

**INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT ON
RADIO-CAMPUS BESANÇON'S "LA PLAGE"
PROGRAM, JULY 4, 2025, BY ANDRÉA TEZZOLI
[about the new group Summer exhibition "BRIC-À-
BRAC #2" [ODDS AND ENDS #2] at the Keller
Gallery in Besançon...]**

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Andréa Tezzoli: Hello to all our listeners and welcome to Radio Campus Besançon 102.4, your cultural news program: LA PLAGE. I am Andréa, your host for this program, every Monday and Friday at 12 noon. We're going to start this program by welcoming the artist Jean-Pierre Sergent, who is here to talk to us about the new exhibition "Bric-à-Brac #2" at the Keller Gallery in Besançon. Hello Jean-Pierre, how are you?

JPS: Hello dear Andrea, I'm doing fine, thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be with you on the radio and to discuss culture and also the joy of being alive.

AT: The pleasure is entirely mutual. So to begin with, can you briefly introduce us to the group exhibition you are currently curating and presenting at the Keller Gallery?

JPS: Yes, this is actually the second group's exhibition at the Keller Gallery. My friend Heidi Suter opened a gallery in Besançon six months ago, and there are seven artists featured, including myself. We have on

display the artworks of: Claude Boillin-Breton, who lives in Grand'Combe-Châteleu, not far from here, and she does magnificent reverse glass painting. There's Barbara Dasnoy, a French-German artist who has been living in Besançon for about 40 years. She does abstract art, and we're showing some sketches of her work as well as pastel inprints on wood. There is Eilbhe Donovan, an Irish artist who mainly paints birds because she lives by the sea and is very interested in nature. She kayaks a lot and has been working with Heidi Suter, the gallery director, for two or three years. So she shows her work at contemporary Art Fairs. There is also my dear and late friend Guimbarde, who is a well-known artist in Besançon, who does what you might call a kind of "outsider art" and we are presenting his "Anthropoid Deer Smiling in a Vortex of Butterflies," which dates from 1994 and represents a kind of shamanic and cosmic transformation. There is Jean-Michel Jaquet, a Swiss artist whom I discovered at the Saut du Doubs restaurant where I saw his works last year and talked to his widow Magali, and we decided to include a few of his pieces. The paintings she sent me are quite sexual, and they work pretty well in this exhibition. There is also, and this is very important, Samira Sahra Naward, who is an Iranian artist and who was supposed to send me a painting, but unfortunately, her painting was blocked by the police. And now, with the war in Iraq, we have to print her painting here in Besançon, and it is a beautiful piece that says: "peace between all men and women". It's a somewhat cosmic painting that shows turtles and dolphins, nature and all countries around together, living

in harmony. She told me that she really hoped for world peace, because in Iran, they've just been bombed. It's absolutely terrible what's happening in Iran right now! And then there's also my artworks too.

AT: So, the title of your series, “Karma Kali Sexual Dreams and Paradox,” how did that title come about, since it seems to convey a spiritual tension all on its own?

JPS: Yes, you're absolutely right. *Karma* is what happens to us in life. It's all the encounters, whether fortuitous or not, or provoked. And Kali is the black goddess. She is the one who regenerates the world and destroys it at the same time (destruction-construction through death and sexuality). It is this paradox that I try to use in my work, because I work a lot with sexual images and a lot of pornographic images, and also with animals, with energies that are in confrontation in my work. It is a work of confrontation! And in the current exhibition, there is a deer where we can see arrows of energy that destroy or regenerate it. My work is mainly about destruction and regeneration. That's a bit of what it's about. And last year I printed more than 500 very erotic works from this same series, “Karma Kali Sexual Dreams and Paradox”...

AT: Among the works on display, there are pieces on paper, smaller formats, and a large Plexiglas piece from another series. How did you choose the works to present here?

JPS: I wanted to stay within the theme of the title, "Odds & Ends and Impromptu: Colors, Animals, Sketches, and Presences." I chose these works for their presence. Even though they maybe, they can disturb the viewer because, for example, the large Plexiglas panel is not necessarily visible, and we don't necessarily see what is happening in it because our own reflection is projected onto the work. And the background is a Mayan red, and we enter it as if entering a red blood, entering the energy of Life and the cosmos simultaneously. And that's exactly what I wanted to do: to convey the presence of animality and of the body, which are important in Art. I don't like conceptual art because there's no energy in it anymore. So I present energies... like that! Colors, things that explode...

AT: You work a lot with silkscreen printing mixed with India ink. What does this medium allow you to express that other techniques would not?

JPS: That's a good question. In fact, this technique allows me to always work on the same format and to use (because I design my images on a computer) so I can make the drawing and the shape I want, as long as it can be printed. You can't print just anything either way. So I work on all my images on a computer and once I'm happy with the drawing, I cut the films on a tool called a plotter. These are light-resistant films (rubylith), but the technique doesn't really matter that much. Then I use screen printing screens. What's important is that the

image is neutral, since it's just a screen printing screen. It's empty and neutral, and it's at a specific moment, when I print the images that I decide on the color I want. And that's the most important moment, since you can print in yellow, blue, red, light blue, cerulean blue, or cobalt blue, it doesn't matter. It's at this moment that I have to connect with cosmic energies, with the energies of my body, so that everything is appropriate and right. I also work with what is named layering, which means that I add one, two, three, four or five layers of color and ink so that at the end, it's like a mixture, like a recipe. It has to work to be lit up. And I stop when I feel there is a presence in the work. For me, what is important is really the PRESENCE in the artwork.

AT: In your compositions, we find female figures, sexual organs, shamanic motifs, and spirals. What place do you give to the symbolic and the sacred in your work?

JPS: It's the most important place. There's no other place, of course. For me, Art is something sacred and, in a way, "religious," but extra-religious, outside of any monotheistic religion. What I want to define are places, locations, presences, like the *kamis* in Japanese culture. In other words, there is a presence here, something is happening, and that something can speak to us and take us to other worlds. These are places and locations of passage, of revelations, that's it!

AT: Eroticism is very present in your work, but you claim it as a spiritual, almost cosmic energy. Can you tell us a

little more about that, please?

JPS: I have a quote that I'm going to read to you, which is from D. H. Lawrence, and it answers your question exactly:

"Sex is our deepest form of consciousness. It is not at all ideal, it is not mental. It is the pure consciousness of blood.... It is the consciousness of the night, when the soul is almost asleep. Sex and beauty are inseparable, like life and consciousness. And the intelligence that goes hand in hand with sex and beauty, and which is born of sex and beauty, is intuition."

And intuition means being in the intuitive space, in Art exactly. I feel absolutely nothing in the works we see, for example, in the FRACS (Regional Contemporary Art Funds in France). In all these things, there is no longer any intuition, there is no longer any soul, no breath of life. It's just conceptual. And my work has a soul, if I may say so, and that's what I'm trying to define, through sex and/or spirituality. But it's difficult to talk about and define all these things. We can't really do it or say it because it's something that completely escapes us, of course.

AT: You trained in Besançon and then you went to New York. How did this dual background change your relationship to creation?

JPS: Yes. Actually, in Besançon, I attended Art School,

and after a year and a half, I went to Egypt. And there, I discovered what you might call “cosmic energies.” I was in a temple and I encountered the Cosmos, somewhere, in a vortex of energy! It was both a mystical and physical experience. And then, for ten years, I raised American horses. So, having lived on a farm twenty-four seven, as they say in New York, with animals, goats, and horses, you are entirely responsible for all their well-being; you are responsible for their lives. You are responsible for when you have to bring the stallion to the mare so that she will be pregnant the following year. I had seventeen horses, so I was part of this “animal family” and I also learned a lot from living in the middle of nature, alone, isolated like a monk in a way. And then in New York, I learned the opposite, to live in a megacity, in a huge human community. But, in a way, it's still the same continuity. I learned about the diversity of human thoughts and behaviours from living with friends who were Colombian, African, or Japanese, and from having German and Italian friends, and from going to the Metropolitan Museum or the Museum of Natural History almost every Sunday. I immersed myself in all the diverse cultures of the present and the past, and that is what really nourished my art, in a way.

AT: You now live and work in Franche-Comté, but with a very international outlook. How do these two dimensions interact in your daily life as an artist?

JPS: I learned in New York to communicate about my art, precisely because there, people are really ashamed

to present their own works and letting people know that they exist as artists. Because many artists in France, artists I have worked with in previous exhibitions, don't really want to show their work! They're afraid to exhibit it, they're afraid of what people will think about it. But, in fact, your work is like a child, and you have to honour it and feed it, otherwise it doesn't exist neither survive! I also work internationally with all my social media: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Well, it works or it doesn't, but I still have a lot of contacts, on LinkedIn, for example, and thanks to that, I now work with a gallery in Cyprus. I've also exhibited a lot in China, but the Chinese public doesn't respond very favourably to my work. But anyway, it doesn't matter, it's important to go and exhibit elsewhere, to see what's going on there.

AT: You give your studio an important place as a place of energy and ritual. What does a typical day in your creative process look like?

JPS: There are several different workdays because my work is seasonal. In general, in the Summer, I print silkscreens, but unfortunately this Summer I won't be printing because I'm busy with communication work I'm doing at the gallery. So, never mind, there are years when I can't work. But in general, for example, in the morning, I add and respond to contacts on LinkedIn. Well, sometimes it takes hours because, as I am at a limit of thirty thousand contacts, I have to remove some of them every day... It's an absurd bureaucratic task, or

rather, almost an accountant's task. And I have to do it, I have to write to people to present my work to them. And also, since I read a lot, I scan extracts of books and put excerpts in my Notes for 2023 or 2024. But this year, with the gallery, I don't have time to do that anymore, unfortunately. But I really enjoy doing it, or putting and copying passages from Twitter on my website. I like sharing information with people, that's what interests me, that's what I'm really passionate about.

AT: How did you meet Heidi from the Keller Gallery?

JPS: Well, it was at the Montreux fair called MAG (Montreux Art Gallery). I think it was in 2015, and we hit it off right away because she was showing work by artists whom I liked. I asked her to come see my work at my booth, and she said, "Your work is good, but I won't be able to sell it!" I replied, "But that doesn't really matter!" And in fact, we've put on several exhibitions together and we still can't sell my work today! even though I'm now better known. But we've developed a friendship because we've been working together for years. We've often participated in the WOPART (Work On Paper Art Fair) international fair in Lugano (2018, 2019, 2022), in the Italian-speaking Switzerland, where they are only presenting works on paper; we've done it three years in a row and we get along well.

AT: You have already exhibited in more institutional venues, such as the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Besançon. Here, in this gallery, it's more intimate. Does

this venue change the way people perceive your work?

JPS: Yes, absolutely. Of course, yes, the public responds well, they always tell us that, this exhibition space, there is a magnificent atmosphere, very intimate, very personal. Of course, it's different to exhibit in different places. If I were showing large wall installations in large empty spaces, the relationship would indeed be completely different, the relationship to the body is completely different. But here, we are lucky to have this beautiful space, located in the center of Besançon, where people can come because admission to the galleries is free. People can come in and they don't have to pay anything. I'll tell you a little story: I was at the opening of the Courbet Museum a few days ago, last week, for the really nice exhibition "Walking landscapes" and I met a friend there, someone who already knew my work, who said to me: "I stopped by your gallery, but I don't want to ring a bell to enter into a gallery!" That's significant and shows how stupid people are here in provincial Cities. We're in a state of total and absolute absurdity! And even though it's free to enter a gallery, no one asks for your ID! And then, the public is very lucky because, we artists are sometimes there. I, for example, am there every Saturday afternoon! It's important to meet with artists, whom you would never meet otherwise in everyday life. It's an incredible opportunity! So don't hesitate to push open the door and come and see, to discover the ideas and works that are presented here!

AT: How does the Besançon public react to this exhibition, which may shock or disturb some people?

JPS: Yes, the Besançon public doesn't really exist. It's very sporadic. The French, as a whole, it has become and moved beyond culture. It's now a completely acculturated society, particularly when it comes to the visual arts, because people today only go to see comics or footballers. We are currently undergoing a complete societal shift, but it's global! It's even worldwide! Only the ultra-rich are still interested in Art, to invest their money. For example, the artist Damien Hirst had exhibitions in seven different galleries around the World. So, if you went to see those seven galleries, they would give you a passport and a silkscreen print by the artist! Today, art has become completely and intrinsically a commercial, politically correct commodity. So people no longer know how to understand it, appreciate it, or look at it. Last Saturday, a friend of mine came over and analyzed all the works on display, analytically, intellectually, and very clearly, all of them! For example, Jean-Michel Jacquet painted on a sheet of newspaper, so he analyzed everything in the newspaper and everything in the drawing. But who cares! We artist are painting, we don't give a damn what it means! We just do it. We are in the making and in the action!

AT: You often talk about rituals, trance, and spirituality as the foundation of your art. Today, in a world saturated with images, do you think that art still has this initiatory role?

JPS: Yes, absolutely, truly absolutely. I think it's like an encounter: art, you don't expect it, you never expect it! It's like falling in love with a woman or a dog or a tree or a flower! You don't expect it and suddenly: BOOM! It hits you. Is it a mystical experience? Absolutely, yes. I was moved by Rothko's work. I was also moved by my experiences in Egypt and Mexico. Because, when I was above the pyramids in Mexico, I had at the time some meta-cosmic experiences. Well, Art is also a cosmic experience, it's an inner experience, it's something that overwhelms us. It's like entering a state of ecstasy and cosmic orgasm somewhere!

AT: You mentioned this earlier. You draw your symbols from ancient cultures such as the Indian, Mayan, and Tibetan. Is this a tribute, an attempt at transmission, or a way of creating a universal language?

JPS: It's all of those things at once. I'm fascinated, for example, when reading Alexandra David-Néel's accounts of her travels in Tibet and Nepal, where she describes the rituals of monks who practice tantrism. And my artist experience is a bit like a tantric experience. I'm talking about pornography, which is absolute crap, meaning that it's the biggest business in the world alongside the arms trade. So I take images that are crap and totally uninteresting and turn them into beauty, in a way, I sublimate them, I transmute crap into gold! Just as tantric monks eat corpses to reach a

higher level of spirituality, art allows us to reach a higher level of humanity! And I pay tribute to all those people who, for example, wrote the Upanishads, to the people who painted the superb Hindu or Tibetan erotic gouache drawings, or even the prehistoric caves. It's because it speaks to my heart. Sometimes Hindus talk about the cosmic void, but who talks about the cosmic void nowadays? Very few people, absolutely no one, except quantum physicists...

AT: What are your major influences? Are there any contemporary or past artists with whom you feel a connection?

JPS: That's a big question. Yes, I really like Fra Angelico and the other Italian primitives, for the purity of their colors and also for the mysticism and purity of soul that emanate from their works! But I could just as easily mention Mayan artists whose names are unknown today. Mayan pottery is magnificent... And also, for example, the drawings by Pygmy artists on loincloths; Pygmy loincloths painted by women are magnificent too. I really like the archaic periods in Greek civilizations. Archaic periods, in general and in all the different cultures, have retained an energy that was subsequently lost in classical periods. Everything has been standardized, aestheticized, and canonized! There are imposed standards of beauty, etc. And then the soul of the work disappears, as does beauty, which of course disappears as well. For me, once there are standards, aesthetics, and standards of beauty, everything

disappears!

AT: And finally, do you have any upcoming projects, a new series in the works, or other exhibitions planned in France or abroad?

JPS: For now, I'm focusing on the Keller gallery. That's really what I'm concerned with, because I want it to be a success! I'd like people to come by, and I think I'll be working on my silkscreen prints again next year, in continuing my "Karma Kali Sexual Dreams and Paradox" series, because it's a series that's very close to my heart.

AT: Can you remind us of the dates of this exhibition?

JPS: Yes, of course. So the exhibition is from June 27th to September 13th.

AT: Thank you very much, Jean-Pierre Sergent, for coming to talk with us.

JPS: Thank you, Andrea, it was a real pleasure! Have a great day, everyone. See you soon, take care, goodbye.