

Her pictorial project

« I paint the cerebral landscape »

« I am only picking up clues »

« I have no imagination »

« Everything must be moving forward and backward at the same time »

« I paint ensembles, suites »

Micheline LO

This page is the result of the study and the gradual discovery of Micheline LO's work.

Started on December 6, 2020, this twenty- third version dates from July 23, 2025.

It contains food for thought. Like in a notebook.

A text on the **Concept of cerebral landscape in Micheline LO** is available [See text \(here\)](#)

Painting the cerebral landscape

In the opening of the catalog for her exhibition *DIX ANS DE PEINTURE* (1992), Micheline LO wrote:

My work [...] cannot be satisfied with the encounter with the motif, it requires the interference of a third party [...]. That is why, although I deeply admire the desert, I prefer to paint it through the eyes of Flaubert, who borrows the gaze of Saint Anthony, who borrows the gaze of delirium, which absolutely distends the unity of the desert, since he sees only mirages.

So if a landscape excites me, it's the cerebral landscape. (my rare direct drawings of mountains, done when I'm in the Drôme, are marginal).

This is the guiding thread of her work as an artist: painting the cerebral landscape of others and then, from 1996, painting her own cerebral landscape.

And, just as any brain - either biological or artificial - is weighing up, associating, reinforcing or erasing indicia [clues] and gaps (écarts), Micheline LO will tirelessly paint: indicia, gaps, contrasts, singularities, cleavages, triggerings, effervescences, ...

Picking up clues

What does happen in a brain? Nobody knows. Nor in ones own, nor in others. To paint a cerebral landscape, one must look for clues.

A “clue” is “perceived.” It evokes and suggests. A redness on a face can be a clue to a fever, an irritation, a feeling, a pressure, an allergy, a burn, a makeup, etc. An elucidation process is necessary.

When Micheline LO said she was painting the cerebral landscape of Flaubert, Dante, Genet, or Saint-John Perse, she had only clues to go on. Like a detective, a hunter, or a scientist, she picked up clues in their writings. Among these clues were compactness (Flaubert), luminosity (Dante), confinement (Genet), or even the breath of the text (Saint-John Perse). These clues could betray or suggest something about the cerebral landscape of their authors.

Painting without imagination

Micheline LO said, “I paint without imagination.”

What she was painting was not “imagined” in the higher layers of the brain: those of the expressible and the rational.

Like an investigator, she picks up clues. And then she paints other clues.

Painting gaps (écarts)

Thematically, the gaps abound in Micheline LO's work:

- natural / supernatural * reason / delirium * life / death
- magnificence / derision * emptiness / brilliance * light / dark
- acceleration / deceleration * trait / color
- negative / positive volumes * evanescence / apparition
- figurative / non-figurative * analog / digital
- peace / hostility * nostalgia / modernity

- appearance / disappearance * form / content

In 1992, she would write:

The presence of an internal gap is required, that it has been swallowed up in the canvas, and that it [the canvas] holds it between its four edges.

Pictorially also, it is gaps and singularities that she explores, and in particular forward/backward relationships.

Painting in the depth

Micheline LO is particularly interested in forward/backward gaps, about which she was saying:

They give place to in-betweens where a basal movement, a pulsation, a vibration come into being.

And, if there is one phrase she never stopped repeating, it is perhaps:

*From everywhere, it all has to move forward and backward at the same time.
Like waves of a sea upright on a wall*

This forward/backward movement introduces a kind of third dimension, where perceived elements and underlying elements coexist, relay each other and circulate.

Making move forward/backward, by colors

Black is able to make move forward and backward:

- Make move backward like the darkness, the emptiness, the abysses.
- Make move forward like the traits, the shapes, the fullness, when emerging from a background.

For Micheline LO, the black (and the white) were thus particularly possibilizing. But the other colors also.

In her work, there is no play on perspective. It is the properties of colors that make the elements on her canvases move forward and backward.

Intermingling the colors

Everywhere, Micheline LO intermingles colors. Some make the sheets of color move forward, others make them move backward. These multitudes of sheets are animated by movements where « everything moves forward and moves backward at the same time ».

Each parcel of the painting, each brushstroke is an intermingling, an overlay, a filigree, a skimming, an outcrop.

These interminglings animate never-finished cerebral landscapes, always in motion, always in formation.

Creating effervescence « among »

None of Micheline LO's canvases is a « whole » composed of « parts ». The gaze is not invited to position itself « in front of » her works, nor to contemplate any form or plastic element, globally or partially.

The perceived elements invite the gaze, and the brain, to circulate « among » them.

This time, the spectator is not « in front » of the cells and plastic compositions, but is « among » the perceived elements.

Making lift from the canvas

By dint of singularizing itself, each element detaches from the elements around it.

In some paintings, the elements take off and dance on the canvas.

Of course, spectators first see what they are looking for. If they are looking for “shapes”, they will see unfinished, unexpected, unstable shapes.

It often takes a moment to realize from how much each painted element is always floating, detached from the others, suspended in space.

Activating the brain

About the series *LES CHEMINS DES ECRITURES* [The pathways of the writings], the anthropogenist philosopher Henri VAN LIER also wrote:

Bringing together metastable states - and being worked on by its ultrastructures, its refluxes of (re)sequenciations, its secret graphs, its interfaces of the perceiving and the perceived - a LES CHEMINS DES ECRITURES is the most intense and most « Universal » cerebral activator that one can conceive.

Painting formations, not forms

A form is perceived from the outside. It stands out against a background. A formation, on the other hand, is perceived from the inside. It brings together elements that together constitute something. We talk about plant, mineral, organic, bone, and cellular formations, for example.

In her paintings, Micheline LO does not offer “finished” forms that can be grasped from the outside, as images can be. She paints formations that are still “uncertain”, in which the brain “immerses” itself as it might “immerse” itself in a landscape.

Painting the basal perception

Remarkably, in LO paintings:

- plastic cells are replaced by perceived elements,
- forms are replaced by formations in process,
- contemplation « in front of » becomes effervescence « among »,
- analogizing elements are reduced to digitalizing singularities,
- links between elements are relays of triggerings.

In her way, Micheline LO offers us a picture of basal perception.

On this subject, she explicitly speaks about « basal pulsations ».

Evocative power of literature

More than music (rhythmic), architecture (all-encompassing) or painting (analogizing/digitalizing), literature is evocative.

Words trigger tones, perceptions, ambiances, smells, shocks, etc., which temporarily appear, transform, overlap and intermingle inside the reader's brain.

Through their evocative power, the texts were a major source of inspiration for Micheline LO, particularly in her series:

- *La tentation de saint Antoine* [The Temptation of Saint Anthony], by Flaubert (France)
- *Don Quixote (El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha)*, by Miguel de Cervantes (Spain)
- *La divine comédie* [The Divine Comedy], by Dante (Italy)
- *Terra Nostra*, by Carlos Fuentes (Mexico)
- *Miracle de la Rose* [The Miracle of the Rose], by Jean Genet (France)
- *Cent ans de solitude (Cien años de soledad) [One Hundred Years of Solitude]*, by Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia)
- *Salammbô*, by Flaubert (France)
- *Vents* [Winds], by Saint-John Perse (France)

Drawing inspiration from texts and writings (scriptings)

More fundamentally, it is the TEXTS, then the WRITINGS (scriptings), properly speaking, that inspired LO. In particular in the following series:

- *L'enfer de Jean Genet* [Hell by Jean Genet], Subseries: *Descent into Hell*, *La mort d'Harcamone* [The death of Harcamone] (1991), where she draws text.
- *Vents* [Winds] (1995), by Saint-John Perse, where she paints text.
- *Les chemins des écritures* [The pathways of writings] (1996-1997), where she paints elements of writing.
- *Les esprits du vins* [The spirits of wine] (2001), where she paints words.

When Micheline LO drew inspiration from texts, she transformed them into perceptions, not images.

Texts and cerebral landscapes

TEXTS and cerebral LANDSCAPES share several characteristics:

- TEXTS connect elements (letters, syllables, words, sentences, paragraphs).
- The elements of TEXTS can be “sequenced,” “re-sequenced,” “brought closer together,” or “moved further apart.”
- The elements of texts can trigger, cancel, or connect other elements.
- TEXTS awaken parallel sequences (auditory, olfactory, visual, sensory).

It is remarkable that Micheline LO first did wrote (in the 1960s) before painting (in the 1980s).

It is also remarkable that her first series of paintings that was inspired by her own mental landscape was entitled *Les Chemins des Ecritures* (The Pathways of the Writings).

No photographic codes

Since the end of the 19th century, the visual arts have been inspired - almost all of them - by photographic codes and images. Today, static or dynamic images populate our screens and our environment.

Micheline LO paints outside of photographic codes and images: without framing, without points of view (simple or multiple), without plays of shadow, without dots or grains (analog or digital), without testimony (image) of an instant, without seeking analogy or illustration.

Even in her *Portraits* series, she primarily paints perceptions, gaps [écarts], and formation processes.

Non-intentionality of clues

While it is true that Micheline LO, painter, distances herself from images and photographic codes, it is also true that the unintentional, indicial, part of photography has certainly inspired her approach.

A photograph, whether taken on the fly, by a robot or by a professional, is never the sole result of an intention. It is first and foremost the trace, the witness, the indicia [clue] of something, even if it can be the object of preparations and then of selections, adjustments, intentional modifications, sometimes decisive ones.

Micheline LO, who played a constant role in the writing of *Philosophie de la photographie* (Philosophy of Photography), published in 1983 by Henri VAN LIER, was well aware of this. She began painting in

1982, during the writing of this book, in which, philosophically, photography appears as an indicializing process, producer of unintentional signs. This predominant part of non-intentionality in photography certainly influenced her.

Subject of the work of Micheline LO

Historically, most artists explore forms, colors and imprints

- Classical painters compose and organize FORMS.
- Impressionists decompose and recompose COLORS and LIGHT.
- Modern painters explode, flatten, deform, recompose, reinvent, glue, assemble or slide realistic, abstract, surrealist, hyperrealist FORMS, etc.
- Many contemporary painters work with IMPRINTS, photographic codes, or quantities of information.

Micheline LO mainly explores INDICES [clues], GAPS and FORMATIONS

- A natural or cerebral landscape is made up of indicia, gaps and formations
- A biological or artificial brain only processes and weighs up gaps and formations
- In Micheline LO's work, shapes - possibly figurative, suspended, transitory, never completed - can arise, on a case-by-case basis, from these formations.

Exploring the cerebral landscape

A LANDSCAPE encompasses and evolves at the same time.

- We are “in” a landscape and “among” the elements of a landscape.
- A natural landscape evolves and transforms, slowly or quickly.

A LANDSCAPE has no edges

- Horizons shift with the gaze, the movements of the body, the workings of the brain.
- Curiously, the edges of Micheline LO's paintings are not lines of stop, but lines of reflux, lines of mutation, lines of disappearance.
- At first, she painted her canvases without a frame, stretched out on the floor or pinned to the wall, with no edge other than the threads escaping from the canvas.

A LANDSCAPE is ungraspable

- It is the seat of constant changes. It can be contemplated endlessly.
- When the eye stops or focuses on one spot, it no longer sees the landscape, but a detail.
- For Micheline LO, the eye could not stop on anything.

A LANDSCAPE is populated with gaps (écarts).

- Gaps and interfaces: shadow/light, stable/moving, distant/near, animal/plant, aerial/mineral, sky/earth, etc.
- Micheline LO painted gaps, triggers of connections. The lines, colors, and spots of her paintings and drawings were at the service of the gaps and what they triggered.

A LANDSCAPE is cerebral

- A perceived landscape exists only in a brain. Dogs, cats, eagles, bees perceive different landscapes. Each brain maps differently. Each perceived landscape is different, continuously, cerebrally.
- Micheline LO has painted cerebral landscapes. First, those inspired by Dante, Flaubert, Genet, Saint-John Perse. Those of Spain and the Americas. Then, one day, her own cerebral landscapes.

Exploring formations/transformations

A LANDSCAPE is in perpetual formation/transformation

- Let us recall that a formation is “a grouping of elements that together constitute something” (a cellular formation, for example).
- A natural landscape is made up of never-finished formations/transformations: mineral, vegetal, animal, luminous, etc.
- A cerebral landscape is made up of never-finished perceptions: captation, memorization, memoration, sequencing/resequencing, mutations/disappearances.
- Micheline LO, by dint of painting cerebral landscapes, ended up essentially painting formations/transformations that were always in motion, never fixed, nor composed or completed. For example: those evoked by literature, those of animals interacting with their environment, those of the texts and writings (scriptures) themselves.

Painting down to living formations

Cerebral landscapes and living formations have the same ingredients:

- Gaps,
- Connections,
- Interactions,
- Triggers,
- Sequencings, re-sequencings,
- Elements that assemble and disassemble,
- Formations in generation, transformation, disappearance,

So Henri VAN LIER will see Micheline LO not only as a painter of the cerebral landscape - what she herself said - but also as a painter of living formations.

A "writing" painting

TEXTS, LANDSCAPES and LIVING FORMATIONS all come together.

- A text is a set of elementary characters.
- When you get closer, you only see its elements: words, letters, symbols, punctuation marks, pictograms, ideograms.
- But from a certain distance, you see the text, it takes on the properties of a landscape, even those of a living formation,
- Writing or reading a text brings into play landscapes / cerebral formations / living formations.
- Micheline LO worked on her canvases as landscapes / texts / formations.
- Her painting was writing (*écrivante*), as in the series *QUETZALCOATL*, or even totally writing as in the series *VENTS*, *LES CHEMINS DES ECRITURES*, *LES ESPRITS DU VIN*.
- Before starting to paint, she had written *FLEXTE*.

Authors' texts constitute traces of their cerebral landscapes, which are often multiple, abundant and ungraspable. Readers reactivate these traces in other cerebral landscapes, different with each reading.

Micheline LO was painting traces of cerebral landscapes. The spectators make then relive them in multiple connections, new each time.

The same can be said about living formations. A living formation, also, is like a text. DNA chains testify of this. The resequencing of DNA strands or their simple redeployment in space changes their interaction properties.

Painting sets / suites / series

In the living world, suites are sets produced « once-and-never-again ».

- When she started out, Micheline LO wrote, « It seems to me that the unity of my paintings is achieved outside of themselves, suspended somewhere in the fantasy of myths. From there, perhaps, I paint sets, suites. »
- At first, she spoke rather of « suites of paintings », like musicians speak of « musical suites ». It was only afterwards, when numbering her paintings, that she began to talk about « series ».
- Once a series was finished, she could not « reopen » it, even at a client request. It was « once-and-never-again ».

Each series was a kind of territory, a cerebral territory, living, whose mysteries she explored philosophically and pictorially, to the point of exhaustion.

- 1982 to 1995, cerebral territories of authors (Flaubert), of peoples (Spanish Suite), of religions (Dante's Paradise), of outlaw communities (Genet's Hell).
- 1996 to 2001, cerebral territories singularized by her own plural brain:
 - Connections/reconnections of signs, in the series *Les chemins des écritures*.
 - Switching between knowing and seeing, in the series *L'astronome*.
 - Bipolarity between conflicts and pacts, in the series *Traités de Paix*.
 - The existential singularities of animals, in the series *Bestiary*.
 - The variability of the painting hand, in the series *Hands*.
 - Appearances/disappearances, in the series *Chameleons*.
 - Beyond/in-ward, in the series *Migrations*.
 - The in-betweens of glimpsing / sensing, in the series *Les esprits du vin*.

Painting growths, rather than textures or structures

If we accept that hominid productions are of three types:

- TEXTURES, i.e. structures with irregularities (fabrics, carved stones or wood, leathers, etc.), as in primitive art, for example.
- STRUCTURES, i.e. constructions, obeying laws that can almost be mathematized, as in classical art.
- GROWTH, i.e. artificial formations (polymers, computer networks), which propagate (grow) in the manner of living formations (bushes, amino acids).

then we observe that Micheline LO's painting is hardly based on textures (apart from the grain of the paper or that of the canvas, which is often preserved), nor based on visible or hidden structures, but based on growths (cerebral landscapes and living formations).

Pictorial project

Numerous artistic projects convey ideas: political, ecological, technical, regionalizing, globalizing, or they convey values: energy, sport, performance, prestige, luxury or - on the contrary - oppression, misery, disability, marginality.

Micheline LO's project is strictly pictorial. It conveys no message, idea or value. It explores the cerebral landscape and basal perception, right down to the foundations of living formations.

The “long” time

Since the 1960s, many visual arts have been moving at the pace of their media coverage, in the “immediate time.”

The media - and since 2000, the social networks - encourage instantaneous, global, networked dissemination. Many artists then play on performance, events, stupefaction and produce objects that are hyper-something: hyper-shocking, hyper-soft, hyper-improbable, hyper-ephemeral, hyper-slow, hyper-responsible, hyper-new, hyper-technicalized, hyper-colored, etc.

The work of Micheline LO follows a long-term, timeless, universal and basic approach. She explores cerebral landscapes - which are possible but unpredictable - like are life, biology and living formations.

A cosmogonic painting

Furthermore, Micheline LO was a “cosmogonic painter”, in the sense that her work “resonated” and “reasoned” with the scientific paradigms of her time, those of the end of the twentieth century.

- At that time, people talked about mineral formations, living formations, anatomo-physiological formations, formation of the Universe, particle formations, all of them transitory.
- Scientific approaches were becoming increasingly digital, putting emphasis on gaps and weightings.
- Biologists reasoned by means of cutting up, sequencing/resequencing cellular material in perpetual formation.

As a witness of her time, Micheline LO painted formations rather than forms. The perceived elements of her paintings were more digital than analogical, available for unceasing resequencings (particularly since the series *La Vache Bleue*, 1989).

Artistic approach

The distinction between *conforming* artistic life and *extreme* artistic life, as proposed to us by the anthropogenist philosopher Henri VAN LIER, gives us some initial insight here.

- The conforming artistic life has the effect of reinforcing the ambient codes. It works on, reinforces and sometimes over-boosts these ambient codes, as is often the case today, with a mastery that can go as far as producing true masterpieces, at least in the technical sense of the term.

- Extreme artistic life shakes up, or at least uncovers right down to their roots, the ambient codes.

Under this first light, Micheline LO is on the side of extreme artistic life. She paints perception in its most basic level, outside of any ambient code.

But Henri VAN LIER doesn't stop there. He also distinguishes:

- The describable, which he places in the order of functionings, with, as an example, the technical drawings in general, and those of Leonardo da Vinci in particular.
- The indescribable, which he places in the order of presence or apparitionality, as illustrated by many works of art, and for example by the mysterious sfumato effects, also by Leonardo da Vinci.

Here, Micheline LO places herself on the side of Presence/Apparitionality, as she writes:

The genesis of my work [...] is more generally that of an improbable apparition, through trial and error. The presence of an internal gap is required, that it has been swallowed up in the canvas, and that it [the canvas] holds it between its four edges.

Other explanatory texts

Henri VAN LIER, philosopher and anthropogenist, author of *The arts of space* and of *Philosophy of photography*, as well as seven articles on art (painting, sculpture, architecture, etc.) in Encyclopaedia Universalis (1968-1972), devoted a long text to Micheline LO, in 2007, four years after her death, in 2003.

- For an abbreviated/simplified version of the text (50 pages). [See text \(here\)](#)
- For access to a full version of the text (84 pages). [See text \(here\)](#)

For the concept of Cerebral Landscape. [See text \(here\)](#)