller’s *Tarzan* films, which are more of our parents’ or grandparents’ time (between 1932 and 1948), are the best example of this kind of inspiration. You just have to look at *Jeanne et le Mokélé* (Jane, of course ...).

**Fred:** *Jésus Betz* and *Jeanne et le Mokélé*, which came out in the same year, both won the Goncourt Jeunesse Prize. Edmonde Charles-Roux preferred the first, and Michel Tournier the second; but as it was the same authors. When we turned up to collect our twin prizes, they were surprised that we were so young. At the time of Rouergue, our traditional approach was out of phase. But no, we weren’t a couple of pensioners doing dad-style albums. What’s funny is that we thought that *Jésus Betz* would meet with a problematic reception. Jacques even thought that there might be legal action. But that album got a lot of support from the people who liked it. It was even chosen by the newspaper, *La Croix*, as its Christmas favourite. Jacques was kind of disappointed ...



### ***So, the success of Jésus Betz ushered in a new period, a period of freedom.***

**Fred:** Although we didn’t really sell many copies of *Jésus Betz*, we have never had more press than for that album, and it made everything that followed possible. It was up to us to add links to that chain: *L’Homme-Bonsai* (The bonsai man) for Albin Michel Jeunesse, who were increasingly enthusiastic thanks to Marion Jablonski and our editor, Lucette Savier. Then *L’Indien de la Tour Eiffel* (The Indian of the Eiffel Tower) at

Seuil Jeunesse, which was soon to close, with the buyout and the departure of Jacques Binsztok. But with freedom comes responsibility. We can't do just anything with it.

**François:** *Jésus Betz*'s marvellous reception encouraged us to take risks but, at the same time, we were aware that you can't do too many albums that don't sell too well. Three commercial failures and your publisher says goodbye to you. *La Comédie des Ogres* (Albin Michel 2002, Chrétien de Troyes Prize 2003) reassured Albin Michel after a number of more difficult albums that didn't sell well. *Ushi* (Albin Michel 2000) was more reassuring.

**Fred:** Even so, *Ushi* is the story of a little blind Indian orphan boy. At any event, we're only able to do things well if we want to do them in the first place. For *Ushi*, I took inspiration from the biography of Ishi, the last Yana Indian in California, published in the Terre Humaine collection.

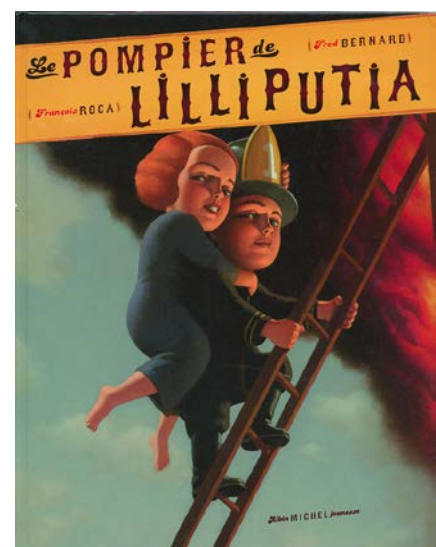


Jésus Betz, Seuil jeunesse, 2001

**Le Pompier de Lilliputia (*The fireman from Lilliputia*) is positioned fairly directly in the wake of Jésus Betz.**

**Fred:** It was Olivier Vadrot, a scenographer friend, who I thank at the beginning of the book, who gave us the story. He was preparing an exhibition on the theme of monstrous works in the history of art and, while researching the project, he came across the story. He was convinced that it was for us. Almost everything in it is true; the only thing I invented was the Mayor of New York's hidden son.

**François:** We loved getting to grips with that story. Since Dreamland really existed, I was able to use photographic documents. The album scared adults (the firemen were ok, but the dwarves!), but it won the Incorruptibles Prize awarded by children (who haven't yet learned to look away, like adults have).



**However, the story has a happy ending.**

**François:** When things start badly, they have to finish well. Or the other way round. It's one of my favourite stories.

**Fred:** Where we find the traditional motif of the abandoned child, ancient tale-style.

**Freaks are a recurrent theme throughout your work.**

**Fred:** My mother's best friend was seriously handicapped, to the degree that she frightened everyone who didn't know her. When my school friends came to the house and she was there, they behaved as if there were a dead elephant in the room. Since she had a business *baccalauréat*, she gave maths lessons to my sister. Handicap, and people's reaction to handicap has always moved me. The double whammy of suffering and being marginalised is a terrible thing. This funny, lively woman, Babette, was a big part of my childhood. I myself had a serious accident when I was 23. I couldn't move for a number of months. It was as if I didn't have any arms or legs. I was totally dependent. And the people who came to visit me looked at me with pity and talked to me as if I were a baby, with a sentimental cloyingness which horrified me. Babette and that accident are two founding events in terms of what I am as a man and an author.

**François:** The (brave) teachers who worked on *Jésus Betz* with their students told us that the children accepted him as he was. The thing that they were upset about was that his mum abandoned him.

**Fred:** Once, in a classroom, a little girl gave me a letter addressed to Jésus Betz because her father had no arms or legs and no one in the class knew about it. For her, the book was an incredible thing.

**As well as the fact that you share them, it seems that all your obsessions are linked ...  
Monstrosity, the circus, the movies, aircraft, trains, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ...**

**Fred:** You can see that now, but we weren't aware of it when we were producing our albums, one after the other.

**François:** Thanks to Eddy Mitchell and his "Last Sessions"! Our knowledge of film comes from TV. Pirates, cowboys, black and white and Technicolor movies are things we have in common with a lot of illustrators of our generation. I'm thinking of Christophe Blain, for example.

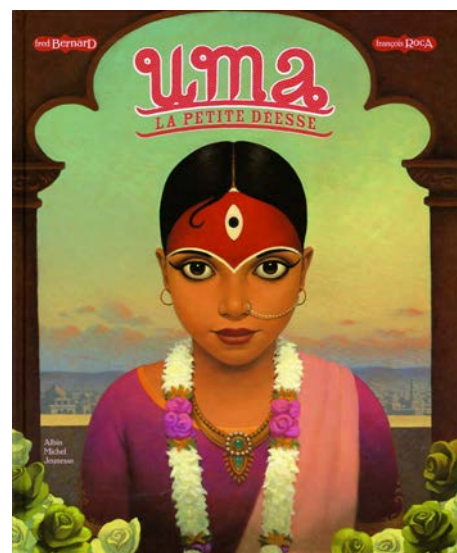
**Then there was Jeanne et le Mokélé and Uma, the Small Goddess. These two albums map out a new role for female characters in your work.**

**François:** We thought that there was something of a lack of strong female characters in children's literature.

**Fred:** In my family, it was always the women who taught me what was important. We'll see what happens when women rule the world; we've already seen how it works out with men. We could try to do without machismo. You don't need to be a genius to know that it would represent real progress. The emphasis we place on our female characters derives from all that, and you can also see it in my work for comic books. But, when you think about it, they're female characters that we construct as masculine characters; they have the same strength, the same freedom. Anya, for example...

**François:** Not Uma! She has a kind of fragility that I find moving. Rose<sup>5</sup> is cute too (she's my daughter!).

**Fred:** They're cute, but they're brave and they challenge authority ...



<sup>5</sup> *Rose et l'automate de l'Opéra*, Albin Michel Jeunesse 2013.

### **And what about Anya?**

**François:** One year – it was in February – I was invited to Minsk in Belarus. When I got there it was 20 below. To get from the airport to the city you had to cross an immense frozen forest. Even though I never go skiing, I thought it was magnificent, Siberian. When I was back in France, I asked Fred to write a cold story, with a beautiful blonde princess. A Russian-style world that we hadn't explored yet.

**Fred:** I linked that desire to a story that I had in mind for a while, about how an entire generation was destroyed to ensure the destruction of a single child, like the Romans who killed all the new-born babies in order to kill the Baby Jesus. I managed to combine the two by adding a really evil witch. When François talked to me about the cold, I started seeing white animals, albinos.

**François:** It's the advert for Beauval Zoo with the white tiger that you see everywhere on the metro; that way we left the wolves to *Game of Thrones*! I wanted to make Anya a Pre-Raphaelite character. In the end, she's almost too perfect, she's afraid of nothing (with the animals keeping her company, that's easy to understand). It's my blue album! At the end of the story, the dragon comes and heats everything up. It's not my favourite part of the album.

**Fred:** But when we're in the realm of fantasy tales, we have to really go for it. The cold war there is very oppressive, and we have to get out of it in style!

**François:** In this book, more than in any of the others, the bright whiteness of the pages with text on them bothers me.

**Fred:** But it's the narrative that governs the way in which the text is laid out, not the book design. I'm not going to add text just to balance the pages out.



### **Is that why we sometimes see, in the pages entirely dedicated to text, graphic elements that bring those pages nearer to the image?**

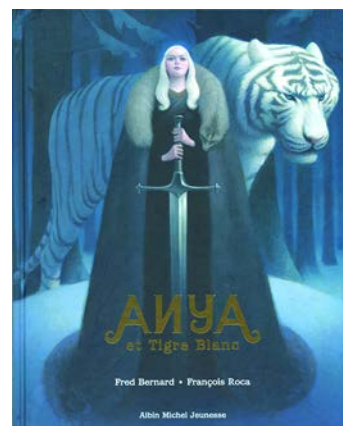
**François:** That's the role of "massacres" (a French term for hunting trophies) in *Anya*, and of the little ants in black and white in *La Reine des fourmis*. For *Rex et moi*, where the text is shorter and the pictures are on a white background without decoration, we managed to get round that problem.

### **Is it easy for a graphic artist to work with you?**

**François:** Oh no! We give our opinion about everything. But, William Boni, who works on our albums at Albin Michel, is a really good graphic artist.

**Fred:** We started working with William on *The Yellow Train* at Le Seuil in 1997. But then he went to work for Albin Michel. He knows us well and we owe him a lot, he works on 95% of our books. Sometimes he designs letters for us to get as close as possible to what we want. It's rare that people would do that for you.

**François:** He does magnificent title pages and cover pages for us. *Anya* is



the best of all. Right now, we're finishing the cover for our September album.

### ***Another tiger?***

**François:** I wanted a lion, but Fred said no!

**Fred:** You see a lot more tigers than lions at the circus!

### ***What is the latest album about?***

**Fred:** Basically, it's about the problem of belief. Can you be friends with someone if you don't have the same beliefs? The story takes place in the Winter Circus, and it's about the question of whether or not we believe in ghosts. Everyone keeps on believing what they've always believed, but the old parrot and the young monkey stay friends. It's an album in which we once again apply the lightness of *La Reine des fourmis*. The theme of belief is dealt with in comedic terms and the fact that literacy is an obstacle to credulity, transferred to the animal world, is part of that lightness.

### ***Illiteracy and credulity, even if we approach them from the point of view of comedy, are strong themes. How do you place them within the architecture of a project?***

**Fred:** I don't want them to be the subject. I have them in mind before starting, but I want them to be swallowed up by the story that's being told. It has to be obvious enough that adults notice it, but not so obvious that it disturbs children. Disease, death, handicap ... We've talked about a lot of serious things, but never in a full on way.

### ***Based on the text, how do you choose what you show in the images? When Jésus Betz is tied to the mast of his ship, for example, we could have seen whales, or even Blériot's airplane. But we don't see anything like that ...***

**Fred:** I wrote the phrase "whale hunt" to describe the image I was thinking about. But François thought that it was more effective not to show it. He wanted us to get closer to the character. It's the first time he's happy, up there on his mast. If we had shown whales, we would have had a great action scene, but we would have lost empathy for the character. And he was right. We really like to surprise one another. Maybe that's our favourite thing to do!

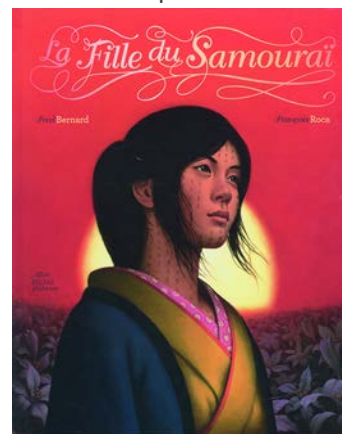
### ***Does this process involve rough work?***

**François:** I don't do much preparatory work. Pictures are constructed by defining the elements of which they are composed, rather than via rough work. It's at this point that we use documentation. For the Opéra, we had the right to a very thoroughgoing visit of the Palais Garnier, where we took over 500 photos. The Winter Circus is also a building that actually exists which we were able to visit.

**Fred:** When the text is more or less finished, we spend two or three hours together working on editing.

**François:** That's where my work starts. I have just one title for a picture. "The Meeting", "The Final Combat"... I know what it's for, the intention behind it. Every picture has to be original compared to the preceding image, so that all of them help us to advance visually.

**Fred:** But at this point, the writing is still moving, a paragraph can overlap two pages to make the scene work better. In *La Fille du samouraï* (The samurai's daughter) there was an additional level in the narration, a man who attends the play recounts it and adds a kind of mirror love story. It was too complicated.



**François:** Even before the text is written, we know that there will be key moments, strong scenes. The fire in *Le Pompier de Lilliputia*, for example. These images have to arrive at the right moment.

**In Max et Gardénia, when the text talks about being trapped in a cage, the picture doesn't show it ...**

**François:** A tiny bit on Page 39!

**Fred:** But there's something I regret about this album. The album as a whole is about the mother's quest, and at the end, we could at least have let the reader see her.

**You really like surprise endings, some of them enigmatic. At the end of Cheval Vêtu, for example, why is he allowed to leave with the mare?**

**Fred:** But he's banished; he's just killed the Sacred Horse! The mare is pregnant by Cheval Vêtu (Painted Horse); for the Indians, she carries evil within her. This question touches on one of the great difficulties of albums whose intention is to tell wide-ranging stories in such small formats (ours are rarely longer than 40 pages). Some stories could be developed further, but we decide to stop there. That's probably why I like to do graphic novels, which give me more freedom in terms of the format. I couldn't just stop with *L'Homme-Bonsai*.



**Because, Fred, you are also an author of comic books, and L'Homme-Bonsai (The bonsai man) became a comic book six years after it came out as a children's album.<sup>6</sup> Does this mean that the album wasn't enough for you?**

**Fred:** It's one of our favourite albums! But there were strong elements in that story that couldn't be used in children's literature. When there's something that's holding back work on an album, we have a kind of understanding. There are two of us, and the publisher is the third voice. If I'm on my own defending an idea against the other two, I fall in with the majority. Then, I sometimes visit comic books for adults to help me get over my artistic block. In 2001, with the success of *Jésus Betz*, I had to be careful not to shut myself away in a career as an author of texts, and comic books for adults was my response to that fear. I did that with *Jeanne Picquigny*<sup>7</sup> and with *L'Homme-Bonsai*. And even after the graphic novel, it's not a story that I'm finished with yet.

**Are you, like François Place, going to need a novel to do that?**

**Fred:** I don't know ... I think I wouldn't be too keen without François's drawings, or mine if I'm doing a comic book. And it's a militant position. I didn't want to think of the novel as a superior form to illustrated genres. I enjoy this approach to writing. I love reading novels, but I don't know what I could add by having a go myself. The illustrated novel isn't a bastard art: all the great 19<sup>th</sup> century classics were illustrated at the

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<sup>6</sup> *L'Homme-Bonsai*, coll. Delphine Chédru. Paris, Delcourt, 2009. 121 p.-[5] p. de pl. (Mirages)

<sup>7</sup> *Une aventure de Jeanne Picquigny*. Seuil, 2003 / Casterman, 2012. Series of graphic novels written and illustrated by Fred Bernard.

start. The illustrations were removed later. Like music is removed from a film because the images are enough. Words and images generate emotion in the reader. *The Call of the Wild* and *Les Misérables* don't lose anything by being illustrated.

### ***It's the eternal debate between popular literature and high literature.***

**Fred:** Literature for children and young people is popular literature! And some books, by Jack London or Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, have been placed in that category so that they don't cause too much disturbance. London and his socialism, Stevenson up against Victorian rigour, be it social mores or the world of finance, were too troublesome.

### ***Twenty years is a fair old time. What do you feel looking back?***

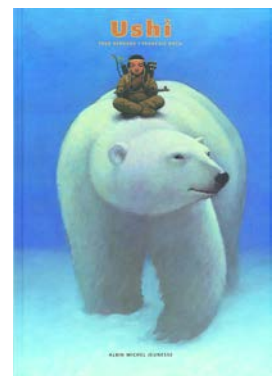
**Fred:** At the start, I told myself that we had a reservoir of ideas that might eventually dry up. We know great musicians and novelists whose oeuvre runs out of steam after a few records or books. But the more we go on, the more ideas, desire and energy we have.

**François:** The basic thing is to do different stuff all the time, to surprise ourselves, to surprise our readers (and our publisher as well, while we're at it!).

**Fred:** The feeling that the context is increasingly difficult adds to that energy. The feeling that we have to fight gives us the strength for the struggle. For ten years, we never talked about figures, and we didn't know what an operating account was. Today, we always talk about sales figures with our publishers.

**François:** It's also us who, with maturity, have decided to take a closer look. If you don't take any interest in it, then you're vulnerable. It was when we started poking around in the figures that we were able to earn more money than we otherwise would have – and it's certain that it's easier to do that when there are two of you. Even if they don't much like it, authors shouldn't be afraid of figures. Being familiar with them is part of the reality of our work.

**Fred:** Publishing is an activity characterised by fun and ideas, but also by money. That doesn't take anything away from our happiness at working for over fifteen years with Lucette Savier, our publisher since *Ushi* at Albin Michel.



### ***From what you say, it seems that you have a great deal of strength, but also a need to stay permanently alert. What's your biggest fear?***

**Fred:** The thing that's a threat for us, and for all authors, is if publishers don't keep old titles going. Only two of our albums, one at Le Seuil, the other at Albin Michel, are out-of-print. That's where we're lucky, because it's the accumulation of the rights on sales from these books, even if they're modest, that makes it possible for us to do a new album every year.

### ***What was the happiest time of those twenty years?***

**Fred and François:** *Jésus Betz*. As much for what we succeeded in doing as for the incredible reception it received.

**François:** When we start a new album, we have great ideas for it. But in the end, of course, the finished product isn't quite as good as we hoped it might be. But for that one, the result was better than we had hoped for. We don't really know what happened, but it was incredible, including the phenomenal success of the theatre adaptation, which toured the world.

**Fred:** We also have a soft spot for *La Reine des fourmis*, our first album ...

### **A regret?**

**Fred:** That *Le Pompier de Lilliputia* sells so badly ...

**François:** Frankly, you don't come across a story like that every day. I've rarely been so excited to start work on an album.

### **A dream?**

**Fred:** Our hope is that it continues, but a dream is something greater than hope. I'd love to see a film adaptation of one of our books. Above all, really above all, *L'Homme-Bonsai*. It seems that Guillermo del Toro really likes it ...

**François:** When our characters come to life, as happened for Rose thanks to a theatre troupe from Troyes, it's incredibly moving.

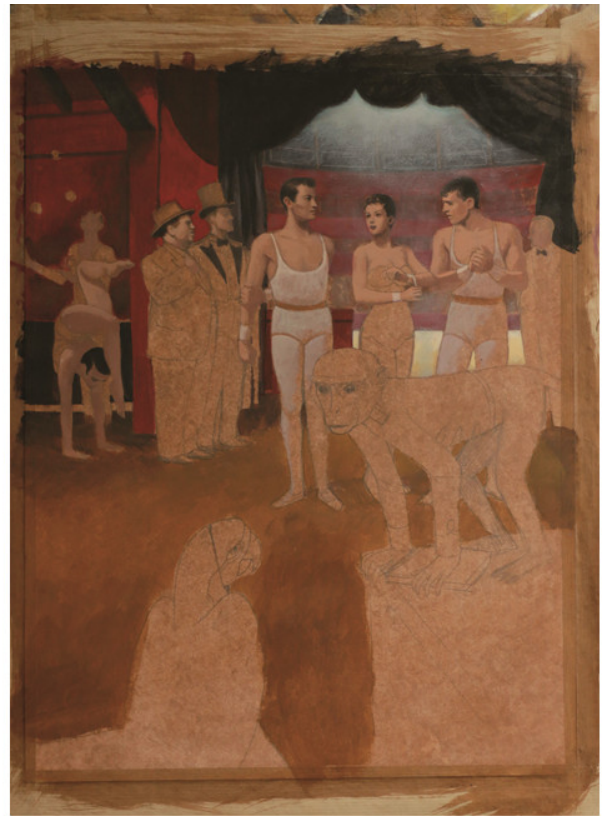
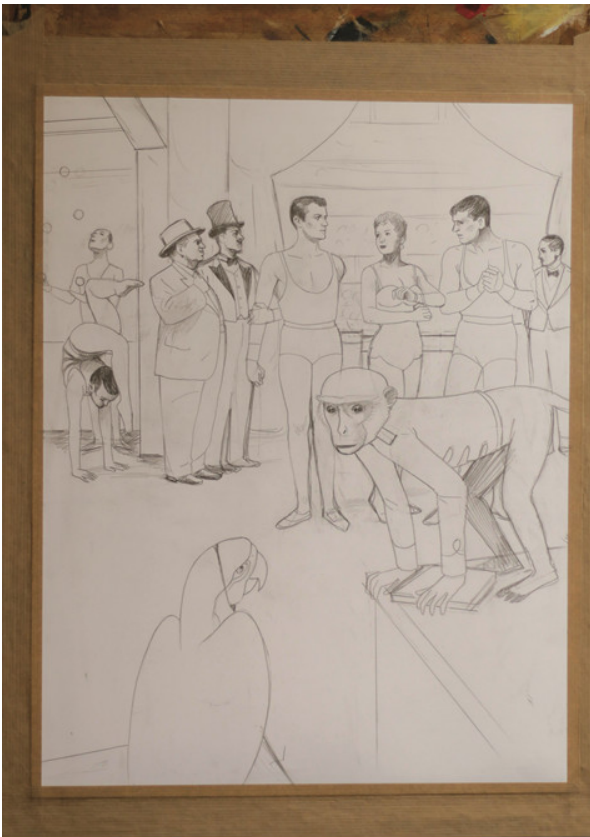
**Fred:** Our albums are our little cinema; the big cinema would be good too!

"Fred Bernard François Roca à deux voix", interview by Brigitte Andrieux and Marie Lallouet, June 2, 2016, *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, 2016, n°290, pp. 88-107. Translated by Michael Lavin.





WORK IN PROGRESS



# AWARDS' LIST

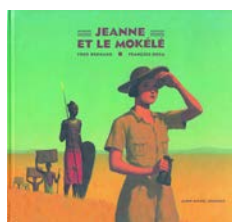
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## La Comédie des ogres

2003 : Prix Chrétien de Troyes

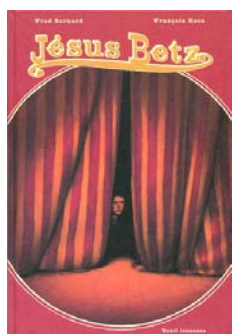
2003 : Prix de la Ville de Cherbourg-Octeville, Cycle II



## Jeanne et le Mokélé

2002 : Prix Alphonse Daudet du Livre de jeunesse

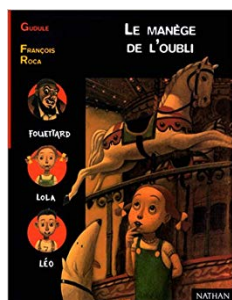
2002 : Prix de l'Illustration Jeunesse de Rueil-Malmaison (Meilleur album)



## Jésus Betz

2001 : Prix Baobab de l'album

2002 : Prix Alphonse Daudet du Livre de jeunesse



## Le Manège de l'oubli

1998 : Prix des Trois vallées

1998 : Prix Tatoulu



## Le Pompier de Lilliputia

2011 : Prix des Incorruptibles, Catégorie CE2-CM1



### **La Reine des fourmis a disparu**

1996 : Prix Jérôme Main  
1997 : Prix Alphonse Daudet du Livre de jeunesse  
1997 : Prix Goncourt Jeunesse  
1997 : Prix Sorcière



### **Rex et moi**

2009 : Prix Livrentête, Catégorie Images



### **Le Secret des nuages**

1998 : Prix À vos livres !



### **Solinké du grand fleuve**

1996 : Prix Chrétien de Troyes



### **Terriblement vert**

2002 : Prix Sorcière



## Ushi

2002 : Prix Livres élus (Le Puy en Velay)



2017: Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters

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New editions:

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### 1997

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### 1998

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### 1999

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### 2000

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### 2001

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New editions:

Éd. collector, Seuil Jeunesse, 2001

Seuil Jeunesse, 2015, in the series « Seuil'issime »

### 2002

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### 2003

**L'homme-Bonsai [The Bonsai-man]**. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2003. 34 p.

## 2004

**L'Indien de la tour Eiffel [The Indian of the Eiffel Tower]**. Paris, Seuil Jeunesse, 2004. [30] p.

## 2005

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## 2006

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## 2007

**Rex & moi [Rex and me]**. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2007. [32] p.

New edition:

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## 2008

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## 2009

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New edition:

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## 2015

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## 2016

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## 2017

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## 2018

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### *Adaptations*

## 2005

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Bauchau, Henry

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**De jour en jour : Le dernier jour [From day to day: the last day],** ill. François Roca, 1997. 133 p. (Lune noire, Policier, 2)

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Drozd, Irina

**Un tueur à ma porte [A killer at my door]**. Paris, Bayard Jeunesse, 2000. 89 p. (Les Romans de « Je bouquine »)

Gillot, Laurence

**Coup de foudre [Love at first sight]**. Paris, Bayard Jeunesse, 2001. 96 p. (Les Romans de Je bouquine, 112)

Hugues, Monica

**L'île des rêves interdits [The island of forbidden dreams]**. Bayard Jeunesse, 2000. 281 p.

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**L'été de mes treize ans [The summer I turned thirteen]**. Paris, Bayard Jeunesse, 2003. 74 p. (Les Romans de « Je bouquine »)

Raynaud, Florence

**Le traîneau d'Oloona [Oloona's sledge]**. Bayard Jeunesse, 2002. 110 p. (Les Romans de « Je bouquine»)

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**La reine des pirates [The pirate queen]**. Paris, Père Castor Flammarion, 2004. 146 p. (Castor poche, Aventure, 976)

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**Arthur : la pierre prophétique [Arthur: the prophetic stone]**. Hachette Jeunesse, 2004. 602 p. (Le Livre de poche Jeunesse)

**Arthur : à la croisée des chemins [Arthur: at the crossroads]**. Hachette Jeunesse, 2005. 668 p. (Le Livre de poche Jeunesse)

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Doyle, Arthur Conan

**Les aventures de Sherlock Holmes [The adventures of Sherlock Holmes]**. Toulouse, Milan, 2000-2001 (Milan poche junior, Polar)

v.1: 147 p. ; v.2 : 135 p.

Hendry Frances Mary

**Les enfants du négrier [The children of the slaver]**. Toulouse, Milan, 2003. 317 p. (Milan poche histoire, 16)

Piquemal, Michel

**Moi Sitting Bull [I, Sitting Bull]**. Toulouse, Milan, 2002. 125 p. (Milan poche histoire, 3)

Sedgwick, Marcus

**Le livre des damnés, t.2 : La nuit du fantôme [The Book of the Damned, t.2: The Night of the Ghost]**. Toulouse, Milan, 2005. 253 p.

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**Qila, fille des cavernes [Qila, cave girl]**. Toulouse, Milan, 2005. 247 p. (Milan poche histoire, 26)

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« Contes et légendes » series

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**Contes et récits des héros de la Rome antique [Tales and stories of ancient Rome's heroes]**, ill. Emre Ohrun. Paris, Nathan, 2010. 309 p. (Contes et légendes, 36)

Chrétien de Troyes ; Mirande, Jacqueline

**Les chevaliers de la Table ronde [The Knights of the Round Table]**, Jacqueline Mirande, d'après Chrétien de Troyes, ill. Odile Alliet. Paris, Nathan, 2010. 248-16 p. (Contes et légendes, 7)

Coppin, Brigitte

**Rois et reines de France : contes et récits [Kings and queens of France: tales and stories]**, ill. Nicolas Duffaut. Paris, Nathan, 2011. 184 p. (Contes et légendes, 57)

Évano, Brigitte

**Contes et légendes de l'Égypte ancienne [Tales and Legends of Ancient Egypt]**, ill. de Marcelino Truong. Paris, Nathan, 2010. 151 p. (Contes et légendes, 13)

Ovide ; Gillot, Laurence

**Les métamorphoses d'Ovide [The metamorphoses of Ovid]**, [adapt. par] Laurence Gillot, ill. Arnauld Rouèche. Paris, Nathan, 2011. 239 p. (Contes et légendes, 21)

Grenier, Christian

**Contes et légendes des héros de la mythologie [Tales and Legends of Heroes of Mythology]**, ill. Philippe Kailhenn. Paris, Nathan, 2010. 241 p. (Contes et légendes, 16)

**Contes et récits des héros de la Grèce antique [Tales and stories of the heroes of ancient Greece]**, ill. Christian Heinrich. Paris, Nathan, 2010. 242 p. (Contes et légendes, 41)

**Les douze travaux d'Hercule [The twelve labours of Hercules]**, ill. Philippe Caron. Paris, Nathan, 2010. 261 p. (Contes et légendes, 4)

**Jason et la conquête de la Toison d'or [Jason and the conquest of the Golden Fleece]**, ill. Élène Usdin. Paris, Nathan, 2011. 264 p. (Contes et légendes, 58)

Gudule

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Haraldson, Lars

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# TRANSLATED BOOKS

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**La Comédie des Ogres**, Fred Bernard and François Roca, Editorial Juventud (Spain)

**El bomber de Lilliputia (Le pompier de Lilliputia)**, Fred Bernard and François Roca, Editorial Comanegra (Spain), 2010

**Le Secret des Nuages**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Lumen (Spain)

**Sol negre [Soleil Noir]**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Juventud (Spain)



### CHINESE (SIMPLIFIED)

**La Reine des Fourmis a disparu**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, DUKU CULTURAL EXCHANGE (China)

**Le Pompier de Lilliputia**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, DUKU CULTURAL EXCHANGE (China)

**Rose et l'automate de l'opéra**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, DUKU CULTURAL EXCHANGE (China)



### DANISH

**Dronningen er bortført (La Reine des Fourmis a disparu)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, AGERTOFTS FORLAG A/S (Denmark)

### DUTCH

**Suzanne**, Marie-Ange Guillaume, ill. François Roca, Lemniscaat, 2005 (The Netherlands)



### ENGLISH

**La Reine des Fourmis a disparu**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, ABBEVILLE PRESS (USA)

**The Yellow train (Le Train jaune)**, Alistair Highet and François Roca, Creative Editions, 2001



### GERMAN

**Le Jardin de Max et Gardénia**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, GERSTENBERG GMBH (Germany)

**Jesus Betz (Jésus Betz)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, GERSTENBERG GMBH (Germany), 2002

**Die verschwundene Ameisenkönigin (La Reine des fourmis a disparu)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, GERSTENBERG GMBH (Germany), 1997

**Susanne**, Marie Ange Guillaume, ill. François Roca, Gerstenberg (Germany), 2005





**Ushi**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, GERSTENBERG GMBH (Germany), 2001



## GREEK

**Le fantôme du cirque d'hiver**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Kokkini Klosti Demeni (Greece)

## ITALIAN

**Anya e Tigre Bianca (Anya et le tigre Blanc)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, INTER LOGOS (Italy)



**Cheval vêtu**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, La Margherita Edizioni (Italy)

**La Commedia degli orchi (La Comédie des Ogres)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, La Margherita Edizioni (Italy)

**La Figlia del samurai (La Fille du samurai)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, INTER LOGOS (Italy)

**La maledizione dell'anello d'oro (La Malédiction de l'anneau d'or)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Inter Logos (Italy), 2018

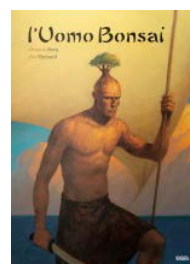
**Il fantasma del circo d'inverno (Le fantôme du cirque d'hiver)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Inter Logos srl (Italy)

**Il pompiere di Lilliputia (Le Pompier de Lilliputia)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, INTER LOGOS (Italy), année



**Le Secret des Nuages**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, La Margherita Edizioni (Italy)

**L'Uomo Bonsai (L'homme-bonsai)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Inter Logos (Italy)



**Rex & Moi**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, La Margherita Edizioni (Italy)

**Rose e l'automa dell'Opera (Rose et l'automate de l'opéra)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, INTER LOGOS (Italy), année

**Sole nero (Soleil Noir)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, La Margherita Edizioni (Italy), 2011



**Uma la petite déesse**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, La Margherita Edizioni (Italy)

## KOREAN

**Cosmos**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, HANMADANG (Korea)

**Jeanne et le Mokélé**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Korea Dewey (Korea)

**La Reine des Fourmis a disparu**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, HANMADANG (Korea)

**Le Jardin de Max et Gardénia**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, HANMADANG (Korea)

**Le Secret des Nuages**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, HANMADANG (Korea)

**Uma la petite déesse**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Tomato House Publishing (Korea)

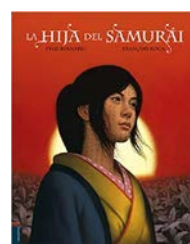
**Ushi**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, HANMADANG (Korea)



## SPANISH

**Anya y Tigre Blanco (Anya et le tigre blanc)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Luis Vives (Spain), 2017

**La Comedia de los ogros (La Comédie des Ogres)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, trad. Pedro Campos Sánchez, Editorial Juventud (Spain)



**La hija del samurái (La Fille du samourai)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Luis Vives (Spain), 2018

**La Reine des Fourmis a disparu**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, LIBRI MUNDI S.A. (Equateur)

**Le pompier de Liliputia**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Comanegra (Spain)

**El Secreto de las nubes (Le Secret des Nuages)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Lumen (Spain), 2003

**Sol negro [Soleil Noir]**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Juventud (Spain)

**Susana [Suzanne]**, Marie Ange Guillaume, ill. François Roca, Editorial Juventud (Spain)

**El Tren amarillo (Le train jaune)**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Lumen (Spain), 2003

**Uma, la pequeña diosa [Uma la petite déesse]**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, Editorial Juventud (Spain)

**Veintiún Elefantes en el puente de Brooklyn [21 éléphants sur le pont de Brooklyn]**, April Jones Price, ill. François Roca, Editorial Juventud (Spain)

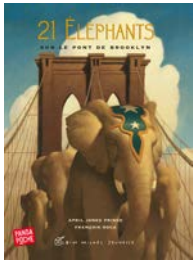


## SWEDISH

**La Reine des Fourmis a disparu**, Fred Bernard and ill. François Roca, TAGO FORLAG (Sweden)

## TOP TEN BOOKS

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### 21 ÉLÉPHANTS SUR LE PONT DE BROOKLYN [TWENTY-ONE ELEPHANTS AND STILL STANDING]

April Jones Prince, ill. François Roca. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2015. 40 p.

After fourteen years of construction, the Brooklyn Bridge was completed, much to the delight of the sister cities it connected: Brooklyn and New York City. One man seized the opportunity to show people in Brooklyn, New York and the world that the Brooklyn Bridge was in fact strong enough to hold even the heaviest of passengers. P. T. Barnum, creator of "The Greatest Show on Earth," would present a show too big for the Big Top and too wondrous to forget...

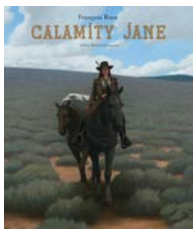


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### ANYA ET TIGRE BLANC [ANYA AND WHITE TIGER]

Fred Bernard, ill. François Roca. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2015. 32 p.

Born in a cold and austere country, Anya, a willing and fearless woman, lives in symbiosis with nature. The children of her generation all disappear, but not Anya. Alas, she is kidnapped at the age of twelve. White Tiger and other animals help her fight a victorious battle against the evil force that freezes the whole country. The palette of blues and greys of the images with their striking frames brings a dramatic tension and an epic breath to this fantastic tale.



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### CALAMITY JANE

François Roca. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2018. 40 p.

Calamity Jane had entrusted her daughter to a couple of travellers who adopted her. For nearly 25 years, Jane sent letters that tell of her profound maternal love and raw tenderness. These powerful texts are accompanied by François Roca's sensitive and grandiose paintings, which render the wilderness of the great outdoors and capture the beauty and fragility of this wounded heroine, modern and free, fighting to survive in the Wild West, a men's world.



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### L'HOMME-BONSAÏ [THE BONSAI MAN]

Fred Bernard, ill. François Roca. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2003. 34 p.

In this fantastic tale, the sea serves as a setting for the extraordinary destiny of a simple potter, forced to board a ship and to travel his whole life. During the vicissitudes of his life, nature gives him a miraculous gift: the tree that grows on his head will give him the strength to take revenge but will also force him to permanently abandon the world of humans.



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## L'INCROYABLE EXPLOIT D'ELINOR [SOAR, ELINOR!]

Tamis Lewis Brown, ill. François Roca. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2011. 48 p.

Elinor Smith, a young American born at the beginning of the 20th century, had decided from her early childhood to become a pilot. At the age of sixteen, she obtained her pilot's certificate and decided to silence the sceptics by accomplishing a feat: to pass under four bridges of New York's harbour... François Roca's illustrations combine documentary precision and evocative power, giving full dimension to this adventure.

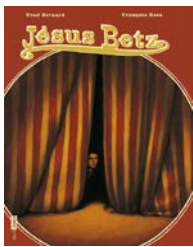


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## L'INDIEN DE LA TOUR EIFFEL [THE INDIAN OF THE EIFFEL TOWER]

Fred Bernard, ill. François Roca. Paris, Seuil Jeunesse, 2004. 40 p.

Two versions of a terrible news item in late nineteenth-century Paris: that of the police, where Billy Powona, a force of nature, of Indian origin, is the ideal culprit of a murder, and that of the narrator who tells the truth of a tragic love story. The powerful illustrations are full of strength and sensuality; they add even more intensity to this tragic story.



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## JÉSUS BETZ [JESUS BETZ]

Fred Bernard, ill. François Roca. Paris, Seuil Jeunesse, 2015. 40 p.

Jesus is born in 1894, without arms and legs. His life is full of obstacles and despair. In a long and touching letter to his mother, he recounts the 33 dates that have marked his life as a trunk-man.

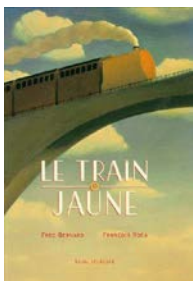


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## LE POMPIER DE LILLIPUTIA [THE FIREMAN OF LILLIPUTIA]

Fred Bernard, ill. François Roca. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2009. 36 p.

Little Henry McQueen is a dwarf; his dream is to become a fireman. It's not easy for him to find his place in the adult world... This moving story finds a charming echo in the large full-page paintings, particularly highlighted by the very large format of the album. A subtle dialogue is established between the text and the images, which are inspired by facts and real places. They serve as a frame for the story of this little boy rejected by his family, but who still finds the courage to flourish and become a hero.

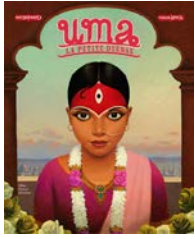


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## LE TRAIN JAUNE [THE YELLOW TRAIN]

Fred Bernard, ill. François Roca. Paris, Seuil Jeunesse, 1998. 40 p.

The driver of the famous Yellow Train that brought the first inhabitants to New Caldera, which has since become a huge city, tells the story of his life to his grandson. He crossed the Ghost Mountains, the virgin forest, the plains populated by Indians... The illustrations, rendering huge spaces, are superb.



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## UMA, LA PETITE DÉESSE [UMA, THE LITTLE GODDESS]

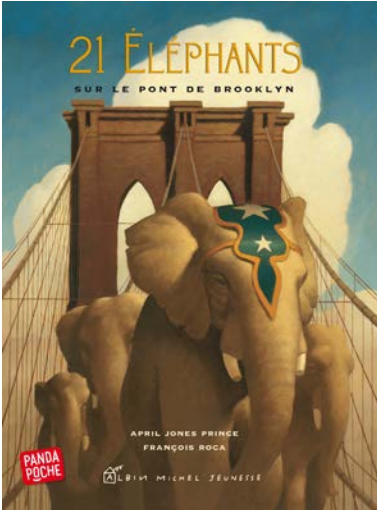
Fred Bernard, ill. François Roca. Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2006. 32 p.

Uma, a little girl, has become the new goddess of India. She will have to comfort the king without saying a word and bless the inhabitants. But one day, faced with the attack of an army of demons, Uma must leave the city and reach the fortified palace of the neighbouring maharajah. The war is spreading and Uma has to flee. She discovers the country, is moved by the beauty of the world and finds the joy of living with her family...

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## BOOKS SENT TO THE JURORS

### 21 ÉLÉPHANTS SUR LE PONT DE BROOKLYN [TWENTY-ONE ELEPHANTS AND STILL STANDING]



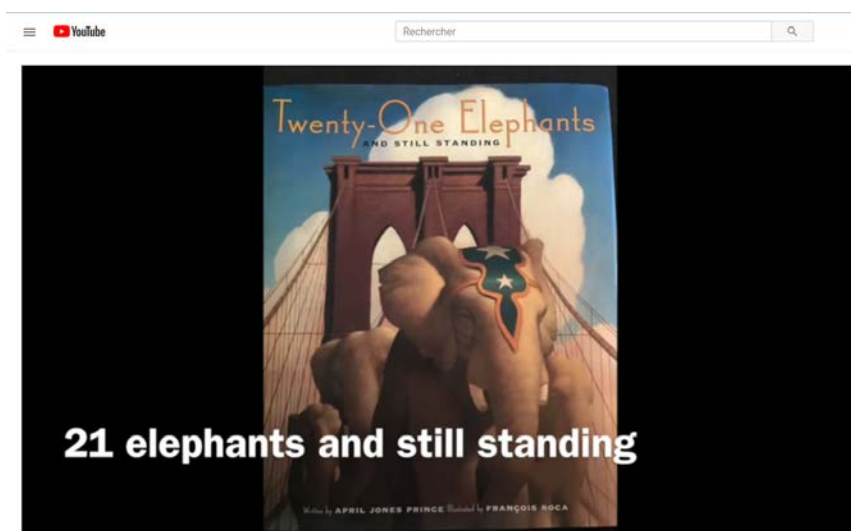
After fourteen years of construction, the Brooklyn Bridge was completed, much to the delight of the sister cities it connected: Brooklyn and New York City. Fireworks and top hats filled the air in celebration when the magnificent bridge opened in 1883. But some wondered just how much weight the new bridge could hold. Was it truly safe?

One man seized the opportunity to show people in Brooklyn, New York and the world that the Brooklyn Bridge was in fact strong enough to hold even the heaviest of passengers. P. T. Barnum, creator of "The Greatest Show on Earth," would present a show too big for the Big Top and too wondrous to forget.

An unusual strength emerges from the images that bring an almost fantastic dimension to the story. A perfect balance is in place between the illustrations and the quasi documentary text.



### A PRESENTATION IN ENGLISH ON YOUTUBE



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgWHb5bK80M>

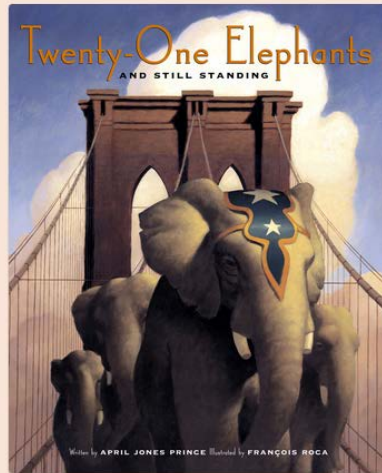
# REVIEW-LAND

THE BEST CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS



[Home](#) [About This Site](#)

## Twenty-One Elephants and Still Standing, by April Jones Prince



### RECENT POSTS

[Good Morning, River!](#) by Lisa Westberg Peters

[Sally Arnold](#) by Cheryl Ryan

[A Job for Wittilda](#), by Caralyn Buehner and Mark Buehner

[Step Into the Night](#), by Joanne Ryder

[Hide and Seek Fog](#), by Alvin Tresselt and Roger Duvoisin

### RECENT COMMENTS

[Rebekah Blocker](#) on [A sequel to Calvin and Hobbes?](#)

[Julie](#) on [The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs](#) by Jon Scieszka

[Pearl Jackson](#) on [About This Site](#)

[Neil Osborne](#) on [Ava's Adventure](#) by Laura Pedersen

[Karen LoBello](#) on [The Great PJ Elf Chase](#) by Karen LoBello and Judy Voigt

### ARCHIVES

[November 2018](#)

[October 2018](#)

In 1883 the Brooklyn Bridge was completed, and the magic moment is captured in a story by April Jones Prince. "For 14 years they'd watched it rise," she writes, "the cities' schoolteachers, bankers, cabinetmakers, pointing and gawking, oohing and aaahing..." The woven steel cables are "graceful and strong, like stairways straight to the stars." Prince describes the achievement with a kind of poetry in *21 Elephants and Still Standing*, and she spins a good story out of the people's reactions!

"New York and Brooklyn, dwarfed by its arches, knew the future had entered their sights." Fireworks are launched for hours, and "flags waved, bands played, kids hoorayed before bigwigs in top hats galore." But Prince knows that the real excitement comes from the people moved by the event. She imagines them thinking about the things they'll do, and marveling at its architecture in the streets below.

"But so long and so lofty, its cable so new – some had to ask, Is it safe?"

It's Prince's first book for Houghton Mifflin, but she's helped along with some suitably grand illustrations that were contributed by Francois Roca. He draws platforms crossing over paddle-wheel steamships, and a boy sailing under the bridge as fireworks explode in the sky. But when questions are raised about safety, the bridge is shown in the shadow of a cloud. Sunlight shines on the river and it lights up the clouds – but the Brooklyn Bridge is a dark silhouette. "Who wants to bargain THIS bridge won't dance in the wind?"

"Both the bridge and [P.T.] Barnum embodied the audacious, can-do spirit of the latter 1800s," Prince writes on the book's jacket, "and their coming together seemed a perfect, outrageous window on the times." Her book describes the famous circus owner as "larger than life," a "world-famous showman" whose ideas "weren't contained by a tent." And Prince shares the wonderful story of a May evening in 1884, when Jumbo the elephant marched down Broadway, past City Hall, "past mothers, fathers, and children."

It's a true story, and it's one worth remembering. (To verify the story, author Prince "traveled to museums and libraries, scrolled through old newspapers, viewed documentaries, scoured books old and new, and called upon experts.") All of P.T. Barnum's elephants filed onto the Brooklyn Bridge – twenty-one elephants in all. And when they came out the other side, it's P.T. Barnum that assure the crowd that the bridge must be sound.

As white fireworks lit up the sky.

QUI SOMMES-  
NOUS ?DOSSIERS  
PÉDAGOGIQUESFRANÇAIS,  
LANGUE  
SECONDEINTÉGRATION  
LINGUISTIQUE  
SCOLAIRE  
ET SOCIALECONTINUUM  
EN LECTURELECTURE DANS  
TOUTES LES  
DISCIPLINES

MES CHOIX (0)

MON COMPTE *Me connecter*

Recherche

OK

Recherche avancée

Accueil &gt; 21 éléphants sur le pont de Brooklyn (LO 49475)

RÉSULTATS  
1/1Ma recherche  
Titre : 21 éléphants sur le pont de Brooklyn

CHOISIR CE LIVRE

Album

**21 éléphants sur le pont de Brooklyn**

Prince, April Jones

Illustré par François Roca.  
Albin Michel jeunesse, ©2015. Coll. Panda poche, 33 p.  
Première parution 2005.

Dewey 818, LO 49475, SDM B524027, Jeunesse

ISBN Édition papier : 9782226318480

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Miser sur l'ingéniosité

Pistes d'exploration

Découvrir et s'inspirer du visuel

Établir des liens entre l'illustration de l'album et les oeuvres de peintres connus tels que Caillebotte ou Hopper.

S'informer

S'informer sur le cirque Barnum et le comparer aux autres types de cirques.

Regrouper livres et produits culturels

Comparer la construction du pont de Brooklyn à celle du pont de Québec en consultant le documentaire [Ce sera le plus grand pont du monde](#).

Mots-clés

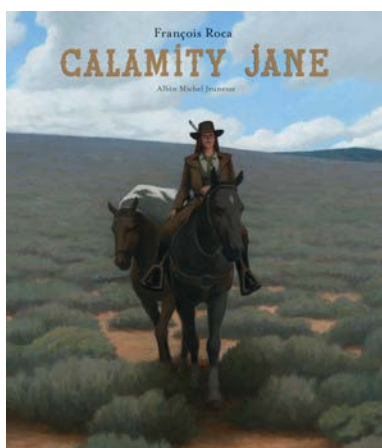
Album, cirque, constructions, ingéniosité, intérêt des illustrations, mammifères (éléphants), ponts, portée historique-États-Unis (19<sup>e</sup> siècle), villes (New York)**Commentaire descriptif**

En 1883, les riverains de la région de New York suivent depuis quatorze ans la construction d'un pont à l'architecture audacieuse, long d'un kilomètre, qui reliera le district de Brooklyn à l'île de Manhattan. Pour calmer les inquiétudes des New-Yorkais qui doutent de ses capacités portantes, Phinées T. Barnum, le directeur d'un cirque déjà célèbre, y fait traverser ses vingt et un éléphants. Ce geste d'éclat a constitué une formidable publicité tant pour le pont de Brooklyn et la ville de New York que pour le cirque Barnum. À quelques nuances près et à la lumière des documents d'archives qui les confirment, les événements racontés sont authentiques. Le texte linéaire relate les événements dans une langue neutre et limpide. La mise en pages sobre laisse toute la place aux illustrations. Elles apparaissent tels de véritables tableaux réalistes où la densité de la lumière, souvent crépusculaire ou nocturne, la variété des angles, des perspectives, les jeux d'ombre et de pénombre, la netteté des personnages leur accordent beaucoup de force et d'intérêt. Dans ce contexte, la marche des grands éléphants silencieux impressionne vraiment et met en contact avec un fait historique étonnant.

Source: <https://www.livresouverts.qc.ca/index.php?p=il&lo=49475>

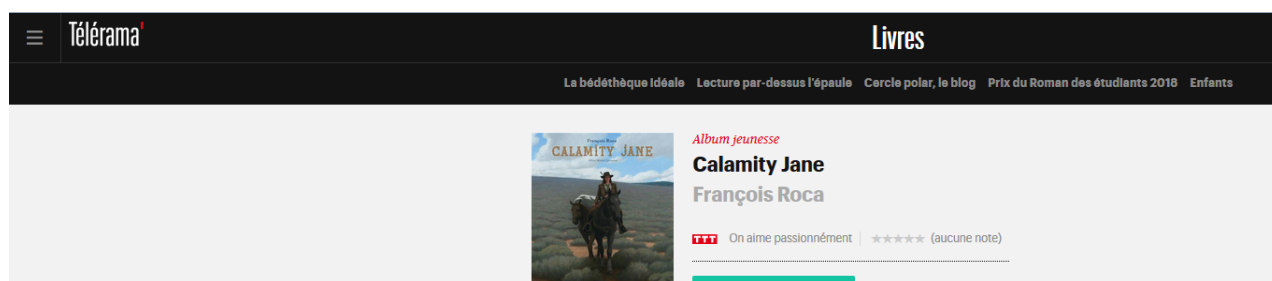


## CALAMITY JANE



Calamity Jane had entrusted her daughter to a couple of travelers who adopted her. For nearly 25 years, Jane sent letters that tell of her profound maternal love and raw tenderness. These powerful texts are accompanied by François Roca's sensitive and grandiose paintings, which render the wilderness of the great outdoors and capture the beauty and fragility of this wounded heroine, modern and free, fighting to survive in the Wild West, a men's world.

Illustrating Calamity Jane's letters to her daughter, François Roca gives life to a legendary figure and captures the fascinating atmosphere of the Wild West.



### **Nul ne sait si les lettres de Calamity Jane à sa fille sont véridiques. Mais avec François Roca, on veut y croire !**

On est happé par les ciels, la lumière, les nuages qui ouvrent, immenses et bouleversants, sur la légende de l'Ouest américain. François Roca en restitue la dimension hors norme et la force d'attraction. On est saisi par ces lettres d'amour d'une mère à sa fille, une petite fille qu'elle a confiée à d'autres pour mener sa vie d'errance sauvage et qu'elle ne voit que de loin en loin, mais qu'elle porte, si proche, au creux d'elle-même. Des *Lettres à sa fille*, de Martha Jane Canary, dite Calamity Jane, François Roca a retenu des extraits où cet étrange amour résonne comme une souffrance, un regret, mais aussi une espérance. L'humanité déchirée de cette femme embarquée dans sa vie aventureuse est comme apaisée par les images du peintre qui exprime surtout la beauté et la grandeur des paysages, et donne à voir une belle jeune femme solitaire, toujours bien mise et maîtresse d'elle-même. Les huiles de François Roca s'inspirent de maîtres tels que Hopper ou N.C. Wyeth, et servent magnifiquement la légende. Les lettres de Calamity Jane à sa fille sont-elles authentiques ? Qu'importe. La magie de cet album tient en ces quelques mots qui préludent aux contes et embrasent l'imagination : « Il était une fois... »

| Ed. Albin Michel Jeunesse, 48 p., 19 €.

Michel Abescat

Telerama n°3587

Mis à jour le 09/10/2018. Créé le 09/10/2018.

Source: <https://www.telerama.fr/livres/calamity-jane,n5842025.php>

Littérature Jeunesse

## « Calamity Jane » par François Roca : portrait intime d'une légende de l'Ouest

7 novembre 2018 • Commenter • par Typhaine



Écrit par [Typhaine](#)

**» On raconte qu'au Far West vivait Martha Jane Canary, dite Calamity Jane. On raconte qu'elle donna naissance en 1873 à une petite fille : Janey. On raconte qu'elle confia Janey à un couple de voyageurs (...) On raconte...«**

Aînée d'une fratrie plus riche de misères que de complicité juvénile, celle qui un jour s'appela Martha Canary fut poussée très tôt sur les routes poussiéreuses de l'Ouest, avant même de savoir monter à cheval. Goûtant dès lors à la nécessité de s'émanciper pour exister au lieu de survivre, la jeune Martha entamera la construction de son identité mythique en servant d'abord dans l'armée, travestie en homme.

Frondeuse, insaisissable, secrète et courageuse, la juste-nommée Calamity Jane rejoindra ensuite le rang des pionniers en laissant le *Wild West* la sculpter à sa mesure : poseuse de rails, convoyeuse de bétail, éclairieuse, conductrice de diligence... son profil semblera taillé dans la pierre des Rocheuses au pied desquelles elle finira d'errer et déambuler, sans être jamais perdue, seule et libre, à sa manière...

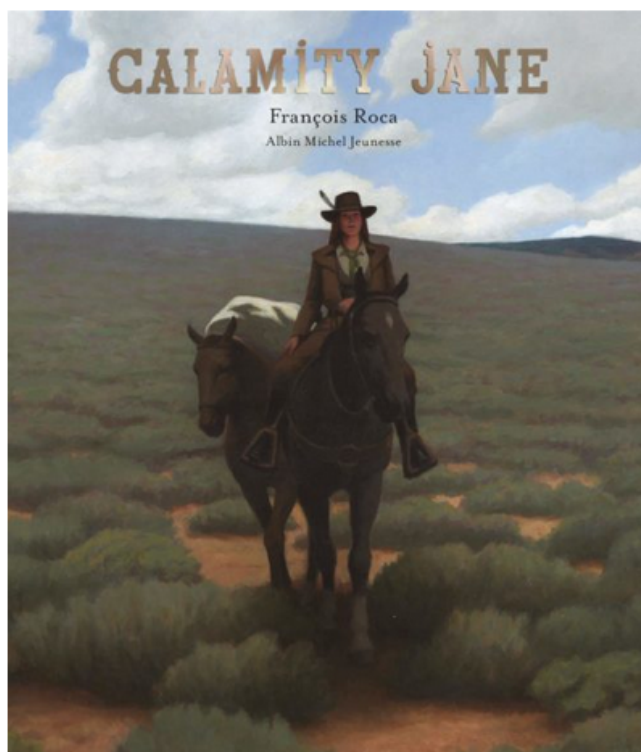


Figure emblématique qui a fait couler beaucoup d'encre, elle laisse à la postérité un recueil de lettres destinées à sa fille Janey, confiée au couple O'Neil.

Loquace, Calamity y relate les anecdotes pittoresques de ses journées dans les plaines (impressionnante tempête de grêle), lève le voile sur l'homme que fut le père biologique de Jane (le non moins populaire *Wild Bill*), et cède à de nombreux états d'âme témoignant d'une envie farouche de démêler le vrai du faux de son histoire si singulière.

Si l'authenticité de ces lettres est remise en cause par bon nombre d'historiens, le doute n'enlève rien à l'émouvante intimité maternelle qu'elles révèlent.

*Quand la légende est plus belle que la réalité, imprimez la légende.*

Aussi, fidèle à cette sentence du film de John Ford, *L'homme qui tua Liberty Valance* (clin d'œil crépusculaire à cet Ouest qui forgea notre héroïne), l'illustrateur François Roca choisit donc de s'appuyer sur des extraits choisis des *Lettres à sa Fille* (éditions Payot & Rivages) pour nous livrer son propre portrait d'une légende au féminin pluriel.

Des scènes épiques, de celles qui peuvent avoir nourri le mythe, puis plus pudiques, comme des épisodes dérobés aux coulisses, se partagent des pages larges qui appellent à une fresque plus grande encore.

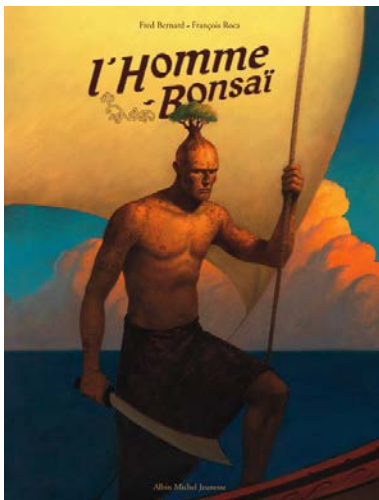
Ces tableaux en mouvement sur lesquels se découvre au détour d'une ligne de fuite un instant suspendu, reflet d'une solitude orpheline, nous transportent à mi-chemin entre un film au doux filtre sépia et une ville-musée sublimée par des projecteurs naturels.

Un sens du détail et des longues courbes, nous ne sommes pas loin de croiser un Edward Hopper en témoin d'une ruée vers l'or qui piétine entre motels miteux et tribus amérindiennes sans sursis.

Avec *Calamity Jane*, album d'une grande sensibilité, François Roca délaisse quelque peu le sentier battu du documentaire pour nous emmener, à travers ses paysages d'huile, au-delà du folklore, là où la liberté n'oublie pas de confesser ce que nous choisissons d'incarner.

Source: <https://addict-culture.com/calamity-jane-francois-roca/>

## L'HOMME-BONSAÏ [THE BONSAI-MAN]



In the middle of a storm, on a raging sea, a huge tree embedded in the structure of an old ship of the eighteenth century rises and falls with the waves in front of the astonished eyes of the Narval crew. This improbable encounter becomes even more astonishing: the morning following the storm, the tree tells its story to the captain who approaches the ship to see this strange tree more clearly. In this fantastic tale, the sea serves as a setting for the extraordinary destiny of a simple potter, forced to board a ship and to travel his whole life. During the vicissitudes of his life, nature gives him a miraculous gift: the tree that grows on his head will give him the strength to take revenge but will also force him to permanently abandon the world of humans.

A text full of imagination and poetry, a view on what humans owe to nature and vice-versa. There's magic in François Roca's grand illustrations, a magic that goes well with the powerful text written by Fred Bernard. This picture book is a real treat!



Logo of Académie de Versailles and CANOPÉ Ile-de-France. Maison départementale de l'Éducation du Val-d'Oise.

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### L'HOMME BONSAÏ

ÉLÉMENTAIRE, CYCLE 3, COLLÈGE - 57 EXEMPLAIRES - SÉRIE N° 24

*L'homme bonsaï*, album, Fred Bernard, François Roca, Albin Michel jeunesse, 2003, 34 pages



Étrange histoire que celle d'Amédée le potier enrôlé de force sur un bateau. Il devient le souffre-douleur de tout l'équipage qui, finalement, l'abandonne sur une île déserte. Son destin bascule...

► Cet ouvrage fait partie de la [Sélection « Littérature pour les collégiens »](#) en ligne sur Éduscol.

#### La fiche Éduscol

**Relation avec le programme Identité, 4<sup>e</sup>**

**Présentation** Dans un bar de marins, le Capitaine O'Murphy raconte sa rencontre avec un bateau-arbre dérivant sur les mers, racines plantées dans la cale du vieux navire, et branches entremêlées aux mâts. Cet arbre, c'est Amédée, potier de métier. Deux siècles plus tôt, Amédée a été enrôlé de force sur un vaisseau pirate.

**Pertinence et intérêt de la lecture**

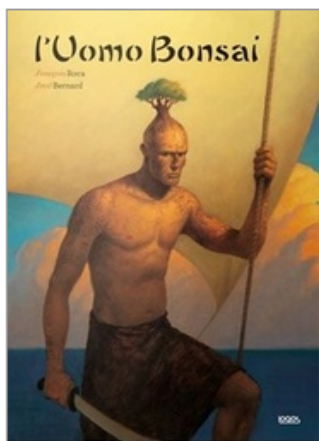
Une histoire de pirates qui bascule dans le fantastique. Un texte ciselé et poétique. Des illustrations de François Roca à fort pouvoir onirique. Une œuvre originale et captivante qui retrace le destin fabuleux et tragique d'un homme-arbre.

**Point particulier**

Fred Bernard reprend cette histoire en bande dessinée destinée aux adultes : *L'homme-bonsaï* paru aux éditions Delcourt.

**Accompagnement pédagogique**

► Des fiches pédagogiques pour l'étude de cet album, élaborées par Michèle Maggi et Laure Ray dans le cadre d'un Jury lecteur, sont disponibles avec d'autres sur le site de Canopé Val-d'Oise dans [Différencier la lecture longue au cycle 3 - série 2](#)

[progetto del mese](#)[la cassetta degli attrezzi](#)[segnali di lettura](#)[scelti per voi](#)[zoom editoria](#)[+ i migliori del trimestre](#)

## Splendida avventura per mare

[CONDIVIDI](#) [f](#) [t](#) [e](#) ...

### L'uomo bonsai

Fred Bernard, ill. di François Roca

Logos, 2015, 36 p.

(Illustrati)

€ 18,00 ; Età: da 11 anni

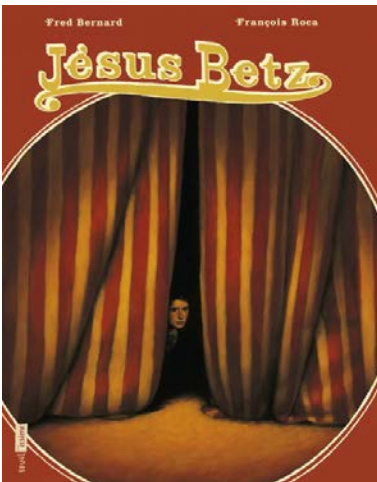
La vita di ogni uomo è attraversata da corsi d'acqua che separano o uniscono la propria vita con quella di altre persone. Acque fresche e limpide o torbide e impetuose che portano cambiamenti più o meno visibili. L'uomo bonsai era Amedeo il Vasaio prima di subire la metamorfosi che egli stesso racconta al capitano O'Murphy e che a sua volta racconta alla taverna del Gambero Monco a un gruppetto di marinai scettici.

La leggenda è passata di mare in mare fino ad arrivare nelle mani del duo artistico Roca-Bernard che ha fatto rivivere la leggenda nelle pagine edita da Logos. Il personaggio, Amedeo il Vasaio, si trova imbarcato con la forza in una nave mercantile presto assalita da pirati comandati dal sadico capitano Stroke. Inizia così la tragica sorte di Amedeo il quale, dopo aver subito ogni sorta di umiliazione e angheria, viene abbandonato in un'isola deserta del Mar della Cina dominata da un albero colossale dal quale cade sulla sua testa un seme che inizia a germogliare. Amedeo lotta con l'albero, tenta di sradicarlo in tutti i modi finché, vinto, si abbandona sulla spiaggia quasi morto. Una giunca di pirati cinesi lo trova, lo imbarca e lo mette nelle mani di un anziano che si prende cura di lui e del suo albero restituendogli la vita e una nuova identità: Amedeo il Vasaio diventa L'uomo Bonsai. Man mano che l'albero cresce riceve forza e vigore ed è in grado di compiere azioni prodigiose che gli valgono la fama di invincibile. Col passare del tempo deve fare i conti con il proprio corpo assalito da crampi e dolori. L'Uomo Bonsai dovrà compiere un passo ulteriore nella sua trasformazione e per far questo i pirati cinesi dispongono con cura della terra nella stiva per piantarlo e farlo vivere secondo la sua natura.

L'avventura di cui si narra invita il lettore ora a chinarsi e raccogliere se stesso in una muta riflessione sul destino umano, ora ad alzare il capo e spingere lo sguardo oltre. Perché un bonsai e non una quercia per dare vita al racconto? L'autore ama lanciare i personaggi in imprese ardite, leggendarie; Roca, con imprevedibili sceneggiature, realizza opere caratterizzate da profondi chiaroscuri.

Adolfina De Marco  
(da *LiBeR* 110)

## JÉSUS BETZ [JESUS BETZ]



This is the story of Jesus Betz, the trunk-man with the soprano voice.

Jesus is born in 1894. His life is full of obstacles and despair. In a long and touching letter to his mother, he recounts the 33 dates that have marked his life as a trunk-man.

Watchman on a whaling ship, stuck by a seagull, he is taken in by the huge Mamamita. Soon, both fall under the influence of Max Roberto who shows them in bars as weird creatures. When he finally finds the courage to flee with his friend Pollux, he decides to enlist in a circus where, finally treated with respect, he will experience success and happiness with Suma Katra, a beautiful mute acrobat...

This uncommon destiny is told in a touching and modest way: in this letter to his mother, Jesus Betz forgives her for having abandoned him and gives her an account of all his misfortunes. This stunning picture book is the confession of a torn, dependant man, who finds the courage to believe in life and to fight for love. It makes us believe that everything is possible, and that encounters with special persons can change the course of one's life.

*Jésus Betz* won the 2001 Baobab Prize for the book fair and the youth press in Seine-Saint-Denis and the Prix Alphonse Daudet - Goncourt jeunesse 2002.



[https://youtu.be/-\\_TrkDYTmWE](https://youtu.be/-_TrkDYTmWE)

REZENSION: BELLETRISTIK

## Ohne Arme und Beine im Scheinwerferlicht

AKTUALISIERT AM 19.03.2002 - 12:00

**Jesus Betz heißt der Held im neuen Bilderbuch des jungen französischen Autor-Illustrator-Duos Fred Bernard und François Roca. Den heiligen Vornamen verdankt Betz seiner Geburt am 24. Dezember: Für seine junge einsame Mutter ist er ihr "Liebchen", "Würmchen", "Jesulein". Das Neugeborene ist kein Kind wie andere.**

**J**esus Betz heißt der Held im neuen Bilderbuch des jungen französischen Autor-Illustrator-Duos Fred Bernard und François Roca. Den heiligen Vornamen verdankt Betz seiner Geburt am 24. Dezember: Für seine junge einsame Mutter ist er ihr "Liebchen", "Würmchen", "Jesulein". Das Neugeborene ist kein Kind wie andere. Ihm fehlen Arme und Beine, es ist ein Rumpfmensch. Das ist trotz der viel beschworenen Enttabuisierung in der Kinderliteratur ein sehr ungewöhnlicher Bilderbuchprotagonist. Seine Geschichte und bildliche Darstellung irritiert, wie es selten geworden ist dank unserer Übung, die bedenklichsten Grenzüberschreitungen der Diskretion und Intimität gelassen zur Kenntnis zu nehmen.

Die Geschichte der Mißbildungen ist bis weit ins 20. Jahrhundert hinein mit der Zirkuswelt, mit den Schaubuden und Jahrmärkten verbunden, die "Monstra" wie siamesische Zwillinge, Riesen- und Zwergwüchsige, ungewöhnlich dicke Menschen, bärtige Frauen und Rumpfmenschen zeigten. Nach dem **Zweiten Weltkrieg** verschwanden diese Schaubuden, und heute, da aufgrund der pränatalen Diagnostik immer weniger Menschen mit schweren Fehlbildungen geboren werden, finden wir es grausam, sie der Schaulust preiszugeben. Doch über die moralische und politisch korrekte Entrüstung vergessen wir leicht, daß die Schauplätze am Rande der Gesellschaft diesen Menschen oft die einzigen Überlebenschancen boten und manchmal sogar etwas Selbstbestimmung ermöglichten.

Jesus Betz wird 1894 in den USA geboren. Seine Geschichte spielt in der Epoche der berühmten Show-Freaks vor dem Hintergrund der globalen Umbrüche des 20. Jahrhunderts. Als Ich-Erzähler gibt er in einem Brief an seine Mutter einen Rückblick auf die Krisen und Höhepunkte seines Lebens. Dreiunddreißig Tage mit genauer Datumsangabe hat er ausgewählt, das sind so viel Tage wie Jesu Christi Lebensjahre. Fred Bernard hat die Erzählung als ein modernes Leben Jesu entworfen, das er aber zu einem ganz anderen Ende führt. Wie der Namenspatron in seiner Auseinandersetzung mit den Pharisäern erlebt auch Jesus Betz die Unbarmherzigkeit eines Pfarrers, zu dem seine Mutter ihn in der Hoffnung auf eine Arbeitsmöglichkeit trägt: "Aber mein Jesulein ist die Liebe und Güte selbst, wie unser Herr Christus!" "Aber mit dem Unterschied, junge Frau, daß man einen Rumpf-Menschen nicht ans Kreuz nagelt, sondern auf einen Angelhaken spießt wie einen Wurm! Also raus mit euch!"

Die nächste Station seines Lebens ist ein Walfangschiff, auf dem er, am Mast festgebunden, mit seiner wunderbaren Stimme die Wale aussingt. François Roca zeichnet ihn als neuen Odysseus, der indes selbst singt, wie im Mythos die Sirenen. Nachdem eine Möwe Jesus ein Auge ausgehackt hat, erlebt er einen der schwersten Augenblicke seines Lebens, er sieht sich fortgeworfen und getreten als menschlicher Abfall. Wie Jesus Christus gewinnt er treue Freunde unter den Ausgestoßenen und Verachteten: eine dicke Marktfrau, dann die Freaks im Zirkus. Am Ende wird er weder aufgespießt noch ans Kreuz genagelt, sondern findet Liebesglück in den Armen einer wunderschönen, stummen Trapezkünstlerin - eine sinnenfreudige, lebensbejahende Alternative zum Opfertod.

François Roca gibt Jesus Betz ein schönes Gesicht über einem kegelförmig glatten Rumpf, der an eine Büste erinnert, zumal er oft auf einen Sockel gestellt wird. Mit dieser kunstähnlichen Gestalt vermeidet Roca alles Abstoßende, ohne daß er den Schrecken über den so furchtbar reduzierten Menschenleib mildern würde. Fern jeder Verniedlichung bewegt sich die Darstellung erstaunlich sicher auf dem schmalen Grat zwischen unzulässiger Ästhetisierung und Preisgabe an eine Schaulust, die sich am Grotesken und Monströsen weiden würde. Die Erzählung wie die Bilder lenken statt dessen die Aufmerksamkeit auf ein Leben, das seiner schweren Einschränkung, seinen Verletzungen und dem Erleiden brutaler Gewalt zum Trotz von Mut, Freundschaft, Schönheit, Freude und Zärtlichkeit geprägt ist.

Wie kaum ein zeitgenössischer Bilderbuchkünstler arbeitet Roca mit dem Licht als immateriellem Akteur seiner Bildwelten, dynamisiert sie mit subtil kalkulierten Schattenwürfen, dramatisiert sie im Clair-obscur und mit den Beleuchtungseffekten der Scheinwerfer und atmosphärischen Lichtquellen. Die Reihe seiner Vorbilder in der Illuminationskunst reicht von Caravaggio bis zu Edward Hopper. Eine Traditionswahl, die dem seltsamen, bewegenden Stoff und der klug mit den großen Erzählmustern spielenden Geschichte angemessen ist.

GUNDEL MATTENKLOTT

Fred Bernard und François Roca: "Jesus Betz". Aus dem Französischen übersetzt von Werner Leonhard. Gerstenberg Verlag, Hildesheim 2002. 32 S., geb., 18,- . Ab 6 J.






# Ricochet

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## Jésus Betz



 Sélection des rédacteurs

Auteur : [Fred Bernard](#)  
Illustrateur : [François Roca](#)  
Editeur : [Seuil Jeunesse](#)  
Collection : [Seuil'issime](#)

Thèmes

[Violence](#), [Handicap](#), [Affection/Tendresse](#)

Album


à partir de 8 ans

Réédition

Janvier 2015

ISBN : 9791023504354

5.90 euros

 [Ajouter à ma bibliographie](#)

[Votre avis sur ce livre](#)

### L'avis de Ricochet

Le 24 décembre 1894, naissait Jésus Betz, un nourrisson dépourvu de jambes et de bras. Deux ans plus tard, la famille s'agrandit avec l'arrivée de Willy, le « p'tit gars » normal tant attendu, par cette mère célibataire, « jardinière d'un arbre gynécologique épineux et bien compliqué ». Jésus Betz chante très bien, mais sa voix ne rapporte rien. Un beau matin, faute d'argent, sa mère le présente à l'affreux Capitaine Styx. C'est le début d'un long voyage, d'une longue errance dans des eaux sombres et tumultueuses, pour en ressortir, des années plus tard, meurtri mais bien accompagné.

Jésus Betz nous raconte son histoire dans une correspondance (en 33 dates) qu'il adresse à sa mère. Il se livre avec pudeur et sans rancune, évoquant ses multiples rejets, ses humiliations (la foire aux monstres) mais aussi ses coins de ciel bleu avec Mamamita, Pollux et Suma Katra. Tout au long de cette courageuse confession, on ressent une force qui ne quitte pas l'homme, celle qui lui permettra de conjurer le sort pour vivre enfin sa vie.

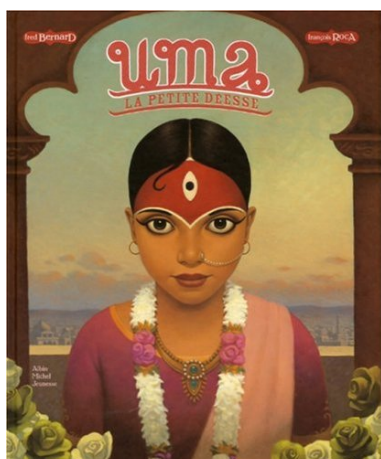
L'écriture de Fred Bernard est magnifique. Elle est soulignée par les illustrations grandioses de François Roca qui, avec un jeu de lumière époustouflant, parvient à nous plonger avec un réalisme saisissant dans l'univers fascinant des Freaks et de la pègre.

Dès lors, on ne peut que féliciter les jurys du [Prix Baobab](#) en 2001 et du [Prix Alphonse Daudet](#) en 2002 d'avoir couronné cet album remarquable qui a été publié pour la première fois en 2001.

[Emmanuelle Pelot](#)

Source: <https://www.ricochet-jeunes.org/livres/jesus-betz>

## UMA LA PETITE DÉESSE [UMA THE LITTLE GODDESS]



The character of Uma is inspired by a tradition of the Hindu religion still alive in Nepal, that of Kumari, goddess incarnated for a time by a girl chosen for her beauty and subjected to the test of a night of terror to confirm the priests' choice. Thanks to her education as a little goddess, Uma will know how to overcome with intelligence and strong will all the difficulties to find refuge in her family. Spectacular illustrations attract and hold the eye.

ଓପିଓପିଓପିଓପିଓପିଓପିଓ



La tormenta en un vaso

La Tormenta en un Vaso

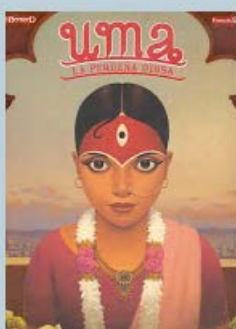
Quién es quién en la Tormenta

Solo con invitación

viernes, junio 29, 2007

### Uma. La pequeña diosa, Fred Bernard / FranVois Roca

Trad. Élodie Bourgeois Bertin / Teresa Farran Vert. Juventud, 2007. 40 pp. 15 €



Villar Arellano

Esta es la historia de Uma, una pequeña niña a quien esperaba un singular destino: los sacerdotes la reconocieron como La Elegida, la nueva diosa viva. Según dictaba la tradición, su sola presencia servía de inspiración al rey, quien debía reverenciarla. A cambio, ella nunca podría sonreír ni llorar y sus pies jamás tocarían el suelo.

Inspirada en relatos del *Mahabharata* —clásica epopeya que recoge buena parte de la mitología hindú—, y con base real —las polémicas kumari o niñas-diosas son consagradas en Nepal desde los 4-5 años hasta que alcanzan la pubertad—, la historia de la pequeña Uma se presenta en este exquisito álbum con un magnífico despliegue de elementos estéticos, del que participan tanto el autor y el ilustrador como la propia editorial.

Respecto a esta última, merece destacarse su apuesta por el gran formato (26 x 31,5 cm), que permite apreciar en toda su magnitud el atractivo trabajo pictórico del ilustrador. Es también meritorio el uso de recursos plásticos que refuerzan la espectacular ilustración de la portada (el empleo de diferentes texturas —brillante en el fondo y mate en la figura— subraya la fuerza de la niña protagonista, que adquiere un mayor relieve y parece salir del libro).

Estamos ante una obra redonda, un integrado trabajo a dos voces que ejemplifica con claridad la riqueza narrativa del álbum ilustrado: una síntesis de lenguajes llena de matices artísticos. No en vano, **Fred Bernard** y **FranVois Roca** han estado vinculados, a lo largo de toda su carrera, por una fecunda complicidad que ha dado como resultado una fascinante colección de obras: *La comedia de los ogros* (Juventud), *El tren amarillo* (Lumen), *Jesús Betz* (FCE) o *El secreto de las nubes* (Lumen), entre otros.

Cada creación de este tándem de autores es peculiar y sorprendente, aunque toda su obra está recorrida por una línea temática transversal: el viaje iniciático, la búsqueda personal a través de la naturaleza...

En este caso, la pequeña Uma emprende su viaje huyendo de la guerra. Cuando abandona su santuario para ponerse a salvo, emprende una gran aventura que la llevará a tierras lejanas, hasta reencontrar sus emociones perdidas —y por ende, su propia identidad— junto a los suyos.

El texto es sencillo. **Bernard** intercala diálogos y narración por medio de frases cortas que transmiten lo esencial. No abundan las descripciones, pero la acción, ágil y emocionante, permite captar los principales rasgos psicológicos de la protagonista. La mencionada brevedad, unida a la cadencia de algunas reiteraciones, aporta un resultado rítmico y musical al texto.

Respecto a las ilustraciones —panorámicas escenas trabajadas al óleo— presentan un estilo realista, que presta un especial cuidado al tratamiento de la luz. **F. Roca**, heredero de los grandes maestros norteamericanos de comienzos del siglo XX (**N. C. Wyeth** y **H. Pyle**), conecta en este libro con la

tradición de artistas indios como **Ravi Verma**, aprovechando al máximo el exotismo de los escenarios y la vistosidad de ropas y ornamentos: exuberante naturaleza, palacios de doradas cúpulas, elefantes sagrados adornados con suntuosas telas...

La habitual predominancia de los tonos ocres y rojizos en la obra del ilustrador deja paso aquí a una paleta de colores más amplia: azules celestes, rosas, naranjas, violetas..., tamizados por una nueva luminosidad, que sitúa las diferentes escenas en el amanecer o el ocaso.

Una atmósfera mágica envuelve todo el relato, fruto no sólo de los recursos estilísticos, sino de la propia condición mítica del personaje. Así, el carácter divino de la joven, que le impedía pisar el suelo, sitúa a Uma en situaciones insólitas —subida a los árboles, llevada por un mono, viajando a lomos de un tigre o volando sobre un gran buitre— para, finalmente, ya despojada de su divinidad, verla niña de nuevo, pisando el suelo firme de la casa paterna y abrazando, emocionada, a su familia.

Una historia, sin duda, extraordinaria y atractiva, que conectará a los más jóvenes (a partir de 6-7 años) con la fascinante y remota cultura india. Y una nueva oportunidad para descubrir los relatos del **Mahabhárata**, que ya pudimos conocer en otro libro delicioso: *El Mahabhárata contado por una niña*, de **Samhita Arni** (Siruela).



Publicado por Banda aparte en [00:02](#)

Source: <http://latormentaenunvaso.blogspot.com/2007/06/uma-la-pequea-diosa-fred-bernard.html>

CRITIQUE

# Uma, la petite déesse

Par Frédérique Roussel — 23 décembre 2006 à 00:36

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➔ Uma, la petite déesse

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Uma a des yeux noirs qui ont la forme parfaite d'une amande, sa bouche est belle comme le rubis... La petite fille de bergers est désignée par les prêtres comme une divinité. Ses pieds ne doivent plus fouler le sol, ses mains n'ont plus le droit de toucher aucun objet, nul ne doit plus soutenir son regard, sous peine de perdre la vie. La petite déesse conseillera le roi jusqu'à ce qu'elle devienne une jeune fille. Après les Comanches et l'histoire de Cheval vêtu, c'est l'Inde qui a inspiré cette fois-ci les complices de dix ans, Fred Bernard et François Roca. La palette de couleurs renvoie à un pays bigarré, habité par des guerriers enturbannés, des éléphants et des tigres sous des ciels azurés. L'histoire s'inscrit dans un registre où les dieux font partie du paysage, comme la magie. Mais toute latitude est laissée au caractère finalement bien trempé de la gracieuse Uma. Elle assume sa charge avec dignité et «vivait ainsi sans rires ni pleurs, sans compter le nombre des années, quand la rumeur courut qu'une armée de démons venus d'un pays voisin allait attaquer le royaume au nord». La guerre bouleverse sa tour d'ivoire. Parcours initiatique (sans mettre un pied par terre), Uma la petite déesse vient enrichir le répertoire des albums qui invitent au voyage. ◆

Frédérique Roussel

*Albin Michel Jeunesse, 37 pp., 13,50 euro(s).*