

**INTERVIEW BETWEEN ARTIST JEAN-PIERRE  
SERGENT AND JOURNALIST HECTOR LAGOS |  
BESANÇON WORKSHOP, OCTOBER 27th, 2025  
[Watch the video]**

- HECTOR LAGOS: Hello everybody, as part of “Rising from the Ashes” in the project I am gradually putting together with the Phénix Circle, to show a little of the human side of people who are very well known today, but who at one point were not famous at all. So, I am really delighted to be in the company of the artist Jean Pierre Sergent. So hello Jean Pierre!

- JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT: Hello dear Hector, it's such a pleasure to see you again after all these years!

- HL: Yes, well, I'm a little jealous, are we here in your workshop or actually in your personal recording studio?

- JPS: Hahaha! It's true that over the years I've invested in photographic equipment, since I'm filming more and more interviews with friends who are anthropologists, philosophers, or art critics... And little by little, I've invested. I started investing in equipment in New York. And now I'm well equipped, so there you go...

- HL: So I'm a little jealous. But that'll stay between us.

- JPS: Yes, yes, absolutely!

- HL: Jean-Pierre, so were you born in Morteau, in France?

- JPS: Yes.

- HL: And you see, there's a little coincidence because we were born in the same year... As I was born in 1958 on July 14th, excuse me, in Chile!

- JPS: Ah, yes; you were born on French National Day

and I was born on July 4, American Independence Day. I didn't know that before I went to live there, what a surprising and astonishing coincidence!

- HL: So you're a true Franco-New Yorker?

- JPS: Yes, I am saying that because it sets the record straight, it's impressive.

- HL: And did you live there for a long time?

- JPS: Yes, of course, I lived in New York for over ten years.

- HL: Oh, I see. Well, Jean-Pierre, thank you very much again because, as I said at the beginning, as part of these podcasts I organize, I interview people like you to get a deeper insight and see the human side of the artist. Today, you are quite well known internationally. You have exhibited in different countries such as Canada, the United States, and Iran as well.

- JPS: Yes, yes...

- HL: There are other countries too, such as China...

- JPS: In China and in Switzerland, I've often exhibited in Switzerland, and right now, I'm exhibiting in Scotland, in Edinburgh, with Chrissy Moore Art Advisory.

- HL: So what I'm saying is that, very often, when one live in a place, you don't realize the true treasures that are at your disposal. You see, because we can be proud to have an artist from Besançon who is exhibiting all over the world. Frankly speaking, in some way. Jean-Pierre, thank you once again for welcoming me into your studio. I'd like to talk to you so you can tell us a little bit about your personal story. When you were little, for example, when you were young, what were you like at school? Because a painter, I imagine, is a bit of a

dreamer, right? What were you like at school?

- JPS: No, no, I wasn't that much of a dreamer. I was a pretty good student. Yes, I liked learning and studying, but I was very restless and disobedient because I always suffered from violent and terrible asthma attacks, which created a sense of violence and inner rebellion in me, because I wanted to escape it... In fact, it's like with Proust, the writer; I wanted to free myself from the unbearable suffering. As it's a suffering that's hard to accept, always feeling like you're dying. Because during asthma attacks, you always feel like you're dying every second, endlessly. So, it's true that it was all very distressing and anguishing. So I got myself out of it, precisely thanks to the imagination in reading books or drawing, by copying images of animals from the Great Book of Animals or the book on Native Americans and their rituals. And I copied the images with a pencil and carbon paper, then painted them on paper or small plywood panels. And that's exactly what I do today, copying images that I find and glean today into the internet. Or before that, before 1995, I used to go to museums, like the Metropolitan Museum, for example, where I would take photos and copy these images to incorporate them into my art works, using silkscreen printing.

- HL: Okay, but how old were you when you started drawing?

- JPS: Ah, very early, like five or Six year old? Yes, maybe.

- HL: And in your family? Were there also any other artists?

- JPS: No, not really, but I had an Italian uncle, Corrado, who did a bit of painting and was very well educated.

- HL: So, really, why and how did this desire, this passion to become a painter come about? Here, we need to look far back and deep into your mind and personal memory?

- JPS: No, I think that ultimately we paint and create to escape suffering and death and to attain pleasure and freedom from suffering.

- HL: Ah yes, I see, so it was really an escape?

- JPS: The creation, yes, of course. We escape our reality. Imagine, for example, creating a monumental Plexiglas wall like this one, behind me, here in Besançon! Where it's very cold and people aren't so very friendly... But I can still manage to talk about Life. Yes, you have to go looking for that energy! Because it's not very rewarding for artists to live here in France. No, but that's the true reality.

- HL: That's right, yes, exactly. So you're very young and you start with drawings. And then what? Did you go to a school? How did it happen? Because very often our parents want us to be lawyers, doctors, or dentists...

- JPS: No, my parents were very generous, respectful and understanding in that regard. I wanted to compromise, so I first went to the Strasbourg School of Architecture (1979), but between you and me, there were far too many uncountable constraints in architecture for me to find my own freedom. That's why I left. I spent six months in Strasbourg at this school, then I came to the School of Fine Arts in Besançon (1979-1981).

- HL: Okay. And then there are always this word of FREEDOM, which you are still searching for?
- JPS: Yes, but of course, of course I do! Because it's important to be free, to be free and enjoy life. Because nowadays, everything forces us to be and become completely and utterly sheep. So I do what I want. But of course, there's a price to pay, obviously.
- HL: Yes, that's right, well, I know exactly what you're talking about, because I'm also a little bit in that same situation myself. So there is a price to pay. That means there have been some very complicated, very difficult moments, because when you're immersed in the world of art, it's not easy, isn't that so?
- JPS: No, it's not really easy, but it also depends on the country you live in! But in France, it's even less easy. Anyway, we're not persecuted, but today, less than 1%, I'm quoting figures off the top of my head, of professional artists that can make a living from selling their own work in France, of those who are registered with the "Maison des Artistes". In Germany, it's 5%, which is five times more. In other words, all the structures have been destroyed in France and people are no longer interested in art at all. But I think it's a global worldwide phenomenon. We have entered in what I often name a "post-cultural" society worldwide. Where culture no longer feeds its people. Somewhere along the line, we have become completely disinterested in what Art could brings us, in what it offers us, such as extreme freedom and infinite openness to the world and all its cultures.
- HL: And so, in your analysis, what is Jean-Pierre

Sergent doing to restore balance and find a way out, because it's very difficult?

- JPS: Actually, you know, we can't fight against a big system that dominates us, because we lose all the time, systematically. I understood that in New York, during the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. Out of solidarity, I wanted to work exclusively with eroticism to show that it was completely stupid and insane to prosecute an American President just because he had gotten a blowjob from an intern... It didn't make sense because sexuality and eroticism always disrupt all the structures of societies, somehow, that's the real reason why I worked on eroticism, not just out of contradiction, conflict, or defiance, but because I thought it was more appropriate. As for example, in Buddhism, or rather in Eastern philosophy, they say that you have to reuse your enemy's arrows to kill him in return. And today, the enemy's arrows are pornographic images. We are destroying the world with this logic: exploitation-slavery-profit. I'm not saying that we are deliberately destroying the world with pornography, but still, 50% of the images viewed on the Internet are pornographic one... So I collect and glean back these arrows from the enemy, these images, and I transform them, transmute them, and magnify them. And I create something enjoyable out of nothing, something that regenerates our world, which is collapsing quickly and rapidly somehow.

- HL: Okay, so from your point of view, pornography isn't bad, is it? Because you transform pornography into Art? Into something acceptable, in fact?

- JPS: In fact, there's nothing bad about it. Somewhere,

in Life, there's absolutely nothing dirty, nothing to throw away. People are saying that sex is taboo, but it's not at all. We can see how other cultures of the past or from other continents were able to reintegrate sexuality into art and into their daily lives as well. For example, in Madagascar, there are statues of couples copulating with their genitals exposed (vulvas and penises) on their tombs. We would never put that on a tomb in France, it would be completely obscene.

- HL: Okay.

- JPS: So I am talking a little about this relationship with different civilizations, differences, different ways of thinking.

- HL: Isn't all this a bit hypocritical, since behind sexuality, and with the sex industry and all that business has become something incredibly crazy!

- JPS: Yes, it's totally crazy, it's some business of course. Yes, and it's the most profitable business along with weapons. Oh yes, it's incredible!

- HL: And that's a constant struggle and a challenge for you, to be able to show all those sides simultaneously ? But also, in a way, your paintings aren't just about that, are they?

- JPS: Yes, maybe 50% of it is about that, sex, but it's also about eroticism, that is to say, it's about energy. It's like in Tantrism, where monks practice asceticism and eat pieces of human cadavers in order to sublimate Life. It's a bit like that. I sublimate Life and I also sublimate Art in a way.

- HL: Yes, okay, and can you tell us a little bit about your stay in New York? How old were you when you got

there? How did you do it? Did you know anyone there?

- JPS: No, not at all.

- HL: Really?

- JPS: No, but I left... actually, before I got to New York, I went to Montreal. I was 33 at the time, the fateful age of Christ, so I left for Montreal with two backpacks, just like that. Yes, I knew only my brother who lived in Ottawa, and that was it. And I made friends there. I discovered an interesting cultural scene. There were artists who were making a living from their work at the time. For example, I had a friend who made almost \$30,000 Canadians a year. For me, it was fabulous, because there were real collectors who bought art there! Yes, and that's something that doesn't exist at all in France. For example, my friend André Girouard, who has since passed away, often came to my studio and said to me: "Jean Pierre, what paintings have you done lately?" So I would show him this painting, and that one, and that one: "Here, it is superb, and if I buy three, will you give me a friend's price?" I would say: "But yes, of course, yes!" But here, that doesn't exist. People aren't interested in buying art at all, and there are no real collectors.

- HL: And so you arrive in Montreal. It's interesting because it's a time when young people were traveling a lot with backpacks and setting off on adventures. It was really incredible.

- JPS: Yes, that's totally true. Yes, I left like that, without health insurance, without anything...

- HL: Once again, there's this desire for freedom, for exploration. I think that's a message we could convey to



young people, to go out and explore the world. Today, it's much easier. Back then, it wasn't so obvious, was it?

- JPS: Well, I really don't want to lecture anyone, I just followed my path and my journey, in a way.

- HL: Yes, but it's interesting, as you say, there's a price to pay, but it's still a great adventure to be an artist.

- JPS: Oh, yes, absolutely.

- HL: And when you leave us, because unfortunately, I too will die some day. Won't you regret everything you've done?

- JPS: When I die?

- HL: Yes, when we leave this world...

- JPS: Oh no, I won't regret absolutely nothing. I've had a full life and lots of interesting things, I should say!

- HL: And it's true that people often say that what we'll regret when we die isn't that we didn't buy this or that car, it's perhaps that we didn't do this or that, that we weren't in close enough contact with our family, etc.

- JPS: Yes, that's totally true, that's true, I try and hope to have that little spark of intelligence to take care of others and of my family. But often we are confronted with the immense stupidity of humanity, which, to quote Einstein, who said once: "There are two things that are infinite: human stupidity and the Universe; and as for the Universe, I have absolutely no guarantees." And very recently, I met someone who was incredibly stupid, and there's nothing you can do about that kind of stupidity; nothing gets through... Nothing, neither kindness, nor attention to others, nothing gets through, stupidity, in fact, blocks everything. We are, in fact, faced with a wall of stupidity, and it's totally hopeless.

- HL: Yes, and someone also stated once that if stupidity could fly, it would be dark all the time! In fact!

- JPS: That's right, yes, but anyway, it doesn't really matter anyhow.

- HL: But when you arrived in New York, were you staying with someone at some place? How did it go? Please, tell us more a little bit about it.

- JPS: No, at the time I was friends with a Montreal artist named Daniel Villeneuve, who was selling a little bit of his paintings. He told me at the time, "Jean-Pierre, we can't stay in Montreal, we'll get bored and die here. And in New York is where the serious stuff happens for the artists!" So he rented a large loft in Soho, in Chinatown, where he had the whole floor. And I rented a small room from him for a month. And it just so happened that during that time, I also met a friend named Anne-Marie Dannenberg, who had a small gallery in Soho and who gave me some good advice: "Jean-Pierre, with the work you are doing, you should really go to meet Leo Castelli. I know he takes on young artists and he'll like your work." I said to her: "Wait a minute, to go see Leo Castelli? He's the biggest art dealer in the world! The one who showed and made famous Andy Warhol, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, etc., etc." But I plucked up my courage and called the gallery, saying, "Hello, this is Mr. Sergent, a French artist, and I'd like to speak to Mr. Leo Castelli, please." So Leo Castelli answered, "- Yes, hello? - Listen, my name is Jean-Pierre Sergent, I'm a French painter, and I'd like to come see you to show you my art work. - Ah, yes, very well, come to the gallery on Wednesday at 4:30 p.m.!"

- HL: Ah, yes, that's a big difference between the United States and France!

- JPS: Yes, that's right, it's a big difference, because often in the United States, you can call some important people without any fuss and they'll meet with you, absolutely!

- HL: Ah, that's not the case here at all. They ask you: "But who are you?"

- JPS: As a little anecdote, I once called the director of the Art Center in Colmar, I think it was the André Malraux Center. Anyway, an Art Center. So I called the secretary and said:

"Hello, this is Mr. Sergent. I currently have a solo exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Mulhouse (a Museum solo exhibition is quite impressive!) and I would like to speak to the director, Ms. Thiellement.

"Yes, well, listen, she doesn't really take calls from artists, so just send her an email."

Yeah! so of course, I sent her a email, to which she never replied. It's unbelievable to treat people like that in France and with so little respect for artists!

- HL: And so you spent ten years there? So I imagine that when you arrived here, you saw the gap? The difference, that is!

- JPS: Yes, it's unbelievable. It's surprisingly unbelievable!

- HL: And how did you manage to readjust? So you settled here, in Besançon, at the Gare d'Eau. How did you manage to survive?

- JPS: I had a really hard time. Deep down, I'm still a New Yorker somehow, yes! I miss so many things

here... But I must admit, to be honest, there are also many beautiful things here in France, and the nature is superb! There's also my family, and there's a different but strong culture that is also very influential. But the weight of this traditional culture is too strong for me, too strong to accept a work like mine. Because it's an art that somewhat disrupts the established codes. It's not that my work is really innovative, but it talks about many things such as spirituality, Hinduism, and all the indigenous cultures that are disappearing before our eyes along with their associated rituals. But here, people don't give a damn about it.

- HL: So, tell us a little about the material you work with: Plexiglas. Why did you choose it? And then, how can someone who is not yet familiar with your work understand it? Because in your monumental work, as you say, there are, let's not say analyses to be made, questions to be asked, or perhaps a message to be deciphered? Of hope, love, sensuality. Firstly, let's start with this: why did you choose this material, the Plexiglas?

- JPS: The Plexiglas, well, actually, in Montreal, I lived right next to a store that printed T-shirts, and I started by asking them to make me some silkscreen frames to print out my images. Now, today, I am working with a square format, but before that it was rectangular. The dimensions were: 35 cm by 17.5 cm. I used this format to print firstly on paper, and then I started printing on small scraps of Plexiglas rectangles because I wanted to find a neutral material that would last and be non-acidic. At the time, in France, I was working on what is

called Masonite. And that doesn't last over time and degrades very quickly.

- HL: Okay. So what is true the message you are trying to convey in your work?

- JPS: No, but there isn't really a message, it's a bit complicated. Last week, I had a visit from the new Director of the Besançon Museum of Fine Arts, who came to the studio and we talked at length about my art. But it's really difficult to approach any work of art, whatever it is. You would really have to be me, have lived everything I've lived, to truly understand what the real message is (if there is any?). Sometimes people can sense it, because they can experience an emotion or a revelation of some kind when they see my work. For example, I went to Egypt and had a revelation in a temple, and in Mexico too, I had similar revelations. In order to get into my work, it's certainly a bit like an intuition or, a revelation. It's nothing aesthetical or sentimental, where you feel love or joy or something else, not at all... Because you have to be able to feel the energies, yes, you have to feel the vital and all-encompassing energies, and you also have to have experienced those same energies yourself. It would be a bit like a woman discovering another woman in the throes of orgasm when she herself has never had an orgasm. So it doesn't work, she doesn't understand the depth of self-forgetfulness and the annihilation of the ego in orgasm. I'm using a very trivial example here, of course, but that's how it is. And I can, of course, give some clues. But my work is still complicated and complex to define.

- HL: But still, there are people who follow you and even admire your work with great respect! And those people manage to understand it?

- JPS: Oh yes, of course, because first of all, they have an immense intellectual culture, but that's not enough either.

- HL: Oh, really?

- JPS: No, no, no. Because you can read all the books you want and all that... and despite that, you won't get into my painting at all. It's quite paradoxical and it's quite inexplicable. People who get into my work, they simply get into the energy of the work, into the universal pictorial magma.

- HL: Okay, and how does that happen? Because you must have some real-life examples.

- JPS: Yes, well, like my dear friend Marie-Madeleine Varet, a philosopher, whom we interviewed together in October 2016. She really enters into and merges with my art works, because she is very well-educated and researcher at the CNRS (Paris, France). She and her husband were friends with Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss. She has also traveled extensively in India, New York, and Mexico. So it's a whole life journey, a life pattern, if you will, that allows, or not, an access to my work... But there may also be people who have never traveled and have no artistic education who will just walk into my studio and fully feel the energies that emanates from my paintings... There are absolutely no rules anyhow, that's what I want to say.

- HL: And how do you see the future, Jean-Pierre? Because today, we're very often on social media.

Information travels very, very fast. Culture isn't something we're going to invest a lot in. So how do you see your future?

- JPS: Yes, well, I think the future for artists is very, very worrying and bleak, I really do.

- HL: All artists in general?

- JPS: It's a mess, or a big mess in general. That's it. For musicians, poets, writers, for everyone. But here, I'm talking about the visual arts, what we call "*arts plastiques*" in France, a term that I find really arguable, which identifies: painters and sculptors etc. That is to say, the art market got completely out of control. There was a very nice article in the Gazette des Arts: "L'Art Valeur Refuge" in 2022, some time ago, which explained very well that only ten years ago, a young artist... Well, I still consider myself as a young artist, since I never entered the market. For example, you used to sell for around €15,000 (first sale in an Auction House), 15000 Euros and now the starting price at auction for a work by a young artist is between: \$300,000 to \$500,000. So we're nowadays beyond all limits and it's completely arbitrary, disgusting, and obscene! Nobody really understand what's really going on there. We no longer have any control over this crazy market and certainly not the artists. Unless we find a big, big collector, we can't survive from our art anymore.

- HL: And then there's also, because I see it a little bit in other countries, works of art where I don't know what, for example, where they put a banana with a scotch tape on it into a museum or an Art Fair? And you ask yourself, well, is that Art or not? Isn't it something that will

denigrate true Art? Whose main purpose is to raise human awareness and consciousness?

- JPS: No, but art is, *de facto*, a collection of all kinds of diverse and provocative things, good or bad. A banana, The Banana (Comedian, 2029, sold for \$6.2 million), is obviously meant to provoke and shock people! It's like his gold toilet, "America," 2019, at the Guggenheim Museum by the same artist: Maurizio Cattelan...

HL: And yet they are sold for astronomical amount of money!

- JPS: Yes, exactly but that's because those artists already has a reputation, there is a market value for his works and he uses it wisely and, at the same time, he doesn't give a damn about the collectors who buy it! So, it's really good for him if he makes a lot of money from it.

- HL: Yes, because Jean-Pierre certainly couldn't put a banana on a wall and sell it!

- JPS: Of course not, because I don't have an audience neither buyers to play with on that, on speculation. As I don't have any buyers. I'm on social media, of course, and I have maybe around 30,000 contacts on LinkedIn, but it's useless, it's actually almost useless. Ah, yes, I made this great contact with a nice gallery owner in Scotland, Chrissy Moore, but that's it. People don't come to the studio...

- HL: So then Artist's life is difficult, so do you work mainly on commission? or do you continue to produce what you want to create?

- JPS: No, not at all. I almost never worked on commission. But then, sometimes I make works specifically for Museums. Well, I rarely create works



specifically, but I organize and choose them from among my many paintings, as I did for my large wall installations in Museums. I chose works I had already done, from my stock of paintings, but I almost never work on commission.

- HL: So, can we come and visit your studio?

- JPS: Oh, yes, of course, but by appointment only.

- HL: And we can come and talk with you, which is kind of the aim of the radio program I'm doing. Which is really to make you known, beyond just being a painter... So, one can give you a call and take an appointment. Jean-Pierre, I imagine you have people you'd like to thank in this video, people who have loved and who have helped you throughout your life as an artist? Do you have any mentors or artists who have deeply inspired you?

- JPS: Yes, there are of course artists, mainly American, with whom I have affinities; yes, like Jackson Pollock or Marc Rothko, the painter. I really like all American abstraction because I find, for example in the works of Barnett Newman and in all their works, a great spiritual dimension, contrary to what some may think, that it is just decoration. In other words, I find that there is a true mystical dimension to their work. What interests me most in art is, as Kandinsky said, "the spiritual in Art." And then, how do you define the spiritual? That's another topic. But I find that there is a kind of "SOUL" in their works, a bit like in Giotto's work or in prehistoric caves, where you can also feel that there is a strong soul, a presence, it is inhabited! So all I'm interested in, are all those artists who are mystically inspired... We could mention here Caravaggio, El Greco, Soutine, or

who else? Antonin Artaud, for example.

- HL: And then, in terms of friendship or your family?

- JPS: Yes, of course, I have to thank my whole family, who helped me a lot and allowed me to be and become an artist (as we never become an artist alone), thanks in particular to my grandfather Maurice Gander, who was my greatest and only patron and who always helped and sponsored me to do this job, because of course, most of the time, you can't make a living from it. My grandfather and my father were very kind, and it's all that kindness and attention from my family that I miss enormously, because now I only have my mother and my sister, but I also have a brother in Ottawa... But that's disappearing and PFFF... That's it, you find yourself all alone. It's very sad because it's really hard to make new friends here in France. Unlike in New York, where I had so many artist friends, because there was a kind of generous intellectual collaboration. We felt that we were part of a great, common, and superior collective intelligence. Opposite of France, where collective intelligence no longer works because it has completely disappeared. It's a palpable fact!

- HL: It's every man for himself!

- JPS: That's right, every man for himself. But how sad! It's very selfish, much more selfish than in the United States at that time and place. And I really miss belonging to a generous artistic community.

- HL: Yes, well, Jean-Pierre, we've come to the end of this interview. I really thank you from the bottom of my heart because I imagine it's not easy to talk about things that we're not used to talking about. Anyhow, we haven't

touched on anything overly sensitive issues.

- JPS: No, no, of course not.

- HL: So thank you. And all that's left for me to say is good luck. Even if it's complicated, it's difficult. But I think you've gotten used to bouncing back.

- JPS: Yes, that's true, that's true. But you know, when I came back from New York, I put all my artistic supplies (paintings etc...) into a big 20-foot container and then, it took me a year to find this beautiful space and another year to renovate it. So every time, it takes time to bounce back... And, yes, like in New York, I also had three successive studios in three different neighborhoods. That's the life of an artist, which isn't just about painting pictures, so to speak, but also about the whole materiality of the studio.

- HL: Yes, dealing with the constraints of everyday life...

- JPS: That's right, yes, of course, heating, being able to buy new equipment: paint, paper etc.

- HL: Hence the importance of "rising from our ashes"...

- JPS: Yes, of course. I don't really know if we'll rise again from our ashes, but in any case, we have to accept and honor this immense artistic wild and untameable Life Force, pay it tribute and then also, live into the fullest and complete joy too!

- HL: Could that be the difference between you and a lot of people? It's that you have and live a passion. You know why you get up in the morning, even if it's not easy, but you still get up motivated!

- JPS: Yes, absolutely, every day, every single day, it's like they say so accurately in English: "It's a blessing and a curse." to be an artist! In other words and

translated, being an artist is both, at the same time, a blessing and a curse, because it's such a harsh life. But in a way, you never get bored. Yes, you never get bored and you can touch the deeply sacred things. We have our fingers deep into Life, sexuality, and Death too... We are always present to the World!

- HL: Thank you very much, Jean-Pierre.

- JPS: Thank you, dear Hector. It was a real moment of shared pleasure, and good luck to you all.

- HL: Thank you very much. That's it. That's great!