

RADIO BROADCAST > LES PÉPITES DE PÉPÉCOYOTE #102
(lespepitesdepepecoyote@gmail.com) | JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT – PAINTER |
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Born in Morteau, France, Jean-Pierre SERGENT has been drawing and painting since his early childhood. After breeding Appaloosa horses in the Haut-Doubs area for several years, the artist set out to try his luck in the art world in Montreal, then New York, where he enjoyed some success.

In 2005, he returned to France and set up his studio in Besançon. Exhibited at the MBAA and recognized by his peers, the artist has just opened the KELLER Gallery on Rue Proudhon with a Zurich Swiss friend, Heidi Suter.

You are listening to special program lasting over 90 minutes, in the form of an initiatory journey in which this passionate painter candidly discusses his career, his artistic and spiritual approach, his inspiration drawn from travel, women's art, and so much more...

– PART 1/3

LAURENT DE PÉPÉCOYOTE: Hello, everyone. Today on Pépé-Coyote's Nuggets on Radio Campus Besançon 102.4 FM, I welcome Jean-Pierre Sargent, a painter from Besançon and New York, to our broadcast. We will be talking about his journey from Haut-Doubs to the Americas and shamanic trance in this very special program, and above all about his artistic work, which can be understood as an artistic epic... Hello Jean-Pierre.

JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT: Hello! Hello dear PépéCoyote, it's thrully a great pleasure to be here with you and I hope we can have an in-depth discussion on many important topics matters that are close to all our hearts.

PPC: Radio Campus is not unfamiliar to you, since you already had a broadcast in 2020 with Aurélien Bertini, and I believe it was at the Museum?

JPS: Yes, it was a very nice show that we recorded at Besançon Fine-Arts Museum, and it lasted over an hour. I filmed the whole interview with my camera, so you can find it on my website.

PPC: Jean-Pierre, were you born in Morteau?

JPS: Yes, in the Haut-Doubs region.

PPC: In the cold and snow...

JPS: Yes.

PPC: And then you went to study architecture in Strasbourg?

JPS: Yes, that's right, it was the closest thing to what I was expected to do. But after six months of studying there, I quickly realized that there were too many constraints in architecture. That's why I turned to fine arts and stayed in Besançon for a year

and a half at the Fine-Arts School.

PPC: So at what is now the ISBA (Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts).

JPS: Exactly, yes.

PPC: So you know already our Bouloie neighbourhood a little bit?

JPS: Yes, I know it, but I haven't been back there in over 40 years, and it's a pleasure to be back here again.

PPC: On a family level, were you born into a family of artists, in the Haut-Doubs?

JPS: Oh no, not at all! No, no, I would say more in a family of humanists. My dad was like a country lawyer. He really loved his clients and had a big heart. And all my grandparents were also very kind people, humanists with great generosity and kindness, once again I should say.

PPC: You started your career early as a visual artist, let's say in Haut-Doubs, because when you were a small child, you were already drawing and making reproductions of drawings from existing images.

JPS: Yes, in fact, at the time, I suffered from very severe asthma attacks, and when you have asthma, you can't really move around much. So you stay in your room and discover the world through books. Of course, I had a book on Native Americans, I had books on animals, so I often copied them, with a pencil and carbon paper underneath, and I copied these images, these other marvellous Worlds, and then I painted them on small panels of hardboard or plywood. And that's kind of what gave me the impression that Art could save us, in a way, from suffocation and suffering. That's exactly what's happening today, in a society where we are all suffocating and suffering deeply. And I deeply think that Art has never been more important as a symbol of freedom.

PPC: Freedom for you too, with your love of nature, horses, and animals led you to breed American horses in the Haut-Doubs region.

JPS: Yes, yes, but what I mean is that my grandfather bought an old small farm in the 1950s, at a time when rural areas were becoming depopulated. Many farmers were selling their farms, and he bought this farm in Charquemont, which had a little bit of land. I squatted on this farm and at first I bought goats and made goat cheese. Then I bought an Appaloosa stallion in the Vosges. I really liked this breed because it belonged to the Nez Percé Indians of the northwestern United States. They had chosen and selected these horses for their hardiness and endurance in cold weather and long walks. And you could leave them outside in winter, so it was less work. And above all, they are magnificent. They are all spotted and dappled. They are the ones you often see in the Western movies. Appaloosa horses are aesthetically one of the most beautiful things in the world.

PPC: How many horses did you have?

JPS: Actually, after that, as I often imported horses directly from the United States via Germany, because the Germans are very fond of Quarter Horses and Appaloosas and they import them in quantity to Hamburg, near Bremen. So I would

go there to pick them up. I bought four mares, but they were Quarter Horses, another breed of American horses that are more docile and adapted for western riding. And so, in the end, I had a total of seventeen horses.

PPC: Oh, seventeen?

JPS: Yes.

PPC: And did you ride horses too?

JPS: Yes, of course, I was training and broke in horses and did American riding. I competed internationally in Bern, Switzerland, Augsburg and Munich, Germany too!

PPC: Oh yes, and what is American riding?

JPS: Well, there are several disciplines. There's trail riding, which means you ride a horse and do short courses with obstacles, not show jumping, but crossing small bars on the ground. It's like dressage, if you like, but the best is the discipline of reining, which is a course to be completed at a gallop! And that's really great fun. The courses are shown an hour before the event, and I went to Bern to compete in these competitions with a mare I bought in Canada (Nowata Connexion). It was a wonderful time because you have to be in harmony with the horse and you have to train every day too.

PPC: So you rode horses and you also painted, you did both?

JPS: Absolutely, yes, I did both in Charquemont. And it's a bit like now. However, it was the opposite because, at that time, I could only paint in winter time because I had less work with the horses. Now I paint in the summer because the studio is much too cold to paint in during winter. In fact, my work is still seasonal, but it also that requires me to stay connected to nature.

PPC: And then there's nature... So you don't ride horses anymore, but you do canoeing.

JPS: Yes, that's right. Every summer, I'm lucky that my family still lives in Morteau, and in Villers-le-Lac, I have my canoe, so I go for trips on the Doubs lakes, which is interesting when you're in nature, because in our daily lives, we're always anxious, we're stressed, and I always realize that I need maybe fifteen minutes or half an hour, to be completely free and let nature completely envelop me. For me, freedom often comes back, like a leitmotif. You have to be free in your body, even in your body, I am always daily deeply impressed and shocked by human stupidity, and maybe after fifteen or twenty minutes, you can finally free ourselves completely and enter into the wind, the water, and the rocks. That's an important and essential fusion.

PPC: It is freedom also, as for your first musical choice? Is it a cumbia?

JPS: Yes, it's a cumbia. I chose it because I was married to my dear wife Olga for a long time in New York, and we are still very good close friends. And in a cumbia and all Latin American music from Colombia, Brazil, and elsewhere, there is a freedom of

the body and a joy somehow. I think we've lost that feeling a little in France, where we're all a bit sad and too serious!

PPC: So, let's start with some cumbia. *Aimer per dio*, by Kader Rita, chosen by Jean-Pierre Sergent, here with us on Radio Campus Besançon.

Now, I suggest we take a little trip to Egypt, because you discovered Egypt when you traveled there with your grandfather, right?

JPS: Yes, absolutely. I think it was in 1981, and we went on vacation for Easter with my grandfather Maurice and my sister Marie-Paule. And it so happened that I was always trying to be a little alone, aside, isolated, because when you're in a group, you can't discover, you can't be initiated into cosmic mysteries, one could say. And at one point, I entered a priest room's that was square, exactly cubic, and on the ceiling there was also a square window. So I stood in the beam of light and at one point, I had what felt like a cosmic experience, an elevation, that is to say, you leave your body a little and then you enter another dimension. Having experienced that made me realize that, on the one hand, art was not to be taught in schools and that true art was worth much more than anything you saw in museums; it is in fact an immersion in the universe. So I had to find another way to express this intimacy with the sacred. And I wanted to come back to something, since we're talking about my grandfather Maurice, who is someone who has always helped and supported me. Throughout my entire life as an artist, he helped me financially and intellectually, and I always remember sitting with him outside his cottage, and he would say to me: "Jean-Pierre, you know, it's really good to be an artist because artists are very important people, because when we come into the world... (this is not a material but a spiritual thought)... everyone comes into the world with a kind of small baggage, as a small stack of wood. And when artists leave this world, their pile of wood is bigger than when they arrived." And I can't say that I think about that every day, but it's my real task as an artist to increase my knowledge and share it with the world too. I believe that being an artist means sharing the feelings and joys that the world brings us, through art but also through... whatever: literature, music, and all that. Sharing and passing on knowledge is so important.

PPC: Was Maurice a collector? Did he have any of Jean-Pierre's works?

JPS: Yes, of course, and especially at his home, there were many paintings, but it was also a different period because, at that time (from the 1950s to the 1980s), people who were a little wealthy would invite artists to their homes for dinner and they would go to see their works in their studios and then they would also buy art! That is no longer the case nowadays. As in those recent last years, I hardly see anyone in my studio anymore. Yes, that's right, and all contact with the public has completely disappeared. It's this enthusiasm and respect for artists, at least in France, that no longer exists today.

PPC: We leave Egypt with this cosmic revelation. You explained to us that you had this revelation without any specific product.

JPS: No, it was just while I was wandering around a priest's cell. Yes, it's true that architecture can sometimes take us, as in the pyramids at Uxmal in Mexico, to encounter the spiritual and other encompassing worlds, that's it!

PPC: And then, a little later, you finally decided to sell your horses and move to Canada?

JPS: Yes, that was about ten years later.

PPC: Ten years later, you joined your brother Alain in Canada.

JPS: I went to see him when he was still living in Toronto, and I was in contact with a very important gallery in Toronto named Galerie Moose. So I took a painting with me, a column as I called them at the time, composed of five parts (5 x 0.50 by 0.50 cm, 1991). So I packed it all up in a big box and arrived at Gary's place at Galerie Moose, and he said to me, "Well, Jean-Pierre, please hang your column on the wall in this exhibition!" And then he told me: "Jean-Pierre, I want to work with you and show your work, but you have to come and live in Canada to make it more practical." And then I said OK, so I went home and sold my seventeen horses in less than two months and moved to Montreal in the fall of 1991.

PPC: So, with your backpack, the box of brushes etc.

JPS: Yes, exactly, I put all my brushes in it, not the paints, but all the brushes. And all what I wanted to take with me over there. And I had two or three backpacks and a military huge bag, and then I arrived in Montreal like that, out of the blue!

PPC: So watch out! Jean-Pierre is coming in Town!

JPS: Yes, that's right.

PPC: And it was there, in Montreal, that you started making silkscreen prints on Plexiglas.

JPS: That is to say, at the very beginning, I continued the same work as I had been doing in France. I was doing abstract art because, rather foolishly, artists often think that abstraction is more important than figurative art. In France, we always think in terms of a value scale. So we think that abstraction is better than figurative art, for example. But that's not true at all. So, at one point, I made a large abstract painting, which was about 2.8 meters by 2.8 meters, and I stood in front of it for more than two weeks. I knew that standing in front of that painting for so long was an essential and important event and moment in my life. And then, after this long time, I said to myself, well, I can do variations, as many painters have done, but that repetitive way of working didn't really interest me at all any more, I like courage risk! So, at that time, I often picked up the Sunday New York Times, which was a thick newspaper four or five centimeters thick, and cut out, into it, images that were interesting me. And after, with these images, I decided to start screen printing them, first on canvas and then on Plexiglas. So I bought some Plexiglas sheets to paint on it.

PPC: So, from Canada, we're going to New York. But before we leave and arrive in New York, I suggest we listen to a short text and then you can tell us about it afterwards, since it's one of your musical selections. So, here's a short text by a Bishop.

JPS: Yes, I'll translate it into French for you. So, it's Marianne Budde and it's her

speech because Donald Trump went to a mass where this pastor had the courage and the "nerve", in quotation marks, to put him in his place. So here is her speech: Bishop Mariann Budde, speech against Donald Trump, January 21, 2015, in the Cathedral of the Episcopal Church in Washington.

"I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. But the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. In the name of our God. I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country. You are scared now. There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican and independent families, some who fear for their lives."

And I could NEVER have imagined that our world would be turned upside down to such an extent with the rise of the far right in Europe and especially in the United States. Because this far-right policy will destroy and cause suffering to so many people, so many families, sending people back by plane, imprisoning them and persecuting them by I don't know what police means, it's absolutely inconceivable what is happening today in Europe and the US. And the United States will pay a heavy price for those atrocities, because all the people who produce vegetables in California and New Mexico are immigrants. So at some point, I think the US economy will just collapse completely. It's really terrible, and I salute the courage of this Bishop.

PPC: Is this a subject close to your heart because you are American, you are from New York and you have the American citizenship?

JPS: Yes, absolutely, and so, I arrived in a country where I knew no one and, in Montreal, the same thing. And then I had to become an American because the immigration laws were drastically changing. So my girlfriend Olga and I got married on the sly so that I could stay in this country longer. So I know this fragile immigrant life very well. I often went through customs at airports where I was held for half an hour or for an hour with Pakistani immigrants who were chained up. I even saw, once, a brave lady, I laugh about it now, but it's so sad: a Pakistani lady who, at one point in the customs waiting room, took out a big wad of 5 inches bills to pay the customs officer to let her in the country. And that's life, that's the absolute true and reality! So we really have to be careful about what we do and who we vote for!

PPC: So, New York in the 1990s, you lived there and moved several times within New York, to Brooklyn, to Manhattan, and there you met some wonderful people. I believe you met the biggest art collector or buyer in New York, in the United States, a big gallery owner perhaps?

JPS: Yes, I had the immense good fortune and pleasure of meeting Leo Castelli, thanks to a friend, Anne-Marie Danenberg, who had a small gallery in Soho. She had said to me, "Jean-Pierre, you know, you should go and meet with Leo Castelli because I know he welcomes young artists and have a look at their works." Then I said, "Wait, he's the biggest gallery owner in the world." Because, in fact, he was the one who brought artists in the art market such as Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Lichtenstein, etc. to international prominence. He was the one who brought all the Pop Art artists to the fore. And I told her: "Do you really think it's possible?" So I called the gallery and said to the secretary, "Hello, my name is Jean-

Pierre Sergent and I'd like to speak to Mr. Leo Castelli." I'll always remember his soft voice when answered me "My name is Jean-Pierre Sergent, I'm an artist (I knew he spoke French) and I'd like to show you my art work." He replied, "Yes, very well, so come to the gallery on Wednesday at 4:30 p.m." And that's how I had the chance to met him several times. He was the pope of art world, and I met someone who was exactly the same age as my grandfather, since he was also born in 1907. He was someone from another generation (because they had lived through two World Wars) and he really loved artists. And when I showed him my work, he smiled and said to me at one point, "Look, here are some animals!" as if he had seen the Virgin Mary. These were people who had retained an emotional connection and curiosity about artists. He tried to help me. He even tried to call Annina Noesi, who was the gallery owner who showed Jean-Michel Basquiat's first exhibition, and I went to see her. But it didn't go very well... but anyway, it didn't matter, as I knew then Leo Castelli, had gave me a bit of an aura among my other artist friends, because he was really the person to know at the time. And so, my work was a little stronger and more important than the one of the other artists.

PPC: So, there in New York, you experienced the nightlife, the parties. What was it like there and in your studio? Did you have a huge studio? I think you had everything rebuild to have a beautiful loft, and then they kicked you out?

JPS: Yes exactly, the first studio was in DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass), in Brooklyn, just below the Manhattan Bridge, and I stayed there for a year and a half. Then I was with my girlfriend Olga, so we thought maybe we should move closer to midtown of Manhattan. It was in Chelsea, in the gallery district, because that's where all the big galleries are now, and we rented and renovated a commercial space, so we redid everything anew in there. But unfortunately, we got kicked out after six months as it was not a living and working place. So we had to find a lawyer to negotiate our exit. In fact, we paid for three months and we got three months free, but if we haven't leave before June 30, we would have had to pay a penalty of \$1,000 per day. So I had to urgently find a studio in Long Island City, and it was a very nice space too, which we rented and renovated with my friend Olga, and where I stayed for almost seven or eight years.

PPC: And that's where you created your series on the Mayans?

JPS: The "Mayan Diary" series, yes, exactly.

PPC: With a format of one meter by one meter.

JPS: That's right, I started working on Plexiglas in that size (1,05 x 1,05 m) because my body feels very comfortable working in that format, in that module. And so that's my main work, we haven't talked about it, they're large monumental works on Plexiglas that are assembled together on the walls, the latest of which were presented at the Musée des Beaux-Arts exhibition in Besançon from 2019 to 2023. For four years, could we perhaps play some Mexican music now?

PPC: Either Mexican music, or I can play you a little surprise tune.

JPS: OK, go ahead.

PPC: Back from New York with the Talking Heads. The surprise is to remind us a little of your stay in New York with this kind of New York music. What was the atmosphere like in New York, is it alive 24/7?

JPS: Yes, New York is alive 24/7. But above all, there is in that City, an incredible energy. It's very difficult for us Europeans to understand. I'll start with an anecdote because every time I came back from New York and landed in Geneva, Paris, or either Vienna... I had, for example, a group exhibition in Vienna in Austria, in a museum in Vienna, and when you land in Europe, anywhere, it's as if the vital energy has disappeared. Everything is small, everything is depressed, everything is cramped, everything is depressing. And you say to yourself, but what is this, what is really going on here? It's the Middle Ages! As the energy has completely disappeared. And that's it, that's what it is, and so New York is pure energy, almost infinite, to your heart's content! At least, it was when I was there. But that must still be the case today, I guess so? There's also a multicultural collective intelligence at work, meaning that I was able to make friends from all over the world there, friends I still have today. There is no racism, in the sense that we understand it here in France, and I may come back to the law on secularism, which, as an American, I don't understand at all and find totally absurd, because the idea of God is something universal, it exists everywhere, worldwide, and is indivisible. So to say that certain places are beyond God's reach is unbearable for true believers! Anyway, it's a bit complicated to talk about it here, but for me, New York is the place of absolute freedom. New York is about encounters, yes, encounters, that's it!

PPC: Freedom, and that's where you also go into trances, what you call shamanic trances, but it has nothing to do with shamans? How does a shamanic trance work?

JPS: Absolutely, no, it really has to do with the shamans, completely, because shamanic trances are done with techniques. For example, among the Kogis in Colombia, it takes twenty years of learning to finally become a shaman. That means you have to study nature, plants and animals. So they study plants and also the places they travel into their trances too. You mustn't get lost, otherwise you die. I had a good friend, Miguel Angel Baltierra, who was originally from Mexico and lived in Los Angeles, who told me that one of his artist friends had died during a shamanic trance because he got lost in his trip. So you may well never come back from it. I experienced these trances through a therapeutic technique called Ericksonian hypnosis, which is hypnosis. A doctor named Glenda Feinsmith put me into a trance. She treated me under trance for several months. And then, one day, we did a shamanic trance, we did four or five of them, and each time, it was like discovering universes that could be called primary, original, wonderful! Somewhere and somehow, we go to the origin of Mankind, to the beginning of humanity, we enter into nature, we become a whale, we become a bear, we become a jaguar, we become a hawk. This is what Native Americans call meeting your 'animal spirit', your spiritual guide, which means that you always meet animals and so, often, you can also die. In fact, most of the time, you die. So I was lucky enough to experience these trances and I talk about them in my work, they are big inspirations to me. Sometimes I describe them and draw them directly in some paintings in which the lighting is different. And above all, the body has lost all its weight. We could perhaps come

back to this later with Simone Veil, who is a philosopher and who talks about the weight of the body, in spiritual and religious trances. In fact, it's like being outside the body but inside the body at the same time, concurrently, since you become a skeleton, your body is eaten by some snakes, or ants, you are eaten by lions, you find yourself in Africa and, the next moment, you are in Siberia and then you are in the ocean or merging from a volcano. It's really what we call a cosmic travel. And that had given a full strength to my work. A cosmic strength which I had first encountered in Egypt but for which I had no images at the time. Now, I had images, scenarios, so to speak, the scenario of what a trance is, an ecstasy, an orgasm. And sometimes you die outright. You have this mystical experience of encountering and merging into the light. And so I can talk about it. But then, does it really exist or not? What's important is that it's in the human brain, in the structure of the psyche, it's not at all invented or delusional, since shamans can perfectly guide themselves into the other world, thanks to their knowledge, they can guide themselves into other worlds, other realities, just like that!

PPC: And you, did it help you in your work? When you come back from these shamanic trances, you pick up your brushes again, you see all these images, you try to put them on a medium, on photos, on your Plexiglas panels?

JPS: No, it's not that I try, I do it really, I know, I just do it. It's as if you've touched God or you've touched orgasm. You absolutely cannot go back. You've been happy beyond human knowledge, beyond literature, even beyond Art. You've touched something, you've touched fulfilment and grace. It's like the state of *satori* among the Japanese Buddhists. For example, there are some monks who stay in their monasteries for 20 to 40 years and never had a chance to experience the *satori*. So the master, fed up with them constantly pestering him with their desire for revelation... "Master, please teach us *satori*!" So he says to them, "You're pissing me off with your bullshit and constant requests!" And then, for example, he violently grabs the monk's arm, pins him in the door and boom, he breaks his arm and then, the guy finally, experiences the *satori* state. That is to say, the state of *satori* is to be awakened and illuminated to the entire World, it is to understand everything at once, it is the ultimate consciousness, if you like! Knowing where you are and that you are nowhere and everywhere at the same time, you enter the Void. And once you've experienced that, you can talk about it. At some point, I can see people coming and glancing at my artworks, they can't understand it because, if you haven't been initiated into it, you completely miss it, you pass it by.

PPC: So, to appreciate your work, do you have to have had an experience of shamanic trances?

JPS: Not necessarily, because you can find bits and pieces of it, yes, you can feel bits, and pieces of it, little fragments. And then the colors I encountered and describes are surprising and vibrant colors. You can see in my work that there are a lot of quite unexpected, bright and marvellous colors.

PPC: On the subject of art and your work, you say that it's important to break the rules.

JPS: Yes, it's absolutely essential!

PPC: That's kind of what your work is about, all those trips, all those experiences that lead you to make these Plexiglas pieces and break the rules. What do you want to show us?

JPS: Yes, I want to demonstrate that, what we are and what we think art is, isn't art at all, it's crap. And what I would also like to show is that art can, in fact, be totally at a different place from where we think it is and exists. And then, people always have a cliché about what art should be. I'm going to read here a few short sentences that I thought of about my work, which are:

"My job is to break things, aesthetic codes, moral and academic preconceptions, so that they burst, shatter, scatter, fit together and rebuild themselves differently, in another ecstatic, joyful & spiritual state!"

And then I say: "to understand or to try to understand, I could say: Art in general is already about dissociating things, taking them apart. Because Art is in the realm of revelation and the inexplicable. And also, my paintings are liberating, just as reggae music was liberating for Bob Marley. Maybe, we could have played a Bob Marley song? That is to say, for me, the very meaning and primary function of art is to liberate the viewer's mind. Because we all live into a poor and petty bourgeois lives, as in Jacques Brel's song *Chez ces gens-là*, with our little cars, our little wives, our little children, etc. Human life is very sad. In Europe in particular, it lacks completely some spiritual dimension, not as the sages and sadhus in India and the anciens hermits of the desert...

PPC: Have you already been there? Have you ever been to India?

JPS: Unfortunately, no, I haven't been there. But I've read a lot of books about India.

PPC: But, you have you been to Mexico too? Guatemala often from New York?

JPS: Yes. It turns out that my friend Olga is of Colombian origin, so she has an Indian look. And Mexico and Guatemala are quite close to New York. It takes four hours to fly there, and we often went during what is called Spring Break in April because Olga had some vacation time. And in September too, we went to Mexico four or five times and to Guatemala twice. And that's where I had some another cosmic and aesthetic revelations, perhaps, also with meeting with the kindness of these Mayan peoples, with their vibrants colors, of course, because their costumes are very colourful, as is their art. Because, also, when you visit the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, you get a huge shock. For the reason that what their art tells us is not what Western art is describing and telling us. These are not small, neatly framed paintings, what I justly name: "the Window Painting." Their art have a powerful volcanic, solar presence... It's Life, it's Sexuality, it's human sacrifice and it's Death, all intertwined and intermingled... And it's full energies, no bullshit, it's telluric forces. Unfortunately, you can't find that anywhere in our poor Western art.

PPC: But that's what you do in your Plexiglas and many square mandala-shaped

formats?

JPS: Yes, I often use mandala patterns.

PPC: You create an accumulation of superimposed images?

JPS: Yes, that's right, exactly.

PPC: I'd like to know how many layers you superimpose?

JPS: Yes, we discussed this together when you came to the studio, and perhaps we could play that excerpt? In general, there are no specific rules, and I also work on the back of the Plexiglas panels, so I can add two, three, or four layers, and at the end, I finish the painting with a last layer of monochrome acrylic paint applied with a brush to complete the work. Yes, to finish it and then... but as I explained in the workshop, I have no idea in advance what the result will be or should be, so I work with the unexpected, the subversive, the randomness and luck... It's very important for me to work blind, because we all have aprioris and preconceived ideas, aesthetic or moral, about what we want to do, what we would like to achieve. And I don't want preconceptions to get in the way of my creativity.

PPC: You mentioned visiting your studio, so let's listen to our visit to your studio:

INTERVIEW WITH LAURENT IN JPS BESANÇON STUDIO'S, FEBRUARY 6, 2025

- Jean-Pierre, is your studio open to the public?

JPS: No, not at all. My studio is open, but only by appointment, because I am always working a lot and every days and I don't have much time to receive people, just like that, unannounced.

PPC: But by appointment only, yes, one can come. There are no open days, nothing like that?

JPS: For a long time, I held studio openings to the public, one open day a year, but it didn't work very well, so I stopped.

PPC: So, we are in this large space with quite a few of Jean-Pierre's works hanging on the walls. They are screen-printed works on Plexiglas, measuring 1.05 meters by 1.05 meters. Then we have a whole wall like this (3.15 by 6.30 meters), in all colors, with lots of images, which is really magnificent! I see we have lots of paint pots on a small trolley, we have tables, we have chairs, we have the floor, with quite a lot of tiny pieces of coloured scotch tapes. What are all these pieces of scotch tape for, Jean-Pierre?

JPS: I often film when I'm working, or I film interviews, so I need to know where to place the cameras. So that I don't have to calculate each time where the camera feet are every time, I have my little markers like this, there you go!

PPC: Ah, camera markers. Because Jean-Pierre films himself, you can find all his films on his website (j-psergent.com) when he's working. So we have a huge work

table, and he has explained or will explain this work table and its history to us, because it's a work table that comes from the United States, from New York... with wooden tables, a pile of papers, and also with a huge bookcase at the back of the studio. And so you use this bookcase and your books for your work?

JPS: Yes, absolutely. I "use," in quotation marks, writers and ethnologists. I love reading, for example, the stories of Alexandra David-Neel because she traveled to Tibet and India. I read a lot about Buddhism, Hinduism, anything that's a bit outside the Western world and narrow thought, to give me back energy that we've more or less lost here, in Europe. And I wanted to come back to my Plexiglas modules. They are works, in fact, it's some inverted paintings, meaning that I apply three layers of screen printing and then add the final touch as a monochrome, with a brush. So it's really a painting reverse, so it's on the back of the panels, what is called reverse glass painting in English. The format of my module is 1.05 by 1.05 m. But when the Plexiglas is framed, it measures 1.40 by 1.40 m at total.

PPC: In your workshop, one can also see that there are a lot of statues, masks, and sculptures, probably a little bit Aztec or Mayan, they come from Mexico? So here, we really have a wonderful atmosphere, and I invite the listener to make an appointment to come and visit Jean-Pierre's workshop. We return to the studio with Jean-Pierre and continue talking about his work and his art. I suggest we take a little trip to India with a piece from your music selection: *Raga Bāirag*, by Gopal Krishan...

– PART 2/3

PPC: So, we come out of our shamanic trance with this music track. We were in India with Jean-Pierre. So we have been to Mexico, Guatemala. We stopped briefly in India, and now we're back in Besançon, France and in Besançon, it's 2016-2021, and now you're doing a new series. So, it's some small works on paper which are perhaps more interesting selling in France and Europe? Smaller formats compared to larger formats? They are 25 by 25 centimeters, and at that time, you have completed more than 3,000 of them! 3,000 silkscreen prints like that, from a series called "Shakti-Yoni," with quite a few images, little bit erotic or pornographic, taken from Japanese videos or Japanese books. Can you please tell us a little bit about it?

JPS: Yes, of course. Actually, the full title is "*Shakti-Yoni: Ecstatic Cosmic Dances*," and *Shakti* is the goddess of sex and death, and *Yoni* is the female sex in India mythology, the vulva, ecstatic and cosmic! What I mean is that I think what's important is the 'body in ecstasy', in dancing and in joy, somehow, therefore, throughout sexuality. And actually, I wrote a short text to read you specially for this program. It was because I'm asking myself a deep and serious question, because today we are all inundated with pornographic images. Pornography has roughly the same turnover as the arms industry, so it's big business. We shouldn't think that pornographic images just appear 'out of the blue'... like that. And we really have to ask ourselves, intellectually and politically, why so many pornographic images are appearing on and in the market or in our homes, on our computers, and who and what they really serving? I could make a serious connection and comparison with the decline of the ancient Aztec and pre-Columbian societies and civilisations, where they constantly sacrificed human beings. I wrote this short text, which I will read to

you and the listeners:

OBVIOUS CONNECTION BETWEEN MEXICAN HUMAN SACRIFICES & CONTEMPORARY PORNOGRAPHIC MADNESS, JPS, SPRING 2025

Hubris and the current pornographic madness could undoubtedly be compared in some ways, to the frenzied human sacrifices killings during the decline of the last Aztec societies, even those perpetrated just before the arrival of Cortez. Because in fact, the Aztecs believed, rightly so and collectively, that other gods would replace theirs, and out of fear, bravery, spite, and honor, they collectively sacrificed not only salves but even themselves, sometimes even their own elite, in order to prevent this crazy predicted apocalypse. It seems to me that, in comparison to those sacrifices, as the global pornography business (which also sacrifices a lot of human lives) now generates a turnover equal to that of the arms industry, we can only wonder, beyond our own individual history and taking a historical perspective and analytical distance, to try to understand where this enormous, so pervasive, almost vital and practically insatiable need of man to feed, drives, and stupefy himself so completely, so abundantly, so orgiastically and 'ogresquely' with all those erotic images, all so similar, so simplistic, so stupid and so meaningless, other than masturbatory, comes from! Because, ultimately, pornography is ultimately only used for masturbation. So, haven't we, all collectively returned to the days of a society that was simply sacrificial and slaveholder as in Roman times, completely subjugated and subservient to the trade in bodies and business at any cost, to the society of spectacle and the total disappearance of religious and spiritual aspirations? Because we can only destroy what is subjugated and subservient to the system. This is in reference to a text by Simone Weil, a philosopher, I may talk about later. And of course, by widely combining pornographic images, let's say, for example, that every other image in my work comes from a porn website, then why do I use these images so widely? Firstly, to place and put a mirror image of the people who look at my work. They may say: "Hey, your work is highly pornographic!" But I can reply them: "But don't you also look at pornography, it's very usual practice? It's obvious!" And secondly, to say that sometimes, in some of these images, just a very few, there is a kind of state of "grace" and of holiness, of ecstasy. And it is this state of grace and ecstasy that I try to represent in my work.

PPC: We can also quote Gustav Klimt, that you quoted who said, "All art is erotic!"

JPS: Absolutely, yes, exactly.

PPC: Yes, that's true. But in your case, is it more erotic, or pornographic, or a mixture?

JPS: No, I don't have a definition or justification to give to anybody.

PPC: It's a mixture of everything?

JPS: Yes, absolutely, I hate definitions. I hate to confine my art to a definition or a concept. It means nothing for me.

PPC: Will this pornographic or erotic image be inserted into your work on Plexiglas

or later on a print on paper mixed with other images, sometimes with very symmetrical and geometric designs?

JPS: Yes, I work a lot with what is called a 'pattern'. A pattern is a repetitive motif. I often find them in so-called "primitive" or "first" societies, and for these peoples and societies, these patterns often represent some genetic and linear connections, that is to say: the father, the mother, the son or the grandfather too, they are genetic links and so it's like a kind of net, a social, genetic, cultural and ancestral network that should never end. But this human network, all these human networks, these links and their connectif weaves, are totally disappearing nowadays. They survive a little now with the Internet, but we can no longer communicate with the dead, our ancestors. Sa for, we can't no longer communicate, not even with the living persons. I always remember this personal anecdote that once, I saw in dream, my grandfather falling in his kitchen, and unexpectedly, a week later, I learned that he had really actually had fallen in his kitchen. In other words, these connections, which all Africans tribes know about, or which indigenous peoples, Native Americans, etc. knew about, all those connections channels, as we can name them, these channels of information and love, and also knowledge, these channels used by shamans, have totally disappeared. And we, Westerners have lost them all (the emperor has no clothes and is fully naked!). So for me, it's a deep, unbearable and irreparable loss. And how many indigenous languages are disappearing? How many cultures are disappearing today, just in front of us? It's countless and immeasurable! And that's why I use a lot of images from these societies that have unfortunately disappeared today.

PPC: Is art made by women artists, in your opinion, well represented, not well represented, or even underrepresented?

JPS: Of course not. Because I believe that only about 1% of the works in Museums in France are done by female artists!

PPC: And you had a quote you wanted to share.
On your website, I saw a short sentence you had written that said that half of humanity is not represented in the art museums?

JPS: Exactly. Well, they are in museums, but only because of the men's gaze and desire for their bodies.

PPC: So now, an excerpt from this Iranian painter and teacher from Tehran. A friend of yours?

JPS: Yes, she's a friend on Instagram and she likes all the posts I add on Instagram. So I think my work is important to her. Her name is Samira Sahrabavard and she is an artist and an art teacher. She teaches art to children and teenagers in Tehran, Iran. And so she says this, and I'll translate some part of her excerpt for you.

SAMIRA SAHRANAVARD, IRANIAN PAINTER AND TEACHER IN TEHRAN

"I am an art teacher and I teach art to children and teenagers in Iran professionally. Greetings and respect to all the dear listeners of Radio Campus Besançon, as well as a special greeting to our dear friend, the artist Jean-Pierre Sergent.

As an artist and teacher involved in the field of art and art history, I try to make the role of women in Iran more exciting by organizing art classes in the right direction and focusing on modern and creative arts. I devote all my time to providing a good education to children and teenagers so that they can continue and develop in art with the right understanding and concept as adults. As we know, the role of women is a subject that is found abundantly in various arts, and this issue highlights the importance of women's issues and freedom in every societies.

The lives of women in my country today are linked to communication technologies, virtual spaces, and their tools, and it makes sense for them to express themselves so that they can properly convey this important issue to future generations and become more prosperous day by day.

With my gratitude to all of you, dear friends, who pay special attention to art and the role of women in it.

And I wish for a world full of color and joy for everyone."

PPC: So you have quite a few female friends and painters? More than men?

JPS: Oh no, no, it doesn't matter at all, I don't count. But I have a particular affinity for the work of female artists such as Frida Kahlo and, of course, Louise Bourgeois. But Louise Bourgeois' work disturbs me a little bit, because it's very difficult to look at it as it's very harsh, depressing, anguished, and full of suffering, but I love it anyway. And I like for example the work of Nancy Spero more, for example, she uses more ancient and obvious references to culture and sexuality. Because in a way, these female artists obviously feel trapped, as if in a prison, a prison that we, men, morals, and religion have collectively built for women throughout thousands of year of history. They are absolutely right, to try to want to free themselves. But, my art is also liberating. It's this kind of freedom that I want to achieve in initiate. Of course! And it's true that in my work, we haven't talked about it yet, but you can see big dicks, pussies, tits, and ass-fucking. It's true that all this shocks the bourgeoisie mindset, but art is mainly made to shock, otherwise we might just stop doing art.

PPC: It's not just that, I should point out, but there's also that, of course. But there aren't only simply pornographic images in your works.

JPS: Yes, but I think it's the true role of an artist to shake up society and moral codes a little bit, or even a lot, otherwise we all fall asleep. Otherwise, we will paint flowers all our lives and that's it. And then we will become rich and stupid!

JPS: We paint flowers all our lives. Yes, I like that definition.

PPC: Jean-Pierre, you do a lot of Plexiglas silkscreen printing, but are do you doing anything else? Do you also do sculpture?

JPS: No, no, not at all.

PPC: No sculpture? But there are a few sculptures in your studio?

JPS: Yes, I made a few in New York with objects I found on the streets of Brooklyn, by the East River. Of course, there are a lot of statues, but they're not mine. They're mainly works I bought in Mexico or Guatemala, mainly ceremonial masks, yes.

PPC: They're rather unusual statues. What do you like about them? They're statues that remind you of your shamanic trances. There's a jaguar, and there are also animal heads and masks.

JPS: Yes, like El tigre (the spirit of the Mayan jaguar!), which means that, as I said earlier, in trances, you always encounter your 'animal spirit'. So I have the Tiger, and it is the spirit of the shaman that guides him into the other worlds. And these artworks have some power that I don't have. Well, maybe I do have it? But anyway, that's the goal and the direction I'm trying to move in. It's definitely the place, it's "the shaman's place," yes, I think so. Talking to spirits, talking to the dead, and regenerating the world—that's my humble and ultimate goal after all!

PPC: Going back to your studio, what is the first thing you do when you get there in the morning?

JPS: Usually, I get up in the morning and then I take care of the social media networks, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter etc. And that's a lot of work because, in a way, success doesn't really come because my work has absolutely no audience, no public, here, in Besançon. Because of this, I am somehow compelled, forced, and obliged to make connections with some international social media. For example, on my LinkedIn account, I have almost thirty thousand contacts. So the first thing I do in the morning, because, on this network you're limited to 30,000 contacts, so I do remove contacts, which takes me between an hour or two hours, and then I contact some new other people to try to reach some suitable personnes which could be interested in my art as: museum curators, journalists, gallery owners, and so on. All this administrative and communication work sometimes takes me two to three hours a day. And I also do a lot of editing work these days. For example, I'm working on editing the videos I filmed last summer in my studio at work. It takes me about twelve hours a day to edit a video. So sometimes I don't have time to work on social media. I way behind... Right now, for example, I'm a month behind on LinkedIn. That's what I do, and I'm also on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

PPC: Can your art and your artworks be considered as Outsider Art?

JPS: I would like to, but it doesn't fit, because I have been to an art school. Only people who have not had any artistic education and who are, for the most part, institutionalized in asylums and who make the art they want to make, without possibly being influenced, are considered part of Art Brut community. So, they haven't had an education. They may have had painting classes in these institutions, but I can't be considered as an Art Brut artist. However, that's what I'm deeply striving for, because, of course, in Art Brut, there's a force that is completely unbridled, an unruly energy.

PPC: We can see all that on your website, which is extremely comprehensive and where you post examples of Art Brut artists with your explanations on them. So how can we find your website?

JPS: Yes, the web address is: j-psergent.com

PPC: And this website is a real goldmine of information. I don't know how many

years you've been running your it, but, in fact, when did you start?

JPS: I started it in New York, at least 25 years ago. I knew a Brazilian friend, Elaine Scola, who did it for me. I met her at a party in Brooklyn, and my friend who invited us had brought a Brazilian samba school to this party. It was a really great party. And then I met this Elaine and suggested that we collaborate on setting up a website together because she was a web designer. And she was the one who started this website. And now my friend Cyril Clément, who lives in Brussels, is in charge of managing it. But I'm the one who adds all the news and content, somehow. Yes, that also takes quite a bit of time, because you have to add photos, text, videos, and all that...

PPC: There's something surprising about your musical choices, too. Maybe it's a memory of New York, is it Eminem? So why Eminem?

JPS: Precisely, there's an energy in his songs that many artists don't have.

PPC: So we listen to Eminem on Pépé Coyote's Pépites on Radio Campus Besançon. And then we'll come back to talk about art with Jean-Pierre, because his story is a well, as they say, a bottomless, it is an inexhaustible source

JPS: Well, let's try to remain humble and simple...

PPC: "Please stand up, please stand up!" Pépé Coyote and Jean-Pierre are here. Jean-Pierre, I haven't heard you sing?

JPS: Oh yes, that's true.

PPC: Are you ever singing?

JPS: Not much? No, unfortunately not much.

PPC: Why did you choose Eminem? Because you know him and like him? Do you find it festive? Is it funny?

JPS: Exactly, there's so much humor in what he sings, especially when you understand some of his lyrics, even if it's really difficult to understand him, even for me, as an American, I don't understand everything he says. But I know there's a lot of humor and a lot of energy in his lyrics. And a lot of rhythm, of course. And I'd like to come back to my work, because it's a bit about the same thing, there are a lot of obscene phrases and words, and when you understand English, there are a lot of phrases that challenge the audience in my works, and, for exemple, the difference between the French audience and the American audience, as we can see, is that people crack up in front of them; in fact, Americans are doubled over with laughter in front of my paintings, they are rolling on the floor laughing because I use phrases that destabilize them. Obscenity and bawdy humor make people laugh and destabilize the rigor mortis and even the stupidity of the viewer. Whereas here, in France, people go to see art like they go to some museums. They never laugh and they sulk. It's so sad, the way people look at art, here in France, it's so boring! Somewhere, I was thinking about that. And today, once my art is done, I don't give a damn about it anymore. That is to say, it lives its own life, and that's it. They are

words, colors, and images that we throw out there, in the void, and then they go on with their lives. I like people to be in harmony with this energy, but it's not really that easy! It's not that easy to find harmony between the work of art and the public, especially if the public is so poor and uneducated! And I wanted to talk about the own weight of the body. I'm going to quote Simone Weil, if you don't mind.

PPC: It's a book by Simone Weil, "*Gravity and Grace*". Would you like to read us a short excerpt?

JPS: Yes. So here we have Simone Weil, a philosopher who is not the Simone Weil we know, the politician who survived the extermination camps, but she was also Jewish. She was persecuted but she was not imprisoned in the camps. And so all her reflections are reflections on the body, on religion, and on art as well. It's a very short book that I really recommend everyone read. So at one point she says:

BOOK: "GRAVITY AND GRACE" BY SIMONE WEIL

"The only way to preserve one's dignity in forced submission (as in pornography) is to consider the leader as a thing. Every man is a slave to necessity, but the conscious slave is far more superior."

This applies completely to our current situation! That is to say, even in the worst, most appallingly difficult moments, the body has its own intelligence, its greatness, its resilience, and its grace. And we must all of us, remember that. And as an artist, I always work with that grace. And she goes on in saying:

"Modern life is given over to excess. Excess invades everything: action and thought, public and private life. Hence the decadence of art. There is no longer any balance anywhere. The Catholic movement is partly a reaction against this: Catholic ceremonies, at least, have remained intact. But they are also unrelated to the rest of existence."

Because in fact, Simone Weil was of Jewish origin and she became a Christian because she found, at some time, grace in this religion, and that is entirely respectable. And further on, she talks about art. She says:

"Beauty is the experimental proof that incarnation is possible. Therefore, all art of the first mean is essentially religious. (This is something we are no more longer achieving today). A Gregorian melody bears witness to this as much as the death of a martyr."

And she is absolutely right about art. What interests me, in my work, is finding some transcendence somewhere, going beyond norms and, precisely, going beyond the body and beyond somewhat rational impressions, going beyond the rational, yes, that's very important!

PPC: You read a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot... You have a collection and a bookshelf with all different kind of books. It's crazy! It can range from nature and animals to poetry or pornography?

JPS: No, I hardly read any pornographic books, it doesn't really interest me at all.

PPC: No, but in relation to your drawings. It's more films, videos.

JPS: Yes, I get images from the internet and it's free.

PPC: Only free stuff. But do you buy those books?

JPS: Yes, I buy them because it's one of the only luxuries I can still afford, and that is to be able to buy a few books when I have some little money to spend. And it's true that I buy a little too many. But it was Umberto Eco who said that we shouldn't worry about having more books than we read. Because, in a way, if we read all the books we buy, we would be right in the middle of the consumer society system, in which we have to consume everything we buy, but books are superfluous, like art, for that matter!

PPC: And then you annotate your books, you read them, you take elements, phrases, you scan them, you put them on your website, you comment on them. Does that help you in your work too?

JPS: Yes, of course! But paradoxically, it helps me, yes, but often more in hindsight... For example, Marguerite Yourcenar talks about something... And well, in that work, at a certain point, I was going in the same direction. It's rare that it opens up a new avenue of thought for me a priori, but sometimes it does, as in the *Upanishads* or books on shamanism or tantrism. But in fact, it complements and supports my work in some way, yes, it's a parallel, the two feed off each other... Absolutely and it's always impressive to know that humans are always the same throughout history, whether they live in India or the North Pole or during the Middle Ages; what interests humans is, in a way, how to survive the extreme stupidity of societies, religious dogmas, and financial systems, in a way, it must be said and stated really clearly. And today, it's still difficult to survive the stupidity and incredible foolishness that are surrounding us.

PPC: Imagine you arrive on a desert island, like Robinson Crusoe. You find a hut, and in that hut there's a box, and in the box there are three books. What would you like to find in there? Or what books would you discover?

JPS: The "*Upanishads*", to start with, of course, I think it's a wonderful book, full of lessons.

PPC: The "*Upanishads*" are the sacred texts of the Hindus, right?

Here are two quotes from this book:

"I-47, In the World, whatever object one considers, it is only a vibratory process of consciousness and not a permanent entity."

"V- 94, "I am united with the one who dwells at the tip of the blade of grass, in the sky, in the sun, in every human being, in the mountains, and even in the deities." ... thinking thus, he no longer knows suffering." In *Annapurnna*

PPC: And what else, perhaps, would you like to find in this box?

JPS: Perhaps the "*Life of Casanova*". I had a dear friend, Bruno Dellinger, whom some listeners may know. He's a friend from New York who narrowly survived the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. And he said to me at one point: "Jean-Pierre, Casanova's "*The Story of My Life*" should be read three times: once when you're young, once when you're an adult, and once when you're old." But these are three large volumes and they are very, very beautiful to read and full of poetry, full of vital energy and with incredible adventurous twists and turns! Yes, I like Casanova, and perhaps what else? I like Marguerite Yourcenar, although I like her novels a little less because I read them such a long time ago... But recently, for example, I read her book "*Source II*", a book she didn't publish alive and asked not to be published until thirty years after her death. In it, she talks about India, Japan, and Mishima. Perhaps I could quote some short excerpts from some Japanese authors. I'm currently reading a correspondence between Mishima and Kawabata, for example.

PPC: An excerpt from Mishima. With pleasure, but we'll listen to a short piece from your selection, "*Le jardin d'hiver*". And then we'll come back on air with Jean-Pierre.

JPS: Thank you.

– PART 3/3

PPC: A really nice song by Henri Salvador's "*Jardin d'hiver*" with the ukulele.

JPS: Yes, that incredible voice is the epitome of sensuality. And sometimes in my life, I've been lucky enough to meet women of incredible beauty with a sweet, sensual voices. That was "*Jardin d'hiver*" by Vaimalama Chavez, a former Miss France. And every time I hear that voice, it touches me like the voice of a mother somewhere, rocking us and soothing us. So, now, I wanted to talk a little about Japan and its relationship with beauty. I'm currently reading the book of correspondence between Kawabata and Mishima. Mishima is better known than Kawabata, but that doesn't matter. I read a lot of Japanese literature and I've been lucky enough to have had several Japanese girlfriends, and their relationship to life is totally different from ours, Europeans. They don't have that excitement, that anger towards things and life in general. And the Japanese are, for the most part, also animists. They believe that there are spirits in nature, such as the kami, and therefore, in certain places, they will put some ropes around a tree, or a stone, a rock to show, mark and signify that this tree is sacred. We have lost this relationship with all the sacred in general as Everything is commodified and marketable. In France, we rediscovered that feeling, a little with the inauguration of the renovation of Notre Dame after it burned, but it was still very grandiloquent! And we have lost the sacred in our daily lives. We have lost our relationship with death, with the dead, with our ancestors. We no longer know how to communicate. So, in the introduction to the book, the person presenting it said:

"In Kawabata, there is a sense of the sacred that is essentially religious, whereas in Mishima it is immediately linked to eroticism and narcissism, paganism and even destruction, to a 'disturbing intoxication' or a bloody sacrifice."

It is true that Mishima committed suicide by performing the samurai ritual of *seppuku*, because he could no longer find his right place in the world in which he lived. And that raises questions. But artists often have ideas about aesthetics or morality that are a little too narrow-minded and unattainable. And often, society or societies do not correspond at all to their high expectations and aspirations; in fact, there is a huge gap! And so, the author, in the book introduction also says further on about Kawabata:

"This faculty of abstraction, this love of spirituality, bursts forth in the speech he gave at the Nobel Prize ceremony (Kawabata): "The Zen disciple sits for long hours, silent, motionless, eyes closed. Soon he enters a state of impassivity, freed from all conception, all thought. He leaves the self to enter the realm of nothingness. This is not the Western Nothingness or Emptiness. Rather the opposite, a universe of the Spirit where everything communicates freely with everything else, transcending boundaries, without limits."

And I would like my work to be exactly like that: transcending boundaries, without limits.

PPC: Do we feel this spirit, this slightly Japanese essence in your work, or is it more Hindu? Like the series with the exhibition "[*The Four Pillars of Heaven*](#)"?

JPS: I hope we feel a little bit of all that: Japanese, Hindu, Maya, Australian, Prehistorical etc. I try to draw inspiration from different cultures, different civilizations, which had this deep connection with the Earth, with the Sky, with the Stars...

PPC: Because that series, "The Four Pillars of Heaven", was exhibited at the Besançon Museum of Fine Arts, and it was quite a monumental display.

JPS: Yes, absolutely. It could plunge the viewer into a state of ecstasy. Unfortunately, given the lack of feedback I received, I think people completely missed the point of my artwork. But that's the same problem with every real work of art, because there is often a huge gap between what the artist does and means, and the public's perception of the work. Maybe that's normal? Maybe it takes ten, fifteen, or 50 years to be reconnect to the public? I really don't know. In any case, my exhibition still made an impression on some people, because now, today, at the gallery, at the exhibition, some people still talk to me about this huge wall installation, but at the time, and since the exhibition lasted four years, I didn't get absolutely not any feedback!

PPC: Because it's true that it's a work that uses these large formats of 1.40 by 1.40 meters. When you look at this format up close, you say to yourself, "Oh, how big it is! It adds something to the work!" You're absolutely fascinated by it, you get drawn and merged into it. And when you're there, you have the perspective to see everything that was on the stairs in the Museum of Fine Arts, it was extraordinary... but how many paintings were there in total?

JPS: Yes, there were 72 paintings and it was 80 square meters in total size.

PPC: When you look at 80 square meters from a distance, you can already see the

power of a 1.40 by 1.40 m painting.

JPS: Yes, actually, the dimensions of my units are 1.05 by 1.05 meters, but anyway, that doesn't matter. Yes, that's true, and it's also true that even the Plexiglas currently on display in the gallery has its own unique and individual power. Exactly, these are powers and energies that are brought and intermingled together, cultures that are merging together.

PPC: Because, we also find that in your studio at the moment, there's a whole section in your big wall. Do you change them regularly or not?

JPS: No, I change them only when I have a monumental exhibition, so I take down the works I want to exhibit in a new place, in a new exhibition. However, I will take down a work that I currently have in my studio to put it in the next group exhibition that we will have at the gallery soon.

PPC: Because there is indeed a new gallery, the gallery Keller on Proudhon Street, in Besançon.

JPS: Yes, the Keller Gallery.

PPC: So, it's a gallery that you created from scratch with a friend of yours from Zurich?

JPS: Yes, I've known Heidi Suter for almost fifteen years now, and because of the Covid, she had lost her gallery in Zurich as she came to see me often in Besançon, she asked me last August (2024): "Jean-Pierre, could you please help me to find a gallery place in Besançon?" So, I have a friend who works in real estate business and he found us this beautiful place and she came to set up her business there. It was a bit complicated because she doesn't speak a word of French. But we got organized and here we are. We opened this gallery in December 2024, and it's going pretty well. So, the next exhibition will be called "[Odds & Ends & Impromptus #2](#) [[Timeless, Timeless, Erotic, Christ-Like, Anarchic, Ecstatic, Jubilant, and Orgasmic](#)]" And so we will be exhibiting the following artists: Elisabeth Bar, Claudie Floutier, Guimbarde, who was my friend and who did a kind of Outside Art but who, sadly, passed away at the end of last October, and also Bertrand Saulnier, along with my own work.

PPC: This new gallery Keller is a must-see! Go check it out, it's located at 7 Rue Proudhon in Besançon. Jean-Pierre, I'd like to hear more of your musical selections, because you've made a playlist of I don't know how many songs... and we are selecting them as we go along during your interview. And now you've selected an Indian song for us, from an Indian tribe.

JPS: Yes, the Sioux tribes, and they are women singing.

PPC: So what does that remind you of from all your good past time? With your horses in the Haut-Doubs Mountains?

JPS: Yes, exactly! The Appaloosas, the horses of the Nez Percé Indians.

PPC: Yes, that's right. And does that inspire you too? Do you listen to music in your studio?

JPS: No, not really so much anymore, unfortunately. Because the older I get, the more I am working. So yes, I don't have much time to listen to music anymore.

PPC: But otherwise, do you work with music or in silence?

JPS: No, it doesn't matter much, I really don't care about that.

PPC: It doesn't matter. Sound for you? Is it more reading that works with you in your head than music?

JPS: Yes, or what I hear on the radio, the news, of course.

PPC: So you hear someone talking on the radio and it inspires you?

JPS: Yes, that's exactly right, I'm someone who is easily influenced and deeply curious about humanity in general.

PPC: There's something we haven't talked about, Jean-Pierre, and that's the screen-printing table in your studio. A work table that you brought back from the United States, from New York, along with quite a few books, brushes, paints, statues, and so on. But this table has an incredible history?

JPS: Absolutely, because I worked as a professional screen printer in Long Island City, at what's called the Drexel Press, run by Georges Drexel, and I was looking for a screen printing table and he sold it to me at the time. And this table is over 60 years old now, since they used to print Andy Warhol's work at the Factory, on it. I bought it from him for \$800, and my workmates dismantled it and then reassembled it in my studio in Long Island City. So it's a table with an incredible history, and I'm proud and honored to work on it.

PPC: So Andy Warhol worked on it. His works were printed on it!

JPS: You know, he didn't do the printing himself because he had lots of assistants at The Factory. Yes.

PPC: Well, he did lay his hands on it.

JPS: On this table, yes, of course, but I'm not a fetishist at all, it really doesn't matter!

PPC: So in your studio, we can see the table on which Andy Warhol worked and which is now used by Jean-Pierre to make his silkscreen prints. Let's listen to: Women's Traditional Song Round Dance, Takini, Music of the Lakota Sioux of North America.

JPS: Yes, it's fascinating. There's an energy in these collective songs, a sacred energy and also a vital force that I mentioned earlier. And I really like this songs. Unfortunately, all these peoples have more or less all disappeared. Fortunately, there was a painter and writer named George Catlin, who traveled among the Plains Indians in the 1830s and documented all the rituals they performed, such as the Sun

Dance, where Native American warriors pierced their chests. They danced facing the sun until they entered into a trance and the wooden pegs tied to leather straps came loose. I still remember reading these books about Native American ceremonies as a child, and it's quite fascinating to access spirituality through suffering. This is exactly what happens in Catholicism, since Christ died to resurrect us, "in quotation marks." So it's common to many past civilizations where, through suffering, one can enter a trance and other worlds. And there is also, in his songs, a joy and a collective thought, harmony and humility that, personally, I think is disappearing a little because we get to the point of no return, in our completely capitalist society. I think we have completely lost our collective intelligence. We are absolutely completely screwing up.

PPC: Did you also want to talk to us about Jean Dubuffet?

JPS: Yes, absolutely. I wanted to quote just four or five quotes about art, since art, is the human discipline that interests me the most. Jean Dubuffet said at one point... He was a great defender and one of the first initiator of Outsider Art, so he would go to asylums and collect the works of the insane and the mad. And he created a beautiful Museum of the Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland, which anyone should visit and which is truly superb. So he said:

"I am convinced that art has a lot to do with madness."

It's absolutely true that you have to be a little crazy and strongly brave and reckless to be an artist, maybe nowadays more than ever anytime time in history. You have to break down all barriers to enter another universe. And he goes on stating:

"Madness is a state of super mental health. Regular normality is psychotic. Normality means a lack of imagination, a lack of creativity.!"

And the huge problem today is that big collectors only buy completely standardized art, what we call politically correct. Jeff Koons' artwork are of absolutely no interest at all. That is to say, it is very well done and executed, but it is a manufactured product. People today are buying art as products from big famous brands like they buy a Vuitton scarf or an Hermès bag or scarf, and they think it will make them more famous and respectable... or even some Nike shoes or whatever. But that's not really purchasing those that items will make them more famous and respectable. That's not really what makes people important!

PPC: It's appearances.

JPS: It's appearances, obviously. And I also wanted to quote Pier Paolo Pasolini, a filmmaker I really adore. I really liked all it's films. He said this:

"I am an old man who has read the classics, who has harvested grapes in the vineyard, who has contemplated the rising or setting of the sun over the fields. So I don't know what to do with a world created by violence and the need for mass consumption."

In an other excerpt, he says:

"When nothing more remains of our the classical world, when all the peasants and artisans will be dead, when industry has relentlessly turned the cycle of production and consumption, then our human history will be over."

PPC: He was a visionary man.

JPS: Yes, his films are truly visionary. And he used sex, in excess, to show people how wrong they were. It's not sexuality that's important, it's spirituality through sexuality. He shows this very well in his film, *Arabian Nights*. And then I wanted to finish about art quotations with Joan Mitchell, who was a famous American artist. I love her work too. She's another female artist, and she says very aptly:

"Painting is the opposite of death; it allows you to survive, it also allows you to live."

Art allows you to live intensely and in a deeper and more intelligent way than other forms of thought or activity.

PPC: But you have to be able to make a living from it, you have to sell a little bit. For artists, that's really difficult.

JPS: That's another problem. I don't really want to talk about it today it's beyond us, it's beyond our comprehension today, with the inflation of the art market and all the galleries closing down. We no longer have any control over the market, because the sale of works and the art market are completely escaping us, and we, artists, are completely overwhelmed and buried by the torments of this totally crazy and insane market.

PPC: You told us about your grandfather, Maurice. You didn't tell us about your dad?

JPS: Yes, I also wanted to talk about my dad, René, who passed away a few years ago.

PPC: Who also followed your work through your artist life.

JPS: He always greeted me with a friendly: "*Salut l'artiste!*" So my family respected my choice to be an artist, and I wanted to pay tribute to them and say how much I miss them today, now, that they are almost all dead. We'll finish that interview with this song by Joe Dassin. And there you go! My dad was a notary in Morteau, and I think he was loved by everyone of his clients because he was so humble and so generous.

PPC: And he used to be listen to Joe Dassin?

JPS: No, more Charles Trenet. It's my mom who loves Joe Dassin and she's still alive. So it's a bit of a tribute to both of them that I wanted to play this last song.

PPC: So we dedicate Joe Dassin to your mom. What's her name?

JPS: My mom's name is Poupette.

PPC: So we salute Poupette in Morteau.

JPS: That's right, exactly.

PPC: Joe Dassin. And the title is "Le chemin de Papa". So, it's a long road. Dad, you didn't sing either? Do you sing?

JPS: Yes, sometimes I do. But it's true that it's not really usual for me to sing, unfortunately. But actually, in New York, I discovered dancing, because there, we were often went out, very went often to parties, so we all danced and it was good and fun. Yes, but in France...?

PPC: Do you dance in your studio?

JPS: I do sometimes, yes, but unfortunately I don't have that joy or that culture there. But, I find that joy again in my artwork somehow, but I'm European, I regret to say. Although... I have a Guadeloupean artist friend who often said to me, "Jean-Pierre, you're almost Black and African," because given the work you are doing, which is full of life and energies, I have a bit of that kind of energy, vital and overflowing, in my work.

PPC: Did you go to discos? Or nightclubs?

JPS: No, we went to parties. You know, in New York, people are having parties at their homes and everyone can come, everyone is invited! It's not like in France where you have to be personally invited. In New York, everyone can come to the parties, rich and poor, famous and unknown and that is a great mix!

PPC: So, thank you, Jean-Pierre, for coming and talking to us about art, spirituality, your work, and everything you are doing... And please don't forget to check out his website: jp-sergent.com, which is extremely comprehensive, full of videos, texts, and works of art... You can spend hours exploring it! And for the workshop, people can call you to come for a visit. You enjoy welcoming people.

JPS: Of course, yes, I will show them part of my work with great pleasure.

PPC: And, of course, the Andy Warhol's table.

JPS: The table, yes, well, it's important, but my work is more important than this table, it's just anecdotal. It's just a means of producing my work.

PPC: Yes, but it's also a work of art, this table itself, it has a history with someone who built it and have been working on it, etc.

JPS: Yes, I think about that all that past time. It's an old table, of course, the people who built it are important too, yes, that's true, you're right.

PPC: And the Keller gallery is located at 7 Rue Proudhon in Besançon. Thank you very much, Jean-Pierre.

JPS: Thank you, dear Laurent, it was a real pleasure to be here, and we ended with this song, which was very catchy and reminds us a little of the 1980s. We had a kind of carefree attitude, and the world wasn't falling apart like it seems to be falling apart

today.

PPC: Thank you, Jean-Pierre. Goodbye.

JPS: Goodbye, and see you soon, goodbye to everyone.

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PPC: Thank you, Jean-Pierre. Goodbye.

JPS: Goodbye, and see you soon, goodbye to everyone.

Text translated by JP Sergent, Besançon, August 19th 2025