

# BARBU LOUISE

1931 - 2021



While visiting museums, galleries and other cultural places, this **self-taught artist** learned the art of painting. She then presented her paintings to Iris Clert, a renowned gallery owner, who was touched by her originality. This marked the beginning of a long collaboration from 1974 until the gallery closed in 1985.

For more than 50 years, Louise Barbu has been exploring the meanders of abstract painting. **Abstract** because it is not figurative. She nevertheless stands out from it with perfectly defined and delimited organic forms, all in a perfectly organised space, speaking herself of «non-figurative». This phrase reflects the artist's taste for **paradoxes and the reconciliation of the impossible**.

Louise Barbu was deeply marked by the memory of the skies of her childhood at Orly, crossed by the wakes of planes. The vegetal register of her beginnings also drew its inspiration from her garden in Thiais, where she produced her first canvases made of plant elements glued in weightless spaces, canvases that she called the « **air period** ».

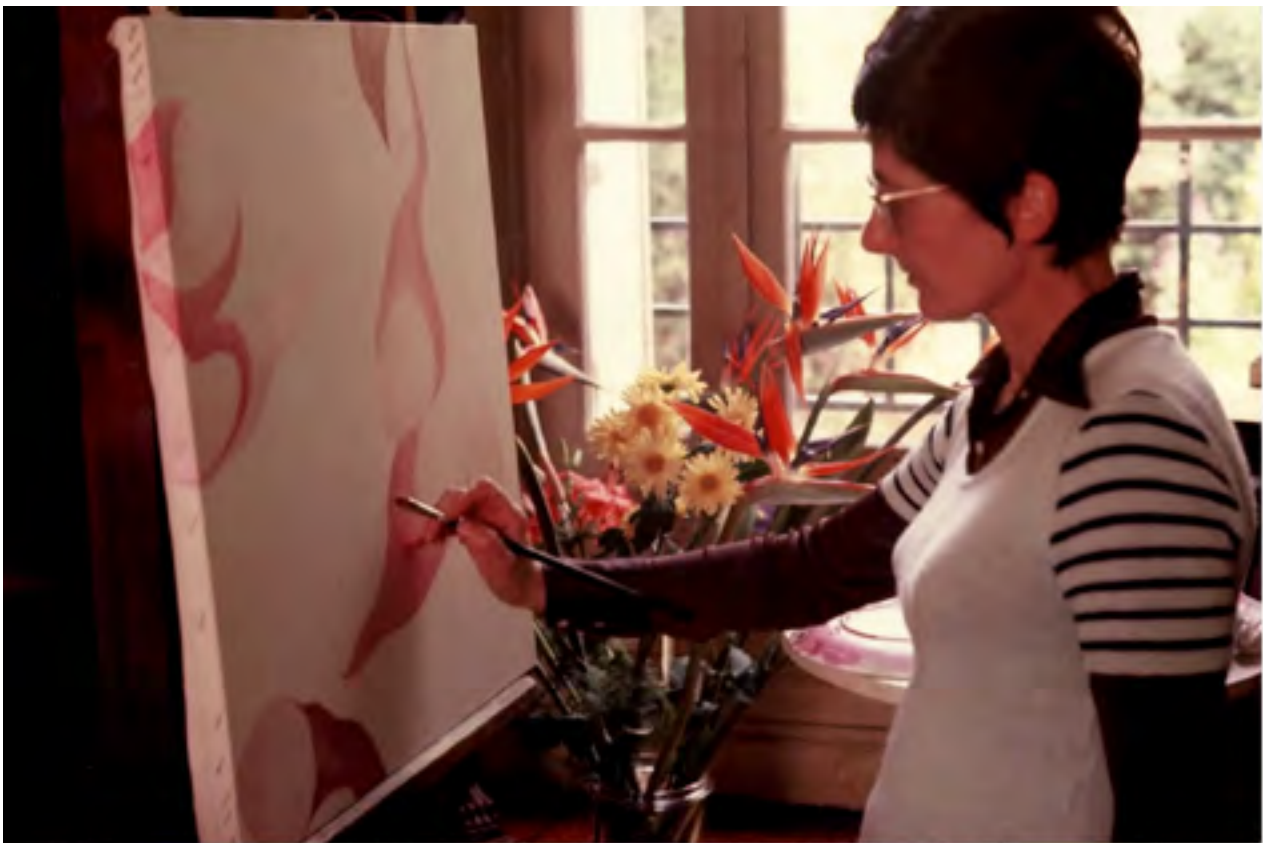
This was followed by the long series of « **Sensualités** » in the 1970s, in which the forms, thanks to an inner light, seem to swell and become taut like «skins». These sensual forms play on the tension between depth and flatness and do not fail to appeal to the viewer's imagination.

It was in the mid-1980s that a change took place. Louise Barbu introduced new, more stretched forms, a kind of plant stems that pierced the forms. There was also a change in colour, with the soft blues and pinks being replaced by a brighter palette, with subtle gradations of white, yellow, red and green. Then comes the black which will allow the shape to gain in relief and to come out of the shadow to better shine in the light. It is from this play of light and shadow that the background insinuates itself into the form, giving an impression of continuity and infinity to Louise Barbu's paintings.

Over time, other forms have intruded into the artist's **sidereal universe**, thus creating a veritable **ALPHABET** of his own: the « **flexible squares** », the « **forbidden tolerated** », the « **air filters** » which evoke the white trails left by planes in the sky, and the « **generative drawing** ». The latter, which appeared in 1996, is the miniature sketch painted in white in a corner of the painting, always placed last on the canvas and recalling the initial form.

More recently, the spiral scrolls of « **DNA** » have been added to **the language of the canvases**. The artist chooses to leave the viewer's imagination free to explore this presence, but one cannot help but see in it **a figurative allusion to the living world**, to life and, more broadly, to the passage of time.

Louise Barbu lives and works in Paris. Her works are exhibited in various cultural venues in France (Paris, Angers, Mayenne, Toulon, Nice, Le Touquet, Château de Carrouges...) and abroad (Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Japan, USA...).



## PERSONAL EXHIBITIONS :

- 2017** Sens Intérieur Gallery, Presqu'île de Saint-Tropez, Cité Lacuste, Port Cogolin
- 2013** Creuse Valley Museum, Eguzon, Indre, France
- 2011** Château de CARROUGES, Carrouges, France.
- 2006** Musée du Touquet, Le Touquet, France.
- 2004** Maison des Arts, Châtillon, Hauts de Seine, France.
- 2002** Centre Noroît, Arras, France.
- 1999** Centre Culturel, Chapelle des Calvairiennes, Mayenne, France.
- 1996** Henri Bénézit Gallery, Paris, France.
- 1994** Office Fléchois d'Action Culturelle, La Flèche, France.
- 1992** Demay-Debève Gallery, Le Touquet, France
- 1990** Henri Bénézit Gallery, Paris, France.
- 1989** Kunst Raum Gallery, Cologne, Germany
- 1987** Mussavi Arts Center, New York, USA.  
Henri Bénézit Gallery, Paris, France.
- 1986** Maison Française, Columbia University, New York, USA.
- 1985** Mussavi Arts Center, New York, USA.
- 1984** Syn'art, Paris, France.  
Palais de l'Europe, Le Touquet, France.  
ACAP Art Gallery, Le Touquet, France.
- 1982** Aux Anysetiers du Roy, Paris, France.
- 1981** Service Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland.
- 1980** Galerie Iris Clert, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France.

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS :

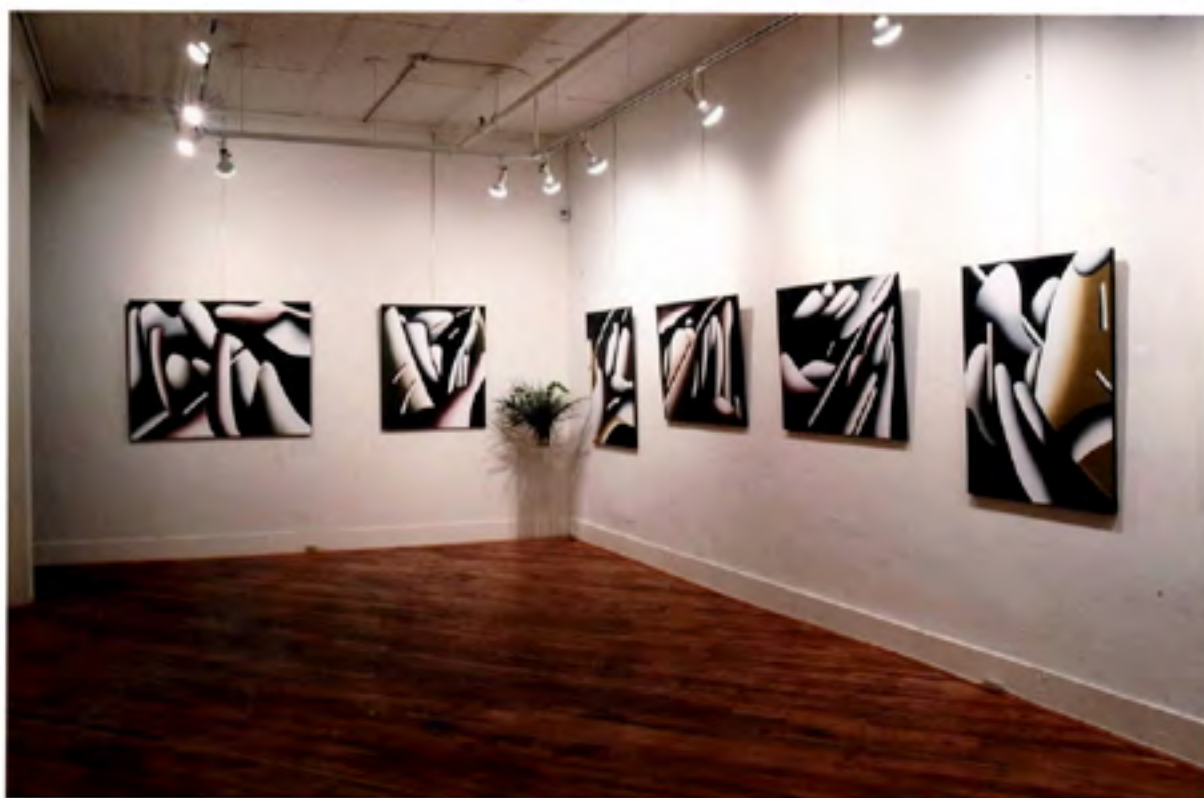
- 2022** Hommage à Louise Barbu, Salon Comparaisons, Grand Palais Ephémère, Paris
- 2020** Comparaisons, Selected (France - Japan), Grand Palais, Paris
- 2014** Salon de Mai, Grand Palais, Paris
- 2006** Selection of Comparisons, Chapelle des Jésuites, Chaumont, Haute-Marne  
Un monde surréaliste, works on paper, Galerie Les Yeux Fertiles, Paris
- 2005** Le pli s'illustre, Abbaye aux Dames, Caen
- 2003** De la Terre au Ciel, Grenier du Chapitre, Cahors  
Le choix et découverte de l'œil Neuf, Marly-le-Roi
- 2002** Mac 2000, Espace Auteuil, Paris  
Salon d'Art Contemporain, guest artist, Espace Culturel, Viry-Chatillon  
Salon d'Automne, guest artist, Espace Maurice Béjart, Verneuil-sur-Seine  
Salon d'Angers, Angers  
Galerie F. Thibault, Saint-Brieuc.

## Biography

- 2000** *L'oiseau change de ciel*, Château de Montauriol, Montauban.  
*The PHASES movement*, Chapelle des Calvairiennes, Mayenne.  
*The PHASES movement*, Centre Noroit, Arras.
- 1999** *Mac 2000*, Espace Eiffel-Branly, Paris
- 1997** *Monte-Carlo International Contemporary Art Fair*
- 1996** Véra Museum, Saint-Germain-en-Laye
- 1994** *PHASES*, Plemet-Ploeue-Quintin
- 1993** Demay-Debève Gallery, International Art Market, Le Touquet  
Véra Museum, Saint-Germain-en-Laye  
*Art at School*, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Paris  
*La Traductière*, Maison des Ecrivains, Paris
- 1991** Henri Bénézit Gallery, International Art Market, Le Touquet
- 1989** Henri Bénézit Gallery, Paris
- 1988** *Hommage à Iris Clert*, Grand Palais, Paris
- 1987** *Korea-France*, Korean Cultural Centre, Paris  
*Hauts de Belleville*, MCJ de Belleville, Paris
- 1986** *Tribute to Iris Clert*, Acropolis, Nice  
*Contemporary Art Exhibition*, ADAC, Le Vésinet and Fondation Cartier, Jouy-en-Josas
- 1985** *Creations, plural feminine word*, « Les Hauts de Belleville », MJC  
*Confrontations*, «Les Hauts de Belleville», MJC  
*Dialogue*, UNESCO, Paris  
*La Traductière*, Maison des Ecrivains, Paris
- 1984** *Expression quotidienne*, Vitry-sur-Seine, Galerie Municipale  
*5th Salon de Création Artistique*, Bourg- en-Bresse
- 1983** ACAP Art Gallery, Le Touquet
- 1982** *Art and Fashion*, Espace Pierre Cardin, Paris  
*Figuration Critique*, Paris
- 1980** Iris Clert Gallery, Horizon Jeunesse, MIGAM, Grand-Paris, Paris  
Salon Eclaté, Paris
- 1978** Salon de Montrouge  
Salon International d'Art, Musée de la Ville de Toulon  
International Exhibition of Monte-Carlo
- 1977** Iris Clert Gallery, FIAC, Paris
- 1974** *Large Women, Small Formats*, Iris Clert, Christophe, Paris

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS ABROAD :

- 2002** *A.P.S. XI Biennale- Korschthaus beim Engel, Luxembourg*  
**1985** *Travelling exhibition France-Japan by Nippon Television*  
**1990-1992** *Network, Tokyo Municipal Museum, Sapporo, Horoshima, Japan*  
**1991** *French Embassy, Washington, USA*  
**1978** *French Institute, Munich, Germany*  
**1976** *Carone Gallery, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA*  
**1967** *Casino de Knokke, Knokke, Belgium*



**Louise Barbu, Random trajectory.**

Louise Barbu's painting takes us off the traditional path with rigorous or sensual and mysterious forms, born of an imagination nourished by a nature without measure. Her unreal universe introduces «the overflows, the generative drawing, the square» on a surface subjected to its unbridled emergences. The colour is subject to an interaction relayed by subtle gradations. Each tonality requires several layers of the same colour; black is thus declined in blue black, in hot black or in cold black. Colour is kept in check by the empirical flow of curves and counter-curves and undulations whose whimsical wandering is part of this organic and physiological ambivalence. Since her debut at Iris Clert, Louise Barbu has developed her wandering accompanied by words and poems attached to her paintings, like so many entries into her world. Her utopias are called *Tentation des infinis*, *La Malise du bois vert*, *Souffle d'irréel* or *Emergence débridée*.



## **Temple of tropisms The work of Louise Barbu.**

I present you an abstract painter: Louise Barbu. For once, the word abstract is perfectly appropriate. Doesn't it mean - we usually forget - that an operation has been carried out, at the end of which the observed concrete has been extracted from its essence? So that at the end of the elimination of all ties with the particular, the specified, the identifiable, the circumstantial, of the progressive purification, of the rigorous abstraction, one is left with entities of an ideal character, of universal value, to the point that they immediately call for investigation and that from their contemplation arises this adventure: the discovery of their properties.

It consists - I add these formulas for the sake of clarity, I hope - in inviting their resources to reveal themselves, according to a new declination and a completely different mode, in calling upon their virtualities, which are asked to present themselves (unless it is to lend an ear - an eye - without tiring of their call).

Louise Barbu has long painted plants. It was often only fragments, we should note; to which we should add that she tended to isolate them in the space that was largely interposed between them and took the first place. It was the sky that could be seen through the holes in a poor leaf visited by slugs.

Starting with plants, she looked for essential, versatile forms that would, if possible, bring her deep satisfaction. She wanted them to be capable of expressing feelings.

Clouds appeared, or pans, as you will, swollen mushrooms, stretched like wineskins, croups, teats, or on the contrary having the aspect of curved pancakes; oblong balloons; soft masses which emitted protuberances, nourished appendices with the appearance of drops. These formations had no place. They came from, proceeded from the vacant space that bathed them. Just as they had arisen in it and would be engulfed in it, they had no contour of their own. Each painting fixed an instant of their eternal metamorphosis. Of their movements. For if they moved, it was not only because their appearance evolved but also and just as much because they aspired to reach each other, to touch each other, to come together, to abut each other. The same fundamental plasticity authorised the changes in their anatomy and allowed all the elongations and arches inspired by a powerful desire to come together.

The line was both pure and soft; the modelling, of extreme refinement, remained sober. The background colour was only one subtle shade - a soft, light pink or blue, sometimes joined by a brown - but it was largely assimilated, absorbed by a pervasive whiteness, which was none other than that of the light, and this light came from within. I use the past tense: not that the spectacle we were witnessing has ceased; it is that there is something new. The forms have simplified, purified, firmed up; renouncing their soft, unusual levitation, their slow drift, they stand like dunes - still moving - very smooth rocks, marine creatures inclined by their search, we don't know, or by the fresh passage of a current. Stems, above all, have appeared.

They cross the scene that the painting uncovers, they cross, if need be, the amenable flesh that they encounter on their way. Thanks to these sticks that like to be oriented obliquely, to these flexible but resolute stems, a contrast has been established, which the black of the background highlights. An irresistible transit is made through the channel of these elongated elements which visit the plump forms which, for their part, are not devoid of momentum. To what is the ambient magnetism due? To the introduction of the Yang, of course!

Let us congratulate Louise Barbu: her enterprise of abstraction is fully successful. What does she show us, in its pure state, if not individuation, if not form, which is its condition, the form that is just sufficient for us to distinguish it, the minimal form in its mobile, living contour; if not life; if not sensuality, if not affectivity? She has succeeded in isolating and illuminating the primary tropisms: the emergence of that which will separate itself from the background, produce its elementary singularity; immediately explore its own plastic possibilities - the modifications of its total, intimate relationship with this infinite neighbour: space -, satisfy its native, nascent curiosity for what surrounds it, its need to reach and recognise what its prospection discovers. Louise Barbu casts a clear and serene light on the mystery, laid bare, of this emergence from the depths - which will later be compensated for by the effacement in the bosom of the same depths -, this emergence - I mean this birth -, followed by mutations, investigations, contacts, exchanges.

The treasure of tropisms. Following Louise Barbu, who practises an empirical, concrete Platonism and invents new, very provisional species of which she only claims to make ephemeral examples, we discard what we know in order to access the «naturalistic nature». Being rudimentary makes the forms modest. They stand in the total bareness, the vulnerable sharpness, the fragility of their naked exemplarity. However, their very simplicity, which is not without rigour, their purity confers on them, keeps them, a universal status; from their very impersonality comes this monumental character, this gravity, this solemnity which strikes all the more because of a diffuse fervour.

We are indiscreet. We have approached an intimacy. We are contemplating a metaphysical solitude. Not the kind of solitude you find in Ernst or Alechinsky. For the solitude here is happy. The forms are among themselves. They shelter a light that rises through their skin and liberally spreads its fresh, brilliant whiteness over them. Could it be love? (Could the ambient emptiness be love - the desire to create, to invent, to appear in creatures, to fill them, to animate them, so that they are in front of each other?)

We are given a view - a partial view - of a limitless laboratory. Protected by the matricial, oceanic, cosmic night; the nocturnal, abyssal and celestial waters, the engravings are accomplished.

From a secret temple a wall has risen. A great silence presides over what takes place in this elusive temple - free of the obligation to be in a place: and invention and celebration. To tell the truth, they are indistinguishable.

**Henri Raynal.**





**Invitation vernissage**, Louise Barbu, 1980

La peinture de Louise Barbu nous fait découvrir un monde sans dimension ou plutôt pluridimensionnel qui plante là les théories, schémas et autres essais mathématiques à ce sujet.

Car il est vain de chercher d'autres repères que ceux qu'offrent les couleurs, les rythmes et les mouvements dans ce monde dont on ne sait s'il est de l'infiniment petit ou de l'infiniment grand.

Puisant leur force dans l'imagination du peintre, les tons multiformes et les formes multiformes s'enlacent et se dénouent de façon antigravitationnelle.

Stéphane Aufile

Louise Barbu, née sous le signe du taureau, est une chèvre dans l'astrologie chinoise. Les natifs de la chèvre sont des rêveurs placides et chimériques. Ils ne font jamais deux fois la même chose de la même façon.

Ils sont purs, au sens minéral du terme.

Les chèvres aiment surprendre et être surprises.

Je souhaite que la peinture de Louise Barbu vous surprenne à votre tour. Cette œuvre n'est ni figurative ni informelle, elle nous fait pénétrer au cœur du monde des formes pour nous imprégner d'une subtile sensualité.

iris clert