

FRANÇOIS PLACE

ILLUSTRATOR



NOMINEE FOR
THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS 2018

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BIOGRAPHY

Born on April 26, 1957, in Ezanville (France), François Place studied at L'École des arts et industries graphiques Estienne, a school of art design, then worked as an illustrator for advertisement companies before moving on to illustrating children books. In 1983, he illustrated his first children's books, novels of La Comtesse de Ségur. But his talent will reveal itself in 1986, when he illustrates non-fiction books like *Le Livre de la découverte du monde* by Bernard Planché, published by Gallimard jeunesse. François Place starts to write his own books that he illustrates himself and, in 1992, creates *Les Derniers géants* [The Last Giants], published by Casterman. The book is a huge success, it wins several prizes and changes the way book professionals consider illustrated books for children and young adults. The three volumes of *L'Atlas des géographes d'Orbae* [A Voyage of Discovery], an atlas of 26 imaginary countries based on the letters of the alphabet, are published between 1996 and 2000, and tackle the frontier between fiction and non-fiction books. In 2010, François Place publishes his first novel, *La Douane volante*, thus adding a new dimension to his work. His work speaks of travels to faraway lands, discoveries, encounters... François Place's imagination and creativity are nourished by all the books he reads, and most of his travels are imaginary ones.

He continues to create picture books, novels, and illustrates the works of others, like Michael Morpurgo, Erik Lhomme, Timothée de Fombelle... He has also worked on the [Louvre Museum's internet site](#) for children.

François Place is also committed to defending the rights of refugees and migrants. Along with other illustrators, he donates his original artworks to be sold in auctions, thus providing financial means for associations and NGO's who help refugees and migrants on a daily basis.



NOMINATING FRANÇOIS PLACE: THE REASONS BEHIND THE CHOICE

Since 1985, François Place has been creating a large body of work as an illustrator and author, work which is special and unique.

He has been nicknamed the “bedroom traveller” or sometimes “the architect of the imagination”; through his books he has created a map of the imaginary, which transports the reader to faraway places, real and dreamed of, exploring the differences of human society through time and space.

And yet as he often admits, he has not travelled widely. It is with books, maps, atlases, engravings from all periods that he feeds his abundant imagination and cultivates his knowledge to produce works that have a power – with meticulous drawings and an impeccable writing.

1. PLAYING WITH BOUNDARIES

François Place will not allow himself to be limited by categorisation, which is what gives him much of his power and makes his work so interesting.

Between fiction and documentary

His work is characterised by a distinct line between documentary and fiction, offering the reader a fascinating view of historical and geographical realities and imaginary worlds. Taking a delight in crossing boundaries, he moves constantly from fantasy to reality. The encyclopaedic approach gives way to a fiction of worlds invented and reinvented.

“In written fiction, what is great fun is to take the reader into a fictive world and then to take him so far into this world that it seems real. After all, it doesn’t matter what happens there. You come back when you close the book. But when still in the book, you must accept the fact that you’re not in the real world.”



Picture books that are also favourites of young adults

This desire to open the mind also shows itself in the ages of his readers. *“I don’t write for any age group in particular. I don’t know how to do that. I want to create bridges.”* François Place plays with different classifications, breaking down barriers between children’s and young adult literature.

In this respect, the publication of *Les Derniers Géants* (The Last Giants) was an important step and played a particular role in the field of French children’s literature: its success with teenagers demonstrated the interest for picture books of a readership that was older and more mature. This made it possible for other authors to propose picture books to that specific age group.



2. A CONSISTENCY OF THEMES

François Place, magnificent story-teller, plays alternatively with images and words, bringing into being very different universes with a remarkable consistency overall. In his books, diverse as they are, we find many different styles of storytelling (adventures and initiation stories) different characters, (from young heroes dealing with the chaos of their existence to wise elders, teachers and artists who guide their first steps) and other recurring themes.

Humanism and a sense of discovery

He is demanding concerning his young readers. Each of his books is an invitation to discover other continents, times and cultures. The voyages that he takes the reader on – geographical, historical, anthropological, realistic or imaginary – do not aim to cultivate folklore or to create superheroes; rather to teach the respect for others and their differences, to transmit values, to enter into a story, to remind us that our society is fragile and the human condition needs to be protected from certain dangers.

Ordinary heroes as main characters

Whether imaginary or real, François Place’s stories create a plethora of captivating personalities, fragile and idealistic, who try to realise their modest destinies.

His books do not create heroes with super powers but personalities who are tossed around by life, full of doubts, self-questioning and who do not always come out victorious. François Place is captivated by ordinary people, everyday people.

Protecting figures

All his characters survive thanks to a support in some form (wise elders for children, artists for women, women for men). Like Hokusai as well as the character of Kensuké created by Michael Morpurgo, there are protecting figures who can instil courage, intelligence and bring out the talents of the children in their charge for different reasons – without making them dependent on the affection that they bring them.





Individuals who emerge from the crowds

François Place drives romanesque catalysts out of closed societies (familial clans, villages...) or out of seething crowds (ports, armies and legendary expeditions).

Each of his heroes is a witness to, or an incarnation of, the stakes of the civilisation that he comes from. In the time / space environments which are precisely defined (England or Japan in the 19th Century, prehistory, The Silk Road, France under Louis XIV, WW1 in Brittany) or the

more symbolic (Africa, the land of Ankou) these characters lean on major heroic figures like the Prince, the scholar and the artist in "credible" worlds.

The humble who take the floor

The voice of ordinary people is the thread which links the eras. The truly heroic act in these books is freeing the expression of the anonymous, those who make up the crowds. This expression is not necessarily oral but through other modes (tattoos, shivers, tears, cries, silence, dance, songs ...) and blossoms in an artistic environment: through tales, through theatre...

Human complexity

François Place's characters present young readers with the spectacle of a complex humanity, where everyone can be dependent and yet free at the same time, fiercely autonomous and driven by a powerful logic. The mixture of the significant and the trivial in the words or the illustrations outlines a framework where the imaginary can unearth reality from the hidden: whether they have existed or not, the characters will return to the myth that they came from because men are men and are held between the horizons of the mundane and the magnitude of history – in the infinite possibilities that language creates but also its dead ends.

The beauty and the fragility of the world

The more he evolves in his books, the more he connects, after great travels through space, to the exploration of time. *"I have the impression that the more we move on and the more we worry about the general breakdown of our system: pollution, the running out of raw materials, the energy crisis. The world is changing fast and that is quite frightening. But one can see that there are also ancient, forgotten levels which are being erased little by little.*

"I am interested in the past not for nostalgic reasons, and not because I believe that the world used to be easier and more beautiful. To talk about the history of voyages means going back to a fantasized place, full of marvels. Marvels in every sense of the word: dangerous, worrying but very beautiful nevertheless. We feel these emotions when we go too far off countries and are faced with a natural spectacle like The Grand Canyon. That's what I like to write about. It's full of images, very varied, very exciting."



3. ARTISTIC DEMANDS

François Place uses, across many different registers, the power of the visual in both a lively and detailed way, which requires a patient work of documentation and a great talent for observation

Adaptability of style to each universe

François Place says that he is *“always influenced by the context of the story when he wants to illustrate”* and his style varies as a result; purified and dynamic for *Le Vieux fou de dessin* [The Old Man Mad about Drawing] - a teaching fable as well as a documentary on Hokusai during the Edo period in Japan; meticulous, imitating the Persian Miniatures for *Contes d'un royaume perdu* [Tales of a Lost Kingdom]; rough and loose, drawn with bamboo and ink for *Grand Ours* [Big Bear], a potent *INITIATORY* adventure set in Prehistoric times. As he adapts the form to the substance, he changes his tools accordingly: his palette is very large, from pencils to pens (he has an impressive quantity of pens in different shapes!), he can work with a very thin paint brush or a very thick one, whatever he feels is appropriate to the period and his artistic viewpoint.

Research and precision over details

“Illustration requires a lot of research and is very restrictive. For example, for an historic documentary the artist must be very accurate over details such as clothes, houses etc. (...) Nowadays I work in a style that is pseudo documentary, accurate but free from the restraints of this genre.”

The need for documentation remains a constant constraint, even in fictional narratives, as shown, for example, by the research that went into *La Fille des batailles* [The Battles' Daughter] based on the works of Flemish and Dutch masters of that period, artists like Watteau, in the aim of imagining and recreating the countryside, the costumes and the attitudes of the characters in a realistic way.



Artistic techniques and methods selected to satisfy the highest of quality standards

François Place draws again and again a number of different sketches, using pencil, lead, brush, wash drawing, and then tinted ink or watercolour. He works in the same way with the text, studying five or six different versions to find a satisfying rhythm, cadence and linguistic quality. The resulting quality of his work is highly praised by critics.



*“I am at ease working with liquid mediums, ink, watercolour, aquarelle (...) I have obviously tried other styles but as my drawing style is cursive, similar to writing, if I work with a coloured page it is not very satisfactory. I look for a sort of writing of the image, a sort of written image: in *La Fille des batailles*, it's the brush that guides the drawing. Then I start again and again, in order to reach this quality of the free line, as if I were writing. The line has to be precise but with great freedom. The thing with drawing is to find a gesture that is*

consistent everywhere. Each separate element and the whole must have the same quality, the same rhythm, the same freedom. This is why I rework so often."

4. A QUALITY REQUIREMENT IN A GENEROUS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS READERS

François Place's books are not addressed to children, rather to that part of the imagination and childhood still present in the adult reader, as well as to that part of curiosity, thought and seriousness that are present within the child reader.

Whether it is during the meetings with children in the book fairs or in school environments, his magic operates. His readers are often astounded to see, before their very eyes with just a few brush strokes, other universes appear in magnificent aquarelles. To participate with him in the creation of a collectively created masterpiece remains a highly privileged moment.

François Place is one of the illustrators who defend the rights of migrant and refugee children in France. He donates his original artworks to associations who organise auctions in order to provide for the basic needs of these children and young adults.



THIS TEXT CONTAINS CERTAIN PARTS OF THE DOSSIER DEDICATED TO FRANÇOIS PLACE IN *LA REVUE DES LIVRES POUR ENFANTS* (N° 254, SEPTEMBER 2010) AND OF AN UNPUBLISHED ARTICLE BY VÉRONIQUE SOULÉ.

INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES

INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS PLACE

By Brigitte Andrieux and Annick Lorant-Jolly¹



*Annick Lorant-Jolly: Dear François Place, there have been many articles published about your work, especially interviews. We will surely ask many questions that you have already answered but we would like to go over your background and the path you have followed, first as an illustrator, then author-illustrator, then becoming a novelist with the publication by Gallimard Jeunesse in January 2010 of *La Douane Volante*. Nearly all your books, non fiction, picture books and novel, take the reader on a voyage and yet I believe you remain very much a stay-at-home person. You must have an abundant imagination?*

François Place: Yes and no. My imagination is fed by prolific reading of travel tales. Indeed I started traveling myself rather late in life and that was thanks to my writing: I have been invited to many places to talk about my work. But it is true; I am not someone who would go to the other side of the world just for the fun of it.

A.L.J.: So all these countries, these far off cultures that we discover in your picture books are the fruit of your reading? Did you read a lot as a child?

F.P.: Yes, when I was a small boy I read a bit of everything and my first memory related to a book is *Apoutsiak, Le Petit Flocon de Neige* [Apoutsiak, Little snow flake] from the collection “Les Enfants de la Terre” [Earth’s Children] of “Les Albums du Père Castor” [Père Castor’s picture books], published by Flammarion.

Later I dived into the “Bibliothèque Rose”, the “Bibliothèque Verte” and “Mille Soleils”. But I also enjoyed going to the library to do documentary research, in particular historical research like many boys do. Then I moved on to the great classics, like *Treasure Island* and *Moby Dick*, in abridged versions I imagine, and Jules Verne. I read comic books like Tintin, Asterix, Lucky Luke, my favourite trilogy together with Valerian and Blueberry.

By the time I was 12, I had discovered collections of tales and legends – in particular the Greek and Roman Legends. I loved them very much, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*... I was fascinated by the Greeks and the Egyptians. In fact I was already fascinated by the historic aspect and by the distant, traveling through space and time. In the artistic field – drawing and illustration – my father was a painter and he had many books on the history of art and catalogues. I was very attracted to miniatures, mediaeval and Mongolian. I already did many drawings and miniatures when I was young.

¹ This interview was published in French in a dossier dedicated to François Place in *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, n° 254, September 2010, pp. 101-112.

A.L.J.: Did your parents tell you a lot of stories as a child?

F.P.: No but we were encouraged to read a lot. My mother was a primary school teacher and there were six of us at home. There was a large library in the house and my parents wanted us to help ourselves. Right from primary school we were given picture books like *Apoutsiak* for example and we read them ourselves.

Brigitte Andrieux: I can imagine you burying yourself in the engravings in the old Larousse illustrated dictionaries.

F.P.: Indeed. In fact there were not that many illustrations but I do remember an edition of the *Fables* of La Fontaine, illustrated by Gustave Doré which I looked at for hours. Later we moved to Tours and I spent a lot of time in the municipal library and as I grew up I continued. I loved to go there to read, leafing through the books on art, in particular the mediaeval and Flemish periods.

B.A.: So your father was an artist?

F.P.: Yes, and he worked in many different forms, mosaic, design, painting – sometimes figurative sometimes abstract, depending on the periods. But he had to do other jobs to earn a living. I realized that the life of an artist is not easy. I said to myself that if I did not earn my living drawing, I would change direction.

B.A.: What about your brothers and sisters? Did they draw, too?

F.P.: No but my son, Pierre, is a writer and illustrator of comic books and I have a nephew studying at Beaux Arts in Nantes. I thought at first I just wanted to create images, and then I took a liking to it. But I am careful about the word artist even if there is necessarily an artistic element to my work.

A.L.J.: A creator or an artist is, among other things, someone who invents different worlds; either with images or with words or both as in your case. So from this point of view one could definitely say you are an artist.

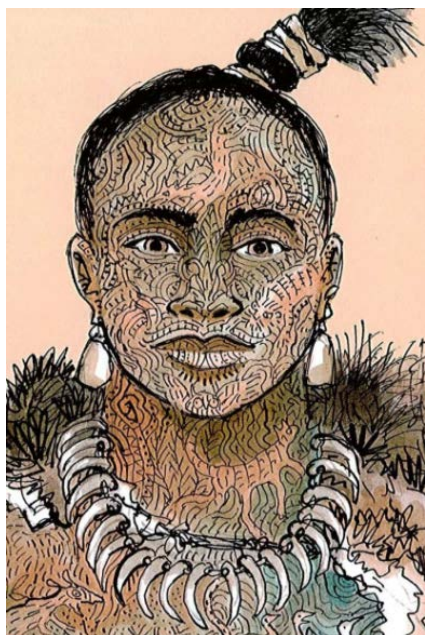
F.P.: And there are great creators in the world of illustration, like Saul Steinberg for example. But these are people who really interpret the world and give it a color, a unique voice. I see myself rather as a storyteller, through text and image.

B.A.: After you finished your studies at the École Estienne, did you immediately start to show your illustrations to children books' publishers or did you do something else?

F.P.: I had a friend who worked in advertising and I worked with him as a free-lancer over five or six years doing a style of illustration that was very commercial. I also worked for small audio visual companies who offered trainings based on diaporamas – video was not that developed then. I drew for slides, story boards etc. Advertising was my money job so that I could take my first steps in publishing. I worked as an illustrator for the collection “Bibliothèque Rose”, but the “serious” work began and in 1985-86 with “Découverte Cadet” for Gallimard Jeunesse. *Les Derniers Géants* [The Last Giants], my first picture book as both author and illustrator, was published in 1992, six years later. But *L'Atlas des Géographes d'Orbae* [A Voyage of Discovery] was already in my mind.

A.L.J.: So you became known first as a non-fiction illustrator. What did that teach you?

F.P.: As you know, it is a work which goes unrecognized most of the time, and is very constraining. For example for a documentary on history, one has to be accurate with the details concerning the costumes, the houses etc. A book for “Découverte Cadet” represented nearly a year's work. Financially not too profitable given the amount of time involved. Having said that, I really enjoyed doing it and learned a lot. Now I do a sort of pseudo documentary drawing which, although fairly accurate, is liberated from that type of restrictions.



For non-fiction children's books I only worked for Gallimard. Going to Casterman for *The Last Giants* happened because Pierre Marchand did not find the project interesting. I understand, because he was in a dynamic turned toward non-fiction books rather than fiction picture books.

At that time, most of the market was divided, roughly, between l'École des Loisirs for fiction and Gallimard Jeunesse for non-fiction. Of course there were other publishers. I went to see Marie Lallouet, the editor at Casterman whom I had previously met at Gallimard Jeunesse. She was interested in the idea and, in order to get the story known by the sales representatives, she organized a cassette recording with an actor and some especially composed music. The publication was important for me, it represented a milestone. It also provoked a change in the market as other authors have dared to create picture books -traditionally aimed at the younger market - for an older and more mature readership.

A.L.J.: In secondary schools, this picture book has often been remarked and used but fiction picture books were not that frequent before in these schools.

F.P.: There are very beautiful picture books for teenage readers. Librarians have said as much for years. The publication of *The Last Giants* opened up for me the possibility to suggest other projects and to widen my knowledge of the professional network. Many young illustrators and authors produce marvelous work but have difficulty getting into the market. The competition is fierce and it is very difficult to make a living of it. I was very lucky to have the time and the opportunity to learn and make mistakes. Meeting Pierre Marchand was a determining factor for me and I was able to profit from my time at Gallimard as in an art school!

B.A.: Everybody knows how presenting projects, even consistent projects, to publishers, is difficult today for young people. And they are, it seems, quickly discouraged by the lack of interest they meet

F.P.: The publishers already have their authors and illustrators, and publishing is changing rapidly with a faster and faster turnover of titles. Part of this production relies on the commercial collections which are the bread winners. More audacious projects or those which cannot easily be classified are always risky and make publishers hesitate. However they are always ready, I feel, to accommodate new talents.

A.L.J.: What were your first publications as an author/illustrator?

F.P.: My first was a non-fiction book, *Le Livre des navigateurs* [The navigators' book] and I did two just after that one: *Le Livre des explorateurs* [The Explorers' book] and *Le Livre des marchands* [The Merchants' book]. They required a lot of preliminary research – and I went on for that matter, reading on anthropology, ethnology and travel tales.

B.A.: Do you still go to libraries for your research?

F.P.: To be honest, much less as there is the Internet where I get much of my visual documentation. There are many on line libraries but I still like walking into a library and borrowing books and CDs. I find that a public library is a good source of resources.

B.A.: You have illustrated some authors like Timothée de Fombelle and Michael Morpurgo, would you like to illustrate more classic authors like Yourcenar?

F.P.: I am not sure. It is true that I visualize a lot when I read novels. But one has to feel an affinity in order for that to be possible. It happened with *Tobie Lolness* [Toby Alone] because in Timothée's tale there was room for illustration. The tale itself does not fill it all. There is a lot of dialogue and action but quite little description. That is interesting for an illustrator. As for Michael Morpurgo, I do not



need to say how lucky I felt to be able to illustrate his work. But you have to be careful with a novel not to interfere with the reading. For the most part, I prefer illustrations that are simple and not too diverting from the text.

A.L.J.: In Le Royaume de Kensuké [Kensuke's Kingdom], for example, the illustrations work very well.

F.P.: Yes, thumbnails that just shed a light. That is all that is necessary.

B.A.: To return to your first novel as an author – La Douane Volante. Why did you decide to publish it without any illustration, apart from the cover?

F.P.: It was a deliberate choice. I hoped that the text would be sufficiently visual and everyone has said that this is the case. I have only received one criticism from a young person saying that there is too much description but I cannot tell really if there is too much or not enough.

A.L.J.: One is sufficiently gripped by the adventures that the descriptions do not weigh heavily on the narrative. And also one sees the characters and the landscape.

F.P.: It was also a challenge, I wondered if I could write a book with no pictures. In fact the project was part of a commission by Jean-Philippe Arrou-Vignod who wanted me to write a novel for the collection that he directs for Gallimard Jeunesse, "Hors-piste". He asked me "When are you going to write a novel?" When he asked me a second time, that pushed me into doing it, I started and wrote three chapters which I sent him. He said that he liked them a lot and told me to continue. Little by little the novel took on its own life and became a long one. We then realized it could not be published in the "Hors-piste" anymore. But I was happy that the book had a good feedback from the editorial team.

A.L.J.: As an author, the adventure must also be exciting for you – to go with words, just the words?

F.P.: Yes, it is really a pleasure to roll it out, especially when it flows nicely. But I do know that some readers are a bit upset as the novel maybe does not give all the keys.

A.L.J.: This is precisely what I find so interesting, including the notions of space/time. We go from one world to another, yet the other world, the one which Ankel takes the young Gwen to, is highly realistic. Personally I like the deliberate hesitation, the "trembling" between the fantastic and the real.

F.P.: Exactly. The readers who are too Cartesian in their outlook may be disturbed, especially at the end. Thinking about it afterwards I felt that I could have put in two rather precious specific little keys. The Baie des Trépassés is the source of many legends in Brittany, legends that tell it is the place where sailors lost at sea will return to floating between two seas. It is due to the sea currents I understand. To not be buried is a problem though as one needs a body for the resurrection. This is where the legends of lost sailors, ghost ships come from. One digs a grave but they

are considered to be lost in a state of limbo; not really dead but not really alive: between two words. This is why Gwen returns through the Bay; he himself is not sure if he is alive or dead.



And the other element is that during the First World War there was in France a country of l'Ankou, a country of death across the territories of the North and the East. It was called the Front. It separated the behind and the front; one had little chance of returning alive from there. Soldiers died in their tens of thousands from bombs. But when they went behind the lines on leave, they saw people in cafés... life went on. Then they would be sent back to the Front saying "I will not come back, I'm going to the Front, the land of death". It was the theme of the song of Craonne, the song of the 1917 mutinies, "goodbye life, goodbye love". My character, Gwen, escapes this land but finds himself in another that is ravaged by the Plague, which likewise decimates the population. It is a similar experience to that of Kermeur at the Front, the old friend that Gwen meets again at the end. Maybe I could have been more forceful in making the comparison between the First World War and this place where a catastrophe ravages a town.

A.L.J.: However it is not a non-fiction book, it is a novel and it is good that the reader is not given everything and that imagination can do the rest.

F.P.: In written fiction, what is great fun is to take the reader into a fictive world and then to take him so far into this world that it seems real. After all, it doesn't matter what happens there. You come back when you close the book. But when still in the book, you must accept the fact that you're not in the real world.

A.L.J.: This other world which Gwen discovers makes one think of the Netherlands and the Flemish paintings.

F.P.: Yes, the paintings of Jan Van Goyen in particular, which I drew sketches of at Beaubourg where there are three books on this painter as well as catalogues on many more. They are paintings of everyday life – life in the Netherlands in the XVIIth century, at ground level. They are almost like wide-shot photographs, taken from the point of view of a man. We can see people going about their daily lives, in boats, taking their animals to pasture, going the market, fishing, etc. There is no action as such; it's simply descriptive, daily life. It is moving because the people are just there, like that. It is interesting to enter, through writing, into a world that has been painted by someone else and to move through this world with a character whom I can move as I wish on the canals, in winter etc.

A.L.J.: It is true that we observe the ordinary people in your novel. You started from a world depicted in painting, and took the reader into this world, with words. When you are both the illustrator and author, how do you go back and forth between the words and the pictures?

F.P.: There are two possibilities. Either I write without thinking of the visual element which is what I did for *Le Prince Bégayant* [The Stuttering Prince] which I originally wrote for a dance. It was a tale which would be told on stage. Then, when I went on to illustrate it, I found I had similar difficulties as with a text written by someone else.

For *L'Atlas* it was much more mixed as I knew exactly if I would put the information in the illustrations or in the text. I always know what will be in each, even when for non-fiction books; what will feed the text or even just a short phrase. And there are so many possibilities to play with the two.

For example in *Le Pays d'Esméralda* [Esmeralda's country] there is a story written by the Indians who had dreamed about the arrival of Los Conquistadors. They send ambassadors to them. The text is all about a sort of double voyage; that of the Indians going to the Conquistadors' fortress in the Amazon (to keep it simple) across the mountains. And there is a second voyage. They get the Spanish to smoke the "dream herb" and they leave in their dreams for a land they will never really see. This is evoked by the voice of dreams, the voice of vision. As inspiration for this, I used the texts from the Nahuatl Indians, which I had read in *L'Envers de la Conquête* [The other story of the Conquest], a work where these texts had been collected, where they lamented the end of their world. These texts have a particular way of addressing Nobility, a writing style I used in the book. At the same time, in my book, I drew a sort of strip, like a codex, representing the whole voyage. So there you have an example of the possibilities of interplay between

illustration and text. *L'Atlas* was, for me, an enthralling experience as a writing and drawing workshop, with its twenty-six different tracks, its twenty-six different ways of approaching a tale. Sometimes in the third person, sometimes the first person, sometimes as an essay, sometimes with dialogue.

A.L.J.: A sort of Human Comedy in miniature?

F.P.: While keeping everything in proportion, *L'Atlas* has an arborescent construction, and above all, with paths crossing through it. This does also give me the possibility to imagine a follow up.

B.A.: One has the impression that the more you progress in your work, the more you involve yourself with voyages across time, after your voyages across space?

F.P.: They are inseparable, no? I have the impression that the more we move on and the more we worry about the general breakdown of our system: pollution, the running out of raw materials, the energy crisis. The world is changing fast and that is quite frightening. But one can see that there are also ancient, forgotten levels which are being erased little by little.

A.L.J.: Do you feel you are a sort of anthropologist? A guardian of the universal memory?

F.P.: Hardly. I am interested in the past not for nostalgic reasons, and not because I believe that the world used to be easier and more beautiful. To talk about the history of voyages means going back to a fantasized place, full of marvels. Marvels in every sense of the word: dangerous, worrying but very beautiful nevertheless. We feel these emotions when we go to far off countries and are faced with a natural spectacle like The Grand Canyon. That's what I like to write about. It's full of images, very varied, very exciting.

A.L.J.: As if you'd gone back to the first day or the world?

F.P.: That's what I like to write about. It has a great visual richness; it's very varied, very exciting.

A.L.J.: It is also wonderful to imagine that books, novels or illustrated books can revive or evoke lost worlds. You write and draw for young people as though you were a sort of guardian, preserving something important and precious; to draw their attention away from the constant disturbances of the modern world. To try and lead them back towards something which is truly essential.



F.P.: Frankly such a task would be impossible for anyone. However, to transmit what has inspired me, yes, that is what I try to do. I am not thrilled with Heroic Fantasy, very much in fashion at the moment, because it plays too much with certain types: elves, trolls, demons... My characters are borrowed from reality; they are human with all the ambiguity and ambivalence that that implies. True there are occasionally fantastic characters, like *l'Ankou*. But at the same time *l'Ankou* had a reality for people at one time. It has long been thought, for example that the Patagons were giants, witnesses seemed to confirm that. It took centuries, and it was after much research that it was said that they were not giants, just not Pygmies. It is the opposite with the Pygmies. I think it was Herodotus who first brought it up but no-one really believed it. And one had to wait for the end of the XIXth century to discover, after many travelers' tales, that the Pygmies were indeed a real people and not fables from ancient Geography.

Voyages created many extraordinary stories of that nature but in the end one finds humanity. The Heroic Fantasy typology irritates me because it associates psychological and moral characteristics with morphological ones which lead one to the idea that there can be “subhuman” “superhuman” and a “normal” humanity.

A.L.J.: So what really excites you, in all your stories, are the ordinary people. Your books do not stage heroes in the sense of heroic superpowers; your characters are buffeted, full of doubts and questions and do not always achieve their goals.

F.P.: They are not perfect, that’s for sure.

B.A.: A moment ago when you were talking about the First World War, I thought of Tardi. Have you ever tried to do comics?

F.P.: No, never. It is a very specific medium (with its own layout) and that doesn’t tempt me in the slightest. In fact, what I like best is to make false non-fiction, with landscapes, characters, costumes... That is what I find the most fun.

B.A.: Following your novel without illustration, how about a picture book with no text? Like Le Roi des trois orientes [The King of The Three Orientes] but in one roll. Because your images are very narrative and sometimes one wants to just enjoy them.

F.P.: It’s not impossible, maybe. But the problem is my drawings – like my texts – are aimed at the older readers. Picture books without text are more for small children, no? And also I enjoy telling stories, writing!

B.A.: Are there, hidden in your cupboard, styles, projects with techniques that we are unaware of?

F.P.: No, I am really at ease working with liquid mediums, ink, watercolour, aquarelle... When I use other techniques something goes very wrong. I admire techniques like Bruno Heitz’s and Joëlle Jolivet’s linocuts and the sculptures of Nathalie Fortier, I find them superb. I have obviously tried other styles but as my drawing style is cursive, similar to writing, if I work with a coloured page it is not very satisfactory. I look for a sort of writing of the image, a sort of written image: in *La Fille des batailles* [The Battles’ daughter], it’s the brush that guides the drawing. Then I start again and again, in order to reach this quality of the free line, as if I were writing.

A.L.J.: So it’s a quick movement?

F.P.: The line has to be precise but with great freedom. The thing with drawing is to find a gesture that is consistent everywhere. Each separate element and the whole must have the same quality, the same rhythm, the same freedom. This is why I rework so often.

A.L.J.: In the writing, too, rhythm and movement are also important.

F.P.: Yes, in writing as in the drawing. And that needs to be worked on. You must let yourself be taken by the work but you must also have a sense of perspective. It’s the difference between writing for yourself and writing to be published. The perspective is necessary to be able to look at what you have created and be able to say “this works and this does not”. Some writers like to follow the first draft and they think that you should rework as little as possible and their writing follows a movement. Personally I need to rewrite a lot. Sometimes the phrases fall into place but I always go back over them. I enrich and at the same time I prune. With short texts, I like to read them out loud, to record them to see if they sound good. For a short piece it is the only indication as to the rhythm. But if someone else reads, it does not always work. The rhythm of the phrases that one hears, as a reader, is very personal.



B.A.: Are you a collector? Are there objects that you find important?

F.P.: Not really. Even the family photos are in a box. I am not really interested in owning things. I prefer to spend my money on books for research. But I guess that every illustrator needs his or her own environment, for some it will be objects, for others books... documentation from the internet cannot replace that.

B.A.: Speaking of the internet, you provided the animation for the web site Musée du Louvre Junior. Was this a new experience for you?

F.P.: Oh yes and rather complicated. I suffered during that project.

B.A.: Were you approached by them?

F.P.: Yes, in fact I hardly knew how to use a computer apart from Word. Concerning the treatment and storing of images I knew nothing. I had to learn; they said to me "it's simple, you create the designs and story boards, send them to us – it is a production house – and we will create the animation. However it soon became clear that the deadlines were not being met. So I had to create the images, scan them, arrange them and then send everything by FTP because for some of the short films (24 in less than a year) I had less than a week. Production really started in February. It was awful, I felt like I was in a tunnel. I also had to do a lot of extra research for the details to be accurate, which made me modify the scenarios as I went.

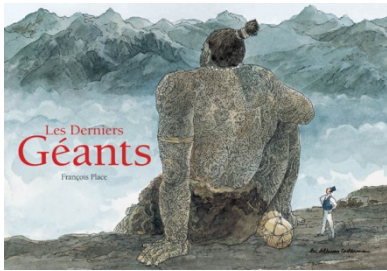
Fortunately the scenarists, Benoit and Emmanuelle de Saint-Chamas gave me a free hand and trusted me. From the technical point of view, however, it was a real exploit for me!

I have since decided to learn more to create my own site. Well, not yet. Maybe one day, maybe not! Young graduates from the art schools have all learned this already.

A.L.J. et B.A.: Thank you, François Place



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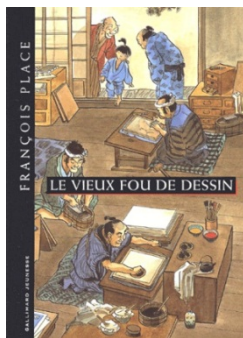
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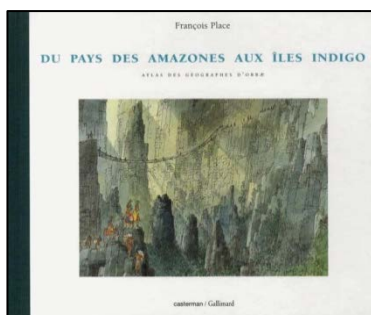
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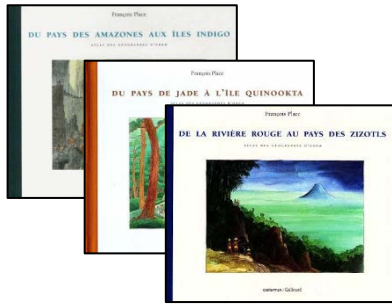
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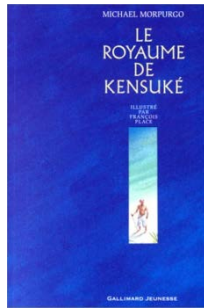
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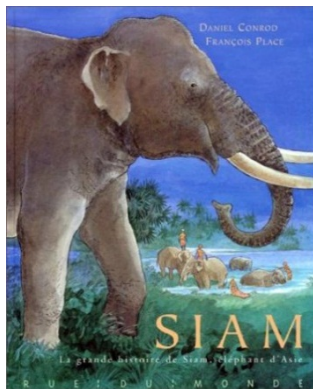
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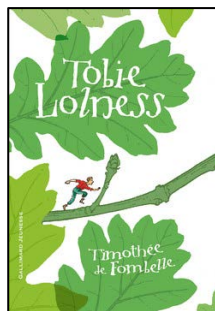
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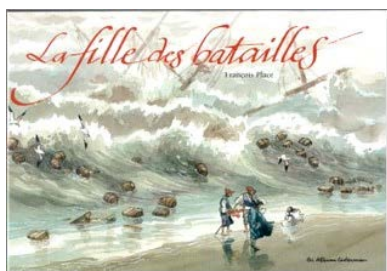
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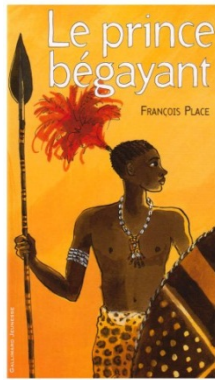
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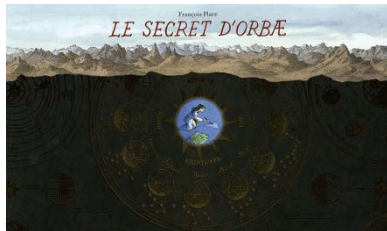
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L'Atlas des Géographes d'Orbæ

Conte spectacle « Les voyages de Ziyara », d'après les Encyclopédies des « Géographes d'Orbæ », par la C^{ie} Comme il vous plaira. Représentations :

Au centre culturel Saint-Exupéry, Bibliothèque Municipale de Franconville, en 2005 ; À Taverny, le 19 mai 2010.

Lecture musicale de trois contes extraits de *L'Atlas des géographes d'Orbæ* par Éric Pintus et Jean-Daniel Talma, à Valencienne en mai 2007.

Les Derniers géants

Adapté en spectacle (« pour quatre acteurs et marionnettes ») par Muriel et Joseph Arnace, de la compagnie Lucien et Madeleine Morisse. Représentations :

Au Centre culturel Jacques Prévert, à Villeparisis en novembre 1994 ; À L'Espace Carpeaux, à Courbevoie en novembre 2000.

Mis en scène par Nino D'introna
Am Stram Gram, Le Théâtre, Genève [Suisse], du 1^{er} au 20 avril 2008.

Grand Ours
Spectacle de marionnettes, par la Compagnie Morisse, en 2001

Le Prince bégayant
« Conte en danse » par la compagnie Alfred Alerte, d'après l'histoire : « Le Prince bégayant », à Valenciennes en mai 2007.

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1994

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Quatre illustrateurs [Frédéric Clément, François Place, Claude Ponti, Grégoire Solotareff]. Bibliothèque Municipale de Beauvais en avril 1994.

1995

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2007

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ONLINE RESOURCES

INTERNET SITES

« [François Place](#) »

A video of an interview with the author about *La Douane volante* and an audio presentation of the book.

« [François Place](#) »

A guide to analyze the work of François Place can be downloaded.

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« **Voir du pays dans les livres en images : fiction documentaire contre documentaire fiction** », in : « Si loin, si proche... Voyages imaginaires en littérature de jeunesse et alentour », Liliane Cheilan, Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, Danielle Dubois-Marcoïn, Jean-Yves Loude, François Place, introd. Sophie Van der Linden, p. 31-43.

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François Place reads an excerpt of Le Secret d'Orbae [Orbae's secret]

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Images from INA's Archives (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel).

Place, François et Fombelle, Timothée de

Timothée de Fombelle et François Place

Timothée de Fombelle reads excerpts from *Tobie Lolness* [Toby alone] while François Place draws on a large white paper pinned on the wall. The video has two parts.

<http://la-charte.fr/magazine/les-chartistes-creent-l-evenement/article/timothee-de-fombelle-et-francois>



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Place, François

François Place, Visiteurs du soir

Chaired by Annick Lorant-Jolly at the National Library of France.

TRANSLATED BOOKS

A SELECTION OF BOOKS WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY FRANÇOIS PLACE



ATLAS DES GÉOGRAPHES D'ORBAE :

- Chinese (Traditional)** - China times
- Chinese (Simplified)** - Publishing House of Electronic Industry
- English** - Pavilion (United Kingdom)



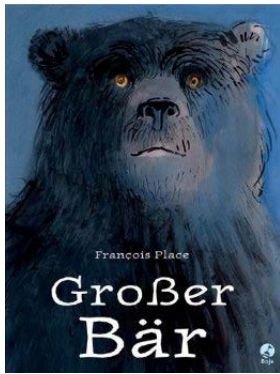
LES DERNIERS GÉANTS :

- Catalan** - Cercle de Lectores
- Chinese (Simplified)** - Publishing House of Electronic Industry
- Chinese (Traditional)** - China Times
- Dutch** - Casterman
- English** - Godine (USA)
- English** – Pavillon (United Kingdom)
- German** - Berthelsmann
- Greek** - Oceanida
- Italian** - L'Ippocampo
- Japanese** - Book Loan
- Korean** - Design House
- Spanish** - Blume
- Spanish** - Ekare (Venezuela)



LA FILLE DES BATAILLES :

- Italian** - L'Ippocampo
- Korean** - Sol Publishing



GRAND OURS :

Chinese (Simplified) - King In

German - Boje Verlag

Italian - Pestalozzi

Korean - Sol Publishing



LE ROI DES TROIS ORIENTS :

German - Gerstenberg

Italian - L'Ippocampo



LE SECRET D'ORBAE :

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Italian - L'Ippocampo

Korean - Sol Publishing

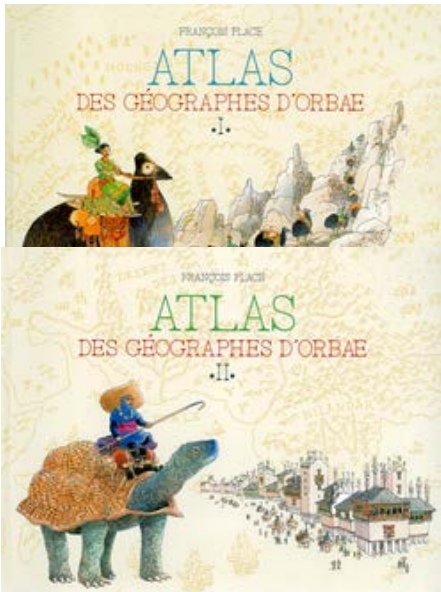


LE VIEUX FOU DE DESSIN :

English – Godine

Portuguese (Brazil) – Companhia das Letrinhas

BOOKS SENT TO THE JURORS



ATLAS DES GÉOGRAPHES D'ORBÆ [A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY]

CASTERMAN, 2015

Among the books François Place has written and illustrated, *L'Atlas des géographes d'Orbae* (A voyage of discovery) holds a special place (in three volumes, 1996-2000; published in two volumes in 2015). Books in which a very personal cosmography is redrawn from the elder's imagination. A fabulous "invention" (in the etymological meaning of the word) that highlights the author's creativity through his unique story-telling art and beautiful illustrations. *Du pays des Amazones* (from the land of the Amazons), the story of Euphonos the musician who has gone in search of the Amazons' song, to the *Pays des Zizotls* (The Zizotls' country) whose inhabitants leave the lightest of traces on earth as a sign of humility, 26 stories crisscross and call out to each other, twenty six worlds born out of a

graphic representation of the alphabet: universes and letters that are interrelated as the writing and the illustration. The author has fed on the numerous travel stories he has read and explored "a place that is almost out of reach for us now, that of the surprise, the geographical marveling, that of the vastness of the earth... My aim was to build an attic and references and then wonder in it, open up trunks, take out objects, work on analogies. As soon as the imagination is anchored a bit, it speaks from within ourselves. The illustrations alternate between long shots, wash drawings, and documentary boards, and are swarming with costumed characters, extraordinary animals, and unusual objects, minutely drawn and commented. François Place has not wanted to look for a particular style, but rather to "make images that are like reading, slow on the uptake". The illustrations extend the story and complete it as well, and incite to enter into the legend.

A Voyage of Discovery, Volume 1: From the Land of the Amazons to the Indigo Isles

François Place, translated by Aubrey Lawrence
Pavilion, £12.99

François Place is an extraordinary artist, not quite like anyone else I can think of. A Voyage of Discovery is a series of prodigiously inventive landscapes in words and exquisite pictures. The concept is rather like that of Umberto Eco's *Invisible Cities*: different places, in this case entire fantastical countries, are described and drawn in as if by curious observers from elsewhere.

The invention is astonishing: in Baïlabaïkal, for example, they build parks among the reed-beds where they rear giant snakes. In spring, the snakes are taken to volcanoes of hot mud, where male midwives help them shed their skins; and the skins are then stretched over a framework of sticks to make canoes. The spirit of the snake lives on in the canoe, helping the boatmen to steer. This little vignette occupies a page, and no less than seven amazingly detailed pictures. In fine pen line and exquisite wash, Place brings both whole panoramas and tiny details to life. And this is only the first of a promised three volumes! It is a triumph of imagination and craftsmanship: one of the most amazing works I've ever seen.

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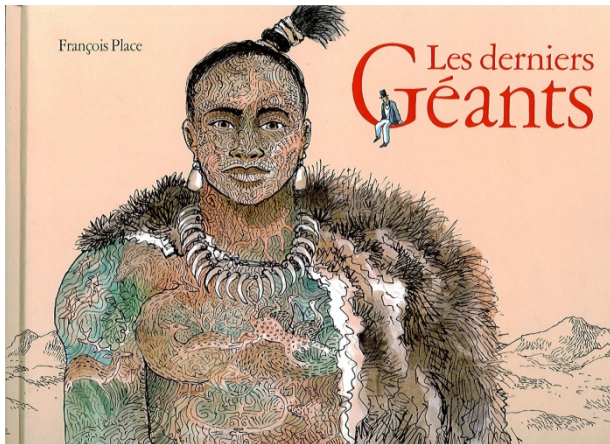
More than real



Philip Pullman
The Guardian, Tuesday 28 March 2000 12.02 BST

LES DERNIERS GÉANTS [THE LAST GIANTS]

20TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION. CASTERMAN, 2012



In *Les Derniers géants* (Casterman, 1992) (*The Last Giants*), a book that has won many awards since its publication, François Place takes his first steps in fiction: he shows the depth and coherence of his universe, his humanistic preoccupations and sensibilities, his concern about the balance between text and illustration in a classical and highly elegant picture book.

Archibald Léopold Ruthmore, a caricature of the English explorer of the 19th century, sets off in search of a fabled land whose tiny map is carved on a giant's tooth he bought from a sailor in the harbour. This travel diary, and its soft-coloured aquarelles, turns into a guiltful confession about the disastrous intrusion into the strange and preserved universe of nine peaceful and calm giants. All covered in tattoos, they live in harmony with nature and follow the pace of stars. But upon his return to Europe, Archibald will cause the destruction of the so far preserved land of giants: the numerous lectures he gives will lead to the rush of unscrupulous men. The detailed and elaborated full-page drawings represent majestic landscapes - snow covered high mountains, bubbling waterfalls sprouting out of moss covered rocks, leafy forests - where the explorer seems to be all tiny next to the giants whose tattooed bodies, like endlessly moving maps, carry the marks of the events they have been through.

THE LAST GIANTS

Publication: Books For Keeps

Reviewer: Michael Morpurgo

Date: March 2000

BRIEFING·BRIEFING·BRIEFING·BRIEFING·BRIEFING·BRIEFING·BRIEFING·

I wish I'd written ...

Michael Morpurgo on François Place's **The Last Giants**, a potent tale of the folly of man ...

It is a rare thing to be able to write *and* illustrate supremely well. Many try, and the result is often uneven. In *The Last Giants* François Place has produced a masterpiece.



The story seems simple enough. Set in Victorian England an anthropologist discovers a giant tooth, carved, depicting a map of rivers and mountains. Research confirms this is the region of the Black River. He sets off on a voyage of discovery across the world, until at long last he discovers a land of giants. These gigantic, gentle creatures seem to have an ideal way of being as yet

unattained by human society. He studies them, draws them, and after some months - and very reluctantly - leaves them.

Back home at the Royal Geographical Society, with Darwin there amongst others, he presents his paper, announces to the world his extraordinary discoveries. He is instantly famous, as of course are the giants.

Upon his return to the land of the giants some time later, he witnesses the dreadful consequences of what he has done - the gentle tribe of giants has been sought out and massacred.

It is a potent tale of the folly of man, of lost innocence, of hubris, and all wonderfully illustrated - the illustrations form part of the storytelling (they are the records of this voyage). A marvellous book which won praise and prizes all over France, but is scarcely read here. Pick it up, read, and wonder.

The Last Giants by François Place is published by Pavilion, 1 86205 289 1, £5.99 pbk. Michael Morpurgo's latest book is **Kensuke's Kingdom**, Heinemann, 0 434 80418 5, £8.99 hbk (see review in **BfK 120**).



LA FILLE DES BATAILLES [THE BATTLES' DAUGHTER]

CASTERMAN, 2007



In this picture book, Garance, a mute child with dark skin, the only survivor of a shipwreck, is faced with the harsh reality and ordeals of 17th century France. This tale of adventure is full of historical elements that have required a thorough documentation work from the author-illustrator. Just like in *Les Derniers Géants* (The Last Giants), he first conceived his story in images to be able to visualize it and master its progression. The sketches "are like the painted scenes of a puppet theater. The story is pinned to these scenes and undergoes its twists and turns. The fact of not having close-ups on the characters in the drawings yields a

distance I find similar to theatre work." He makes numerous sketches, using pencil, lead, brush, wash drawing, and then tinted ink or watercolour; he researched Flemish and Dutch masters' paintings, such as Watteau, to be able to imagine and represent the landscapes, the characters' costumes and attitudes.

The eventful life of a dark skinned girl, who survived a shipwreck, evokes a time when France was ruled by an authoritarian and vindictive king, a time of war and arbitrary decisions. It tells the story of a life of struggle for the little people who suffer on the hands of those who hold the power. An exciting tale rendered truly authentic by the superb and detailed illustrations.

Télérama^{fr}

La Fille des batailles

Album jeunesse - François Place

TTT François Place a traversé le temps, conquis des paysages, imaginé des personnages, donné vie à une histoire d'amour, aussi tourmentée que radieuse. L'écrivain illustrateur renoue avec le récit au long cours et ses fresques miniatures. Dans la lignée des *Derniers Géants* et de *L'Atlas des géographes d'Orbæ*, *La Fille des batailles* est un hymne à la passion, à la rage de vivre. Le lecteur d'emblée est projeté au XVII^e siècle, dans une France dévastée par les guerres. Ainsi commence l'histoire : « Une nuit de novembre, alors que soufflait une de ces épouvantables tempêtes que l'automne envoie pour annoncer l'hiver... », un navire fait naufrage.

Seule rescapée, une fillette à la peau brune. Elle est muette. Elle est recueillie par des aubergistes. François Place ne ménage pas son héroïne : Garance, la fille des îles lointaines, tombe amoureuse d'un jeune garçon, bientôt enrôlé tambour dans l'armée du roi de France. Accusé de désertion, il part aux galères. Garance l'attend, élève seule leur petite fille, celle qui sera douée de parole... François Place a travaillé le rythme avec minutie, texte raffiné et images lumineuses. *La Fille des batailles* n'est pas seulement un conte, c'est déjà une légende.

Le 03/11/2007 - Mise à jour le 31/10/2007 à 10h43
Martine Laval - Telerama n° 3016



Ed. Casterman, 80 p., 16,95 EUR (à partir de 12 ans).

LES DERNIÈRES CRITIQUES

[Un père en colère](#)
Jean-Sébastien Hongre

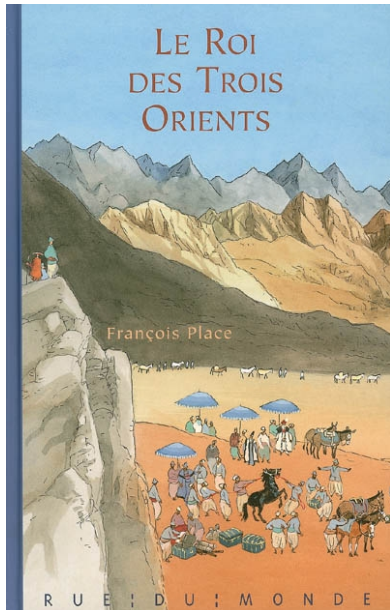
[Le Peuple des berges](#)
Robert Giraud

[Shâb ou la nuit](#)

Source: <http://www.telerama.fr/livres/la-fille-des-batailles,21264.php>

LE ROI DES TROIS ORIENTS [THE KING OF THE THREE ORIENTS]

RUE DU MONDE, 2006



In 2006, when *Le Roi des Trois Orientes* (The King of three Orientes) is published by Rue du Monde, the book is accompanied by a roll, in "Asian" fashion: three long paper strips that are unrolled as we read the book. Place's illustrations flow from page to page, embarking the reader in an immense procession behind the Great Embassy like a town that would have set into motion to visit the "Great king, the king of the three orientes". The journey reminds us of Marco Polo's travel, but François Place makes no mention of date or place, yet we are guided by clues like the landscapes of Tuscany, the cedars of Lebanon, the mountains of Afghanistan, the Gobi desert, and China at last. There are also "cultural anchors": architecture, clothing... We thus enter into the images, minutely, attentively detecting all the scenes in it. Sometimes, the words guide our gaze.

Throughout the events that unfold during this long journey, the text delivers its beautiful message of wisdom and liberty.

The roll is available in a PDF format. Please bear in mind that the roll is long; you can zoom in to see all the details.

internationales literaturfestival  berlin

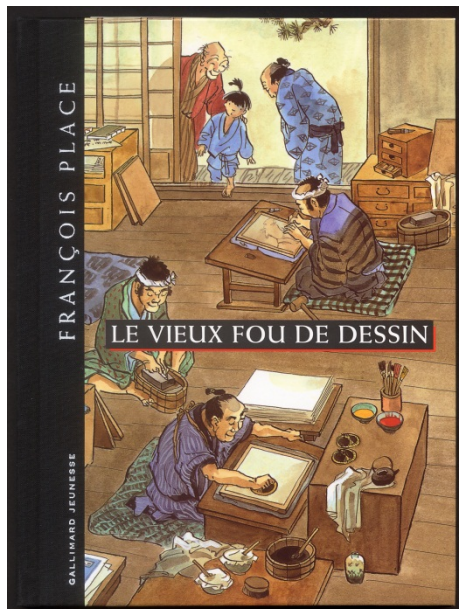
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(...) His adventure stories in the form of travel chronicles continually engage readers' imaginative faculties and take them beyond their conception of reality. In »Le roi des trois Orientes« (»The King of the Three Orientes«, 2006), a caravan defies enormous challenges as it wanders the world for an unspecified period in search of a legendary king. Much remains veiled in this story, inviting readers to fill in the blanks with their own interpretations. This picture book boasts »expertly-matched images and text [...]». Place manages to combine an elevated tone with a delight in expression and the straightforward prose of legends, without ever becoming dowdy«, commented Eva-Maria Magel in the »Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung« in 2008. (...)

Source: <http://www.literaturfestival.com/participants/authors/2011/francois-place>

LE VIEUX FOU DE DESSIN [THE OLD MAN MAD ABOUT DRAWING]

GALLIMARD JEUNESSE, 2002



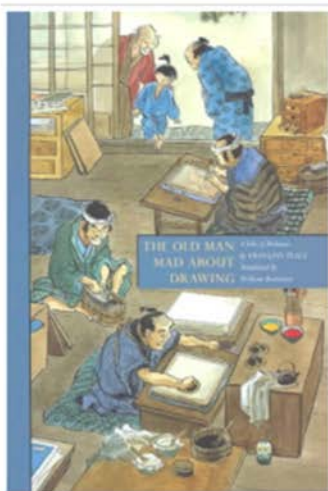
François Place renders a tribute to the great Japanese painter Hokusai (1760-1849) by imagining his encounter with Tojiro, a little orphan boy who lives with his uncle and earns a living selling rice cakes in the streets of Edo. He's unaware of this faithful, elderly and grumpy client's identity, who soon will ask him to become his assistant. The old man is eager to transmit his culture. He speaks of Kabuki theatre, shows him sumo tournaments, takes him to the temple, explains the techniques behind image reproduction, ink fabrication... but he also teaches him to look and to work endlessly because that is the only way one can enter, day after day, the essence of art. Tojiro is adamant to learn. François Place adapts his style to his subject; he has observed Hokusai's art, his sense of movement, his characters' expressivity, the freedom in his lines and he is inspired by it all. He also shows the great master's work by integrating reproductions of his drawings and engravings. This beautiful book is both a lesson in art and in life.

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a review of books, websites, movies, or anything worth reviewing with comments about libraries and librarianship

Friday, March 06, 2009

The Old Man Mad About Drawing: A Tale of Hokusai by Francois Place



What attracts me to Japanese art is getting a bird's-eye-view of everyday life in a foreign time and place. I enjoy scenes showing royal courts, artisan workshops, marketplaces, and travelers. Often there are distinctive pets, birds, trees, and mountains in the background. As I scan the scenes to see what each figure is doing, I often want to enter the picture myself. I find the same joy in [The Old Man Mad About Drawing: A Tale of Hokusai](#) by Francois Place.

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) is one of the best remembered artists and print makers of the Edo Period of Japanese art. I recognize several of the illustrations that are inserted among beautiful original drawings by William Rodarmor. Most famous is *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*, one of *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. Francois Place portrays Hokusai as an easily irritated old artist in *The Old Man Mad About Drawing*. Only a young and curious rice cake vendor named Tojiro is able to crack the old man's hard shell. Hokusai adopts Tojiro as an apprentice and shows him the ways of a master painter.

Every page of this book is nicely illustrated. It is good reading for young and old.

Place, Francois. *The Old Man Mad About Drawing: A Tale of Hokusai*.

David R. Godine, 2004. ISBN 1567922600

Source: <http://ricklibrarian.blogspot.fr/2009/03/old-man-mad-about-drawing-tale-of.html>