

**TRANSCRIPTION OF THE LECTURE BY ARTIST JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT: "THE SHAKTI<sup>1</sup> & THE METACOSMIC VOID<sup>2</sup>" AT THE MULHOUSE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS | MARCH 13, 2026**

**- PART 1/4 | "INTO THE VOID" - [Watch the video](#)**

**- Ms. Isabelle Dubois-Brinkmann, Museum Director:** Good evening, everyone. We are very pleased to welcome you this evening to the lecture by Jean-Pierre Sergent, an artist whose work "*Mayan Diary #100*" is featured in the exhibition "*25 Years of Acquisitions*" on the second floor, in the stairwell. In fact, this is the very first work you will see upon entering the exhibition. So, I'll give a brief introduction to the artist, and then Jean-Pierre Sergent will have the opportunity to discuss his work in greater detail. He was born in Morteau, studied architecture in Strasbourg and painting at the Fine-Arts School in Besançon (1979–1981), and has since pursued an international career. In 1991, he moved to Montreal, and in 1993 to New York, and then, he chose to return to France, settling in Besançon in 2005, where he established his studio. He is an artist who experiments extensively with a wide variety of media for painting and screen printing, as well as with unconventional materials such as masonite and Plexiglas... He also works with found objects from New York... So, this is an art of experimentation. He will certainly discuss it during this lecture as well as of his "Mayan Diary" series, created in New York between 2001 and 2003, consists of a series of square-format images, one of which is featured in the exhibition. This body of work has been exhibited in several New York galleries and cultural centers. And in 2011, the artist was the subject of a monographic solo exhibition here at the Fine-Arts Museum in Mulhouse, and between 2019 and 2023, he presented his monumental series of silkscreen prints on Plexiglas at the Fine-Arts Museum in Besançon, titled "The Four Pillars of the Sky". Today, his work is widely exhibited in Europe, as well as in Canada, the United States, and since 2016, in China and Iran... Jean-Pierre, I'll hand it over to you and thank you very much.

**- Jean-Pierre Sergent:** Thank you very much, Madam, and to the entire Museum team. I'm very happy to be here again tonight with you. And I'm going to present something related to my hindou influences, because I'm deeply fascinated, in my work, by Hindu cultures. So I'll go to the computer and talk to you about these topics.... So, my presentation is titled : "*The Shakti And The Metacosmic Void*". SHAKTI: this is an Indian

term meaning power, might, strength. In Tantrism<sup>3</sup>, this word refers to feminine energy, the active principle of the force that animates both the Universe and all the living beings that inhabit it. And the METACOSMIC VOID is a concept I drew from a book: "*Ritual Art of India*" by Ajit Mookerjee, who is a leading expert on Tantrism. In one of his books, there was a painting depicting this "*Metacosmic Void*" and it was something that truly captivated and interrogated me, because it revealed something (an idea and a concept) that I had never encountered anywhere before and that I didn't know. So I'll talk a little about that new concept! Now, it's PART ONE, which I wanted to present, is titled: "IN THE VOID" And I actually wanted to start with a quote from Leo Tolstoy, because I read a lot of Russian novels and I find that it speaks well to the relationship between a Work of Art and its relation to the audience, and how a work of art can fundamentally change our lives!

*"A true work of art destroys, in the viewer's consciousness, the separation between the viewer and the artist. Art elevates man from his personal life to universal life."* LEO TOLSTOY

It is true that, sometimes, in art, we find ourselves entering fascinating worlds... That did not belong to us and that we did not know before. And these become new spaces for discovery.

### **- SUBSECTION 1: FIRST OF ALL, SOME FEW WESTERN ARTISTS & THE VOID: REMBRANDT, BARNETT NEWMAN, MORRIS LOUIS, JACKSON POLLOCK & YVES KLEIN**

So here I am talking about the concept of the Void in Western Art. I have always loved this small painting by Rembrandt in the Louvre, *\*Philosopher in Meditation\** (1606–1669), and every time I went to see that painting, I sensed a wholly metaphysical dimension, but also a profound sense of finitude and infinity. In other words, it is Man who is rooted, at once, simultaneously in the present and in his future. And the old man's near future is, of course, to be dying soon. And it is this presence in the world, and into the void, that I would like to discuss into emptiness and a metaphysical dimension. Of course, Rembrandt is fabulous because there is—not systematically, of course, but, as in many of his works, there is an incredible presence! And here is an American painter I adore named Barnett Newman; it's a work titled "*Shining Forth (to George)*" from 1961, which is at Beaubourg. And ever since my youth, when I was still living in France, I would sometimes go

to Beaubourg and I've always been fascinated by this large canvas. Because, in fact, for me, it represents something that one could be summarized like this: God in the center, and Man and Woman to the left and right. The Positive and the Negative (yin and yang). It's also a synthesis of energy. And besides, it's a large-scale work! And I finally understood large-scale works only after arriving in the United States and North America! Because, for example, in Montreal, you get the impression that the sky is physically immense! Space is much larger than what we can experience here in Europe. And here is a painting titled "*Beta Theta*" (1961) by another American artist. You'll understand that I've been greatly influenced by American artists... This painter's name is Morris Louis, and he also worked in this manner, with empty space and streams of color filling the canvas. You can sense a kind of existential anxiety in it as well. Where does it come from? Is the space closing in? Or is it opening up? That's a truly existential and real question? And he worked with primary colors using Magna, which was a mixture of acrylic and oil paint. This was painted in the 1950s and truly represents all my pictorial influences, as American painters have greatly influenced me, thanks to their indomitable will to create freely, of course. And here is a painting, *\*The Deep\**, 1953, by Jackson Pollock, which is also on display at Beaubourg. I've always been fascinated by this painting because, in a way, it's both the Void and the Whole... It is the void that fills the fullness. It's a bit like the moment of death, of dissolution, of orgasm... it's a bit of a cosmic moment that is at once sexual, since one can perceive the white as sperm gushing forth and ejaculating, completely covering a woman's vulva. A black cosmic abyss. Well, that's my interpretation! And finally, to wrap things up, with Western artists: Yves Klein, *\*Le saut dans le vide\** from 1960. And Yves Klein had traveled extensively in Japan, I believe, and he was also interested in Buddhism and practiced martial arts as well. So the concept of emptiness was something that was deeply ingrained in him. And it's a magnificent photograph. There were five or six artists holding a blanket to catch him at the end of his jump! Because, of course, no one can fly, except birds. There you go!

**- SUBSECTION 2: SHAKTI, TANTRISM & SEXUAL RADIANCE  
[SMALL HINDU GOUACHES & SHORT EXCERPTS FROM THE  
"UPANISHADS"]**

The *Upanishads* book is a massive tome of about 1,600 pages, I

believe, and I read it cover to cover; it took me two years to read it, and it's full of interesting insights... So I'll start now abruptly with a quote from famous filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard:

*"We must show the reality of all things..."* Jean-Luc Godard, *The Image Book*, 2018

And in my work, that's also somewhat what I'm showing, because I take pre-existing images and rework them; they might be pornographic or obscene images, or religious images, and so on. And that reveals a reality, things that are sometimes unsettling. And so my goal and my statement as an artist is:

To move beyond every erotic aesthetics and enter into Life and its own vital energies. To move beyond this concept, to shed, in a way, the reductive idea of eroticization and enter into the very structure of the living, spiritualized, with its orgiastic designs and the patterns of archaic or religious structures...

You'll get a sense of what we'll be discussing shortly... And last weekend, I thought a bit about this lecture and told myself that I absolutely had to quote, by way of introduction, this beautiful poem by Leconte de Lisle. I don't know if you're familiar with it? And it's so relevant and just given what we're all going through nowadays, because it saying so many important and true things. So here is this poem:

**TO SET UP THE TONE! "BARBARIC POEMS," LECONTE DE LISLE [1889]**

*"You live cowardly, without dreams, without purpose,*

*Older, more decrepit than the barren earth,*

*Castrated from the cradle by the murderous century*

*Of all vigorous and profound passion.*

*Your brains are as empty as your hearts,*

*And you have defiled this wretched World*

*With blood so corrupt, with breath so foul,*

*That death sprouts alone in this filthy mire.*

*Men, slayers of Gods, (IT IS SO TRUE!) the time is not far off*

*When, sprawled on a great heap of gold in some corner,*

*Having gnawed the nourishing soil down to the rocks,*

*Knowing nothing to do with days or nights,*

*Drowned in the nothingness of supreme boredom,*

*You will die foolishly, filling your pockets.”*

I came across this famous little poem on Twitter. It made a deep impression on me and touched me deeply, because it speaks to a fundamental truth, one that is instilled in us, and imposed upon us, by our contemporary societies... A sense of disgust and weariness with life somehow! And so here is an image from India. It's a small Hindu painting. It depicts the *nâyikâ*, the embodiment of love for all creatures; it's a miniature from a 1781 album from Rajasthan. I'm not sure if you can see it clearly? Because it's full of details. These are actually orgiastic scenes depicting animals copulating with women. It sort of depicts bestiality or universal carnal love! And so I'm talking here about:

#### **KÂLÎ<sup>4</sup> THE BLACK ONE & THE SHAKTI: “TANTRISM, MYTHS, RITES, METAPHYSICS,” BY JEAN VARENNE**

*“Kâlî comes here to spend the night drinking and dancing with her favorite companions—vampires, revenants, ghosts, and gnomes of every kind—who engage in the most diverse sexual games among themselves, including all forms of bestiality and necrophilia.*

*Despite appearances, there is nothing demonic about this depiction; the devotees of Kâlî, who pray daily before the image of a black goddess, dripping with blood, drunk and dancing on the body of a woman embracing a corpse, actually venerate the one who allows one to “cross over death,” to go beyond the tragedy of life's interruption and its dreadful setting to reach the blissful abode from which there is no return.*

*“Kâlî's dance (which echoes Shiva's cosmic dance) is a dance of joy; it is the ultimate symbol of victory over Evil, which is Death.”*

And in fact, my work is also, in a way, a kind of dance of joy against

death! Do you see this little Hindu miniature? Here, we see *Kali* decapitating herself and copulating with *Shiva*<sup>5</sup>. And so there are animals, blood spurting everywhere, birds... It is a whole, a metaphysical totality. It's something that speaks to me deeply! Here again, we see her, *Kali*, decapitating herself. She is always with skulls corpse and bones. And here, once again, is a small painting from Kathmandu, in Nepal. So the gods are all-powerful and they are creators of Life and harmony "through" and thanks to overflowing, unstoppable sexuality! Here is this magnificent little detail! So I will now quote a few short excerpts from the *Upanishads*:

## **EXCERPTS FROM THE "108 UPANISHADS"<sup>6</sup> (800–500 B.C.), BY MARTINE BUTTEX**

### **"ANNAPURNA**

In the world, whatever object one considers, it is merely a vibratory process of consciousness, and not a permanent entity.

### **TRIPAVIBHUTI MAHANARAYANA**

Greetings to the deities! It is desire that has performed the act. Desire committed the act. It is desire that is the author of the act, not me. It is desire that acts, not me.

There is thus a shift away from human responsibility regarding desire and sexuality as a whole!

*It is desire that compels the actor to act, not me. O desire, fascinating in the multiplicity of your forms, accept this offering I present to you. Hail!*  
*P. 805*

### **KUNDALINI YOGA**

*Then she pierces a passage through the knot of Rudra, and then through the six lotuses. Then Shakti enjoys union with Shiva in the thousand-petaled lotus. This state must be recognized as the highest there is and the only one that grants final bliss. P. 1101*

## TATTVA YOGA

*Like the fragrance in the flower, like the butter in the milk, like the oil in the sesame seed, like the gold in the nugget, there is a lotus in the cavity of the heart. It turns downward, while its stem rises. Its essence (bindu<sup>5</sup>) flows downward, and at its center lies the mind. P. 1124*

## MUNDAKA

*From joy springs all creation; by joy it is sustained; toward joy it proceeds; and to joy it returns.”*

I think this idea of creating in total joy is truly very important because here, in France, we work only in suffering and pain. So, here you see some of my first silkscreen prints using Hindu images that I printed in New York in 1997. So it's acrylic paint screen-printed on Japanese rice paper. It depicts a male penis intertwined with a female vulva; it is also entangled with a ritual adornment of the tantric shamanic goddess *Rus-pa'i-rgyan*, made from the bones of human corpses. And here is a diagram illustrating the *kalpas* (units of time in Hindu cosmology, cycles of 4.32 billion years; this represents the duration of one day in the life of the god *Brahma*). These are the cycles of time in Hinduism. These are my current new works: "*Karma Kali, Sexual Dreams & Paradoxes*" from 2024. They are very erotic works, sometimes featuring a few obscene words. Here, there are also pornographic images that I've sourced and reworked, which are screen-printed and superimposed, for example, with images of Egyptian stars.

## - PART 2/4 | "THE METACOSMIC VOID" - [Watch the video](#)

Here, we can see the *Metacosmic Void*. It's a concept that's pretty hard to grasp, but here's this little Hindu gouache painting that describes, defines, and depicts it and which has had a big influence on me. And when I saw that, I said, "Well? What on earth is that?" Because, well, there's just the "border", there's no subject matter, there's nothing. It's truly the Void, and it challenges the mind in a way. And this is also a Hindu *yantra*. It is the *Nava-Yoni Chakra*, floating and emerging from the cosmic waters and symbolizing the creation of the Universe through the union of the masculine and feminine principles, represented by the triangles, interpenetrating, pointing upward and downward. The nine

inscribed triangles indicate the nine *Nava Cosmic Yoni Wombs*. Among Hindus, there is often a strong connection to sexuality, because they thus, wisely, give meaning to the Universe and all creations! By sexualizing everything to the extreme—and this is an idea I particularly appreciate and also use in my work! And this is a silkscreen print I made based on this *yantra*. So here we see this *Metacosmic Void* and the *Primordial Ocean*, created in 2011. And this work is based on the same principle of the Void. But these are Egyptian lotuses, which I used as friezes, conceptually bordering the Void! This is another *Yantra* as well.

So here is the *Bindou*<sup>7</sup> Point, which I mentioned earlier. It is a sacred point of origin and return. It's a bit like our cosmic Big Bang, with concentric circles symbolizing the eternal cycles of cosmic evolution and involution... Well, one might think this is a conceptual and abstract painting, but not at all: it is a Presence! As Jodorowsky said: when you throw a stone into a pond, consciousness expands little by little, extending to infinity.

## **"MU, THE MASTER AND THE MAGICIANS", BY ALEXANDRO JODOROWSKY**

*"The attainment of fluidity is like a stone falling into the middle of a lake (the mirror of the Self). From this impact, a circular wave emerges, giving rise to a larger one, the circles continuing to multiply until they cover the entire surface of the water. The expansion of consciousness is like this, but with one difference: the mental lake is infinite..."*

It is essentially this concept that I wish to develop in my work! We are now in my new "*Karma-Kali*" series, in which I have also used this *Metacosmic Void*, as in this piece. These are solid colors, spaces that fill, that cancel out, and that annihilate and confront the erotic, obscene image in some way. It is a head-on confrontation between the Void and the Full. And here, these are what are named "patterns" in English. I've collected drawings from indigenous cultures, native peoples, and even medieval manuscripts! Because, of course, people in the Middle Ages had a spirituality, as well as spiritual awakening, teachings, and hopes that we have completely lost today. And when we look, for example, at the drawings of Hildegard von Bingen or other such spirituality awakened people, something very powerful happens: there is a presence! Here is yet another *Metacosmic Void*, with a blue!

## - SUBSECTION 4: THE PHALLUS (*lingam*), THE WOMAN'S BODY, THE VULVA (*yoni*), SEXUALITY & THE SENSUALITY OF HINDU EROTICISM

I'm going to present you some erotic images of Hindu sculptures as well as a painting. And to introduce this topic, I'll quote a text by Alain Daniélou:

### **"THE DIVINIZED EROTICISM", BY ALAIN DANIELLOU**

*"O, the luxury of my semen in the night of your thighs! Up there, the counterpart seed of the Milky Way." G. Lely*

*"The purpose of the temple (as of the work of art) is to bring man closer to the divine, to create a passage, a link between the two. This purpose finds its expression in the representation of this act of union through which the lost individual being rediscovers his fullness, his wholeness, by uniting with that half of himself from which he felt separated.*

*Everywhere, at the main points of the temple and even at the entrance to the sanctuary, we find the act of love represented, not as an act of reproduction (This is important!) but as an act of sensual pleasure, of complete self-realization in the joy of this reunion.*

*This is not merely a symbolic representation. Man is truly whole, truly himself, truly close to the divine only in the moment of sexual pleasure."*

Well, that's a very interesting concept, one that can also be found in Marquis de Sade, though perhaps in the absence of a certain spirituality in his writings? Here are a few photos of Hindu sculptures. This is a photo I took at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, which I used to visit practically every Sunday when I lived there! And I found this image also that is truly magnificent. We often talk about erotic art in Greece, but I believe the Hindus go far beyond that, because here, in these works, there is a sensuality, an unashamed sexuality, that is evident, striking, and communicative. And so Hindus people still perform rituals today on the banks of the Ganges honouring the *lingam* and the *yoni*. So *lingam*, the masculine symbol, and *yoni*, the feminine. *"Absolute stillness is the ultimate movement in the nature of Shiva."* It is this confrontation and simultaneity between two utterly contradictory things (stillness and movement) that we in the West could neither imagine nor conceive: that stillness is the ultimate movement! Except that we can very well sense this in quantum mechanics, which I will discuss shortly...

That's perfect, as the opposites can merge together. These are erotic

scenes from the temples at Khajuraho. Unfortunately, I've never been to India; I've been to Mexico, Guatemala, and Egypt. And in these sculptures, in these very ancient civilizations, there was apparently no shame displayed regarding sexuality and its depictions, nor regarding death, for that matter. Because these are tangible realities that we could and must talk about. We don't necessarily talk about this everywhere, and besides, as I said before, the Temples are adorned with erotic images on the outside, but on the inside, they are empty, ironically, filled only with the presence of God, an absolute presence, just like that! And this image of group copulation is very beautiful and very sensual! So here is another sculpture near this Temple.

### **“A BARBARIAN IN ASIA”, BY HENRI MICHAUX**

*“There are even Hindus who masturbate while thinking of God. They say it would be even worse to make love to a woman (in the European way) who individualizes you too much and doesn't know how to move from the idea of love to that of the Whole.”*

So, here is my work, where you can also see the *lingam* and the *yoni*. And then you can clearly see what it is! That's also very erotic, with stars. That one too, with a lingam. My assistant Christine told me it was a Phallus-Sex Totem. Yes, you can see it as a totem! And those are the animals, the Deer! Because among the Navarro people, or among Native Americans, they often depict animals with energy lines, so in these cases, the energy lines emanate from the animal!

### **- SUBSECTION 5: THE ESSENCE OF THINGS, LEVEL DISCONTINUITIES, TRANSGRESSIONS, INTERCONNECTIONS, ORGIES & SEXUAL RITES**

### **“THE SECRET TEACHING OF THE DIVINE SHAKTI”, BY JEAN VARENNE**

*"Now, Tantrism, far from avoiding these paradoxical behaviors, values them, on the contrary. The basic idea is that since the harmonious union of the two principles is very difficult to achieve under normal conditions, one must, to achieve it, use violent means."*

And that is exactly what I am doing in my work because I use violent

means, that is to say, I mix images that are viewable by everyone with images that are a bit more provocative, to create a violent aesthetic shock, so to speak!

*"violent and "heroic" (vîrya<sup>8</sup>) because they are dangerous, etc.*

*Transgressing norms (dharma<sup>9</sup>) is obviously the best of these means, since it is likely to lead to ostracism from society!"*

Much like how we ostracize artists from society today because we no longer have much interaction with the public, or rarely do!

*"Thus, it is to force a decision, or, at the very least, to hasten it, that the Tantrics, taking their logic of rupture to its extreme, organize these gatherings where the exchange of sexual partners takes place."*

So here's another erotic piece. Well, the subject matter might be a bit shocking, for sure! Unlike in New York, where people used to laugh when they saw my work! Here, it's not the same thing. And here's another animal like that... I read this article on Twitter the other day; it was done by NASA at the Max Planck Institute.

## **ULTRA-COSMIC INTERCONNECTION & QUANTUM MECHANICS: NASA & THE MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR QUANTUM OPTICS**

*"Quantum entanglement is one of nature's most perplexing mysteries, evidence that the universe might be more unified than we can imagine. When two particles are created together, they share a single quantum state. No matter how far apart they are (even light-years apart) a change in one instantly affects the other. For Einstein, this was impossible, but experiments continue to confirm that it is a real phenomenon."*

(That's pretty surprising to read!)

*"This strange connection seems to ignore the speed-of-light limit, suggesting that at the deepest level, space and distance might be illusions."*

Which is exactly like in Hindu *Māyā*, because, in fact, Hindu sages believe that everything that happens to us is projected by the magical

force of *Māyā* as if onto a movie screen. It's a great illusion, that's all.

*"The universe behaves like a continuous fabric, not like a collection of separate objects "Every spark of energy and every act of observation is a thread that pulls at this cosmic web."*

That's truly beautiful and it's pure poetry!

*"Entanglement blurs the boundary between 'here' and 'there,' 'you' and 'me.' It suggests that everything, from atoms to galaxies, may already be connected, sharing a hidden heartbeat across the quantum field."*

Yes, it really is poetry. So here's the image, and in the article I read: two particles can remain connected across an infinite dimension. It makes us wonder because sometimes, you know, we have premonitory dreams. Sometimes we think of close relatives who are dying or who have already died. So, we use channels of communication that Africans still know... That primitive societies still know spiritually, like the Aboriginal people of Australia, and that we, we no longer know at all. All these connections, these interconnections, are important to cultivate, to see, to know, to understand how to use them.

Here, these are works that speak a little about that. That is to say, how do we stay connected? So here is an image from a medieval manuscript. You can sense that it's a stained-glass window with drawings of vulvas, patterns of vulvas, in the background. And that, as in New York, I had gone canoeing in Pennsylvania, where I found, in a river, stones with particular, anthropomorphic shapes, So these are drawings of stone outlines with a deep red vulva on the background! This is also a drawing from the Middle Ages, with vulvas on the back as well!

## **- SUBSECTION 6 | THE SILENCE**

I just read this book, which is quite astonishing. It's by an author I didn't know at all, but I learned a lot from reading it, and I recommend everyone read it:

**"THE INNER MAN AND HIS METAMORPHOSES", BY MARIE-MADELEINE DAVY**

*“Likewise, the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly stems from the distinction between good and evil; this is how the unified being discovers beauty, for it stands within beauty, like one who, centered in his sun, would perceive nothing but sunbeams.”*

That’s magnificent, too!

*“Whoever has penetrated the void of their secret depths dwells in their inner desert, where the Eternal One leads and speaks to the heart of man, revealing his beauty to him.”*

We really need those who reveal beauty to the world. Perhaps artists are exactly here for that reason!

*“It is through it that beauty—one might say ‘secondary’ beauty—is discovered. However, in the void, there is no distinction; no name is given. To distinguish and name from silence would imply a distance. The only language of the void is that of silence.” P. 248*

So, everyone need to meditate on that please...!

And in New York, I created a work inspired by a manuscript from medieval Spain that read in Latin: “*SILENTIUM EST*”, It’s silent, and that’s it. I’ve also used this piece recently. It’s also a reflection on emptiness. I found this image in a book of Hindu paintings... I think it also describes the Metacosmic Void; it’s quite surprising. One might think here of the works of Paul Klee. It belongs to the realm of the strange, but it also belongs to the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, and so on.

### **“THE INNER MAN AND HIS METAMORPHOSES” (continued)**

*“With the ‘void of equality’ (samâna<sup>10</sup>), ‘cosmic enlightenment’ begins; time, duration, and death are transcended; the subject becomes present to the universe and attains the “supramental void”; this grants him a state of impassivity. Thus the Universe withdraws before his eyes; he is no longer tempted to intervene in its movement through his various actions. This unfolding appears comparable to a spectacle in which the subject has no active role to play. The temporal is transcended, and it is because it is totally transcended—one might speak here of “decreation” —that the “vibration of ineffable reality” can spring forth.”*

In fact, the artist's entire work consists of creating and decreating. To de-create what has been created and to create, to seek new paths. This is also a very, very beautiful text by Marie-Madeleine Davy. Well, you'll have to visit my website for more information. Listen, thank you very much. I don't know if you'd like to do a Questions & Answers session or not?

- **PART 3/4: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS #1** - [Watch the video](#)

- **Ms. Isabelle Dubois-Brinkmann:** Please can you tell us about your painting "*Mayan Diary*", which is on display here, in this exhibition, and perhaps about your body of work in general?

- **JPS:** About my works on Plexiglas? Well, yes, I don't have any visuals with me, unfortunately, but I'll add some in the filmed video, of course. My main work consists of square Plexiglas pieces that are always 1.05 by 1.05 meters, which I began in New York in 1999 as part of a large series titled *Mayan Diary*! Because I had visited Mexico; and during those successive trips to Mexico, with my girlfriend Olga, who is actually of Colombian origin; I had felt a kind of vital energy that took hold of me and swept me away like a force that was both Telluric (Earth) and Cosmic (Sky). So, from that moment on, I told myself... And just as before, I had also been to Egypt, where I had this interaction with the temples and some images in the tombs that took me to some place I'd never been before... And, so Mexico is also another deep spiritual place because when I was, for example atop the pyramid at Uxmal, you may enter what's called a cosmic state, taking a cosmic journey. And that "got worse," so to speak, because one day I also had the chance to experience shamanic trances under hypnosis in New York... So, everything that Native Americans know (or knew)—I'm not saying that I know it perfectly also, as I haven't experienced it firsthand with my own body. For example, I haven't performed the *Sioux Sun Dance*, but I've been able to encounter the energies they speak of, and so I've worked with these shamanic energies into my art... And I've incorporated many images of trance into my work. For example, Aztec priests piercing their penises to enter a trance, to meet their Gods! For me, trance is very important because it allows us to encounter wonderful, fantastical worlds that we don't know, of course. So this painting there, in the museum stairs, is painted on Plexiglas; it's a work depicting a Mayan goddess. I believe she's piercing her tongue with a rope, precisely to enter into a trance. And Mayan and Aztec societies were highly ritualized; their lives

were strictly organized by rituals. For example, the priests would rise several times during the night. Just as priests here, in monasteries are also praying at night (Compline, Matins, and Lauds), but they, they would pierce their penises or ears (for men) or their tongues (for women) by performing bloodletting rituals, letting the blood spurt into bowls over bark and copal incense, which they would then burn in extraordinary censers to communicate with and seek the advice and blessings of their Gods. So, all these rituals and connections to the sacred; that's what interests and inspires me. So, I then began working on Plexiglas, and it turns out that my square paintings can be put together and can be mounted to fit on the walls. So, Madam Director, you have seen my exhibition in Besançon, which was eighty square meters in situ and included seventy-two paintings on the Museum's staircase walls. And I like working this way: in a mobile, easily portable and nomadic way, because the pieces are made in square units, like this, and I put them in crates, and then we pack it and take them and hang them in another exhibition location. It's a bit like an ephemeral, nomadic performance (ref. Bruce Chatwin). I like that it's easily removable yet monumental at the same time; that's the whole paradox!

- **IDB**: Are you always recreate this work in the same way, in the same layout?

- **JPS**: Oh no, not at all! It's modular and interchangeable! We went to install an exhibition in Haute-Marne, where we installed a wall that was eight meters forty centimeters long by three meters fifteen centimeters high! The arrangement of the works depends on the available wall space. Like here at the Museum, it was ten meters fifty centimeters by two meters ten centimeters high, since we couldn't install anything taller than three meters. Yes, absolutely it all really depends on the exhibition space. I adapt my art to fit into the space. Well, since I have a whole stock of works available, maybe two hundred in total. Yes, so I'll present you some images in the video. Here, this was in Narbonne, into a contemporary Art Center named "L'Aspirateur." So there you go : it's six meters thirty by three meters fifteen high. And I do have actually a mural of that size installed in my Besançon studio's.

- **IDB**: And what are the dimensions of each panel? one meter and five centimeters?

- **JPS**: Yes, exactly, one meter and five square, yes, and it was a bit of

an important question mark because I did it intuitively, experimentally, while developing my work over the years, bit by bit. At first, in Montreal, I used to buy sheets of Plexiglas to paint small silkscreen prints that were 17.5 centimeters by 35 centimeters. And then later, I assembled them side by side. So I finally arrived at the square format of 1,05 meters! Except that one day, having thought about it, I thought—in hindsight, of course; of Mondrian and then of the architect Le Corbusier with their famous Golden number Ratio! Because in fact, it's a ratio of 1.618. And in fact my size is: 1.72 cm, divided by 1.618 is the ratio to my navel (105 cm) of my body! and I discovered this by working in a completely organic, empirical way, without really having thought about it or reflected on it. In hindsight, I thus understood the modular dimension of my work, of this particular format! And my body feel perfectly at ease within this module!

- **IDB**: Within this square format?

- **JPS**: Yes, exactly, because I've also been thinking about what's the "smartest" way—in quotes—to fit as much information as possible into a given space, and in what format? And it was the bees who figured it out smartly: it's a hexagon! It's incredibly clever! Because if you put some informations into circles, triangles or rectangles together, it won't work! So the maximum amount of information you can fit is into the hexagon shape (because artists are also purveyors of informations, whether Gilles Deleuze likes it or not!)

### **GILLES DELEUZE, LECTURE AT FEMIS, PARIS, 17 may 1987:**

*"The work of art has nothing to do with communication. The work of art contains absolutely no information whatsoever."*

But, finally, the square isn't bad either! Because painting in a hexagonal manner is, technically, impossible! And you've understood it well: my preferred personal formats are either ratios of: 1/2 or 1/1! I've been working this way for years. And so I no longer have to ask myself which format to use! Because when you're an artist, you shouldn't ask yourself too many questions, otherwise you'll spend your full life trying to answer them. As I'm a New Yorker : I just make it! Do you have any other questions? Noël, you may have a question?

- **Noël Barbe**: If no one else has any questions, I'd like to make a few comments on what you just said. Isn't there a common thread running

through all of this, it seems to me, which is the question of the Presence?

- **JPS**: Oh yes, of course! It's the presence of Life! I feel very much alive, obviously yes. And I love being in touch with my sexuality. I love being into joy, yes, of course! Well, obviously, we live here, in a country, France where a strong presence and energy aren't very welcome. And It's very true that in New York, I felt right at home. It's true that even my body felt much stronger (less vulnerable and less constrained). For example, I had a girlfriend who came to visit me, here, from New York, some time ago and she told me at the time: "*But Jean-Pierre, you're so different here in France than when you were in New York!*" It's true that even my body shrinks here, and it's a problem of being suffocated by the surrounding cultures and public indifference! Yes, and so I was lucky to be able to live in New York, at some time, to be present there, and to be able to develop myself and my work there! And you're right, it's Presence, that's it!

- **NB**: And so, in different forms, ways of inhabiting the world, it seems to me?

- **JPS**: Yes, yes. But finally you're present everywhere where you are living actually. Ultimately, when you're in the world: you're in the world! That's what IS, and it's not restrictive. You are present everywhere!

- **NB**: Finally, when you mention trance, for example, is it the summoning of the presence of other beings?

## **ON TRANCE BY HENRI MICHAUX, "THE TURBULENT INFINITE"**

*"I would have been crazy to start investigating and thus detach myself from it. This time, I went along with it. People ask me: 'But was it a vision? Or a hallucination? Or an apparition?'—'It just happened, that's all.'"*

- **JPS**: Yes and no. Do we imagine them? No, but well, it's a variety of things, a totality... of course. Yes, but then it's true that I encountered many different entities. Absolutely yes. In fact, to describe a shamanic trance: often in most of trances, we die, one become skeletons, and snakes eat our bodies, our flesh, and then the spirits rebuild us. That's what Native American shamans say... And so then, I met four female spirits who rebuilt my body. Well, when you see that, it speaks volumes! Well, after that, I think that goes far beyond all of us, beyond ourselves,

our ego and our own given cultures, into the inexpressible infinite. As I said, the Aboriginal people know this perfectly well, for example through their dream maps but nowadays since their natural environment have been destroyed, it's like a geographical map through which they could travel spiritually and physically. Especially since, by human destroying all nature, these human beings can not longer travel psychically and physically, like the Indians of Brazil. If we destroy their forests and their trees, all the non-human entities, the spirits (like the Japanese *kami* for example), no longer exist. And so, there is still a physical presence somewhere that it's important to maintain and preserve... Because we can't not start from a tabula rasa, from scratch—that doesn't exist! Culture isn't just about reading books; it's also about being able to have physical and spiritual experiences and to experience them deeply right now, by force. Does anyone have another question?

- **Ms. Evelyne Widmaier:** What are you working on today? On the same themes but in a different way?

- **JPS:** Exactly, yes, I'm continuing my series of works on paper for better or for worse, well, as an artist—and this might sound trivial—but above all, you have to find money in order to be able to work and buy art supplies, because for some years I don't have enough money to be able to work and to buy paper or paint. So, when that's happening, I work mainly on writing texts or editing my videos because I also make a lot of films as I organize and film interviews and film myself at work. And I also have a whole body of texts because, every time that I read books that interest me, I copy excerpts and important passages into my Studio Notes. Because, for me, being an artist means sharing widely and spreading things and informations; we are messengers, of course, yes, but also sharing things with JOY! Sometimes, my work can be shocking also, of course! I've sometimes received insulting letters. Yes, yes, because I gave an artist talk at Flagey (family Courbet Farm's near Ornans) and my friend Laurent Devèze, who was at the time, the director of the Besançon Fine-Arts School, asked me at the time: "*Jean Pierre, which authors are you reading right now?*" So I mentioned Bruce Chatwin and Knut Hamsun, for example; or writers that nobody really knows. And then someone wrote me a letter insulting me because I had mentioned authors they didn't know at all. Whereas people should be really happy and grateful that I mention authors they don't know yet or know very little about, because then they can go read those books. You see, there's a whole question of the ego when one look at Art, and

above all, the ego is always present and acts as a complete barrier to direct, intuitive emotion and art comprehension. It can be complex because we all imagine that we know everything and about everything. And well, my work is still a rather unique and specific kind of artwork. One surely haven't seen anything like it. Although I am still part of a tradition of European, American painting, and also Hindu, of course... So, there's a lot to take and learn from it. Anyway, that's how I feel about it, and how my friend Noël feels too, since we have to reshoot a third part of an interview where we've already filmed two parts (three hours in total!).

- **EW:** I'm thinking of a painter friend who took a comment from someone who told him that his painting was "vulgar" very, very hard on him! How would you, you had reacted to such a nasty comment?

- **JPS:** In fact, vulgarity exists only in the eye of the beholder! Because your friend's painting disturbed the viewer gaze, of course in some way. Here's a short excerpt from C. G. Jung on this very subject matter, because it describes this situation exactly!

*"There comes a moment in life when you realize that the hostility directed at you has little to do with your actions, but much more to do with the invisible depths hidden within others."* C. G. JUNG

And very often, for example, people feel hurt when one talks about the body, its pleasures, desires, pains, trances, or orgasms. And, if you have a ninety-year-old woman who has never experienced an orgasm in her life and has no idea about what it is, then she'll be lost! And there's something that hurts them, inevitably, but Art—it hurts somewhere and somehow necessarily; it deeply definitely shake things up with our certainties... That's true and normal! Well, today we have a bit of that problem with feminism too, because there's a lot of sexual content into my art works, so... well, there you go...

- **PART 4/4: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS #2 - [Watch the video](#)**

- **JPS:** Do you have any other questions? Noël? Do you have any more questions?

- **NB:** Yes, you just touched on that a bit in your previous sentence, the question regarding feminism... and so one of the questions I have about

your work—though, well, there are several things I wonder about regarding your work. One of the first questions I have is, broadly speaking, regarding what you were saying about vulgarity, for example: aren't we facing a failure of language here when trying to say something?

- **JPS**: Perhaps, yes, absolutely, yes, but Art goes far beyond language, of course!

- **NB**: It also exists through language!

- **JPS**: Yes, but who reads Georges Bataille? Who reads Sade today? That goes too far! Maybe yes, my work goes too far too! That's a question we'll ask ourselves in our next interview, yes!

- **NB**: At the same time, the paradox is that Bataille writes, in fact, if you will!

- **JPS**: So what? You think the image is stronger. And you think the written word is more easily assimilated than the image?

- **NB**: No, precisely, what I'm saying—and this is a truism for an anthropologist—is that, broadly speaking, the world doesn't exist without language to shape it, describe it, assimilate it, subvert it, or whatever you want...

- **Audience Member 3**: Thought as somehow its own language!

- **NB**: Without a set, as with images or text—in any case, across the range of differences—that are there to give form, etc. And the second point is to say that, aside from this type of language through which to receive your work, there might be a second aspect. And here I'm continuing on the question of feminism... Could we say that, ultimately, your work is into a situated perspective! It's a perspective situated from at least two perspectives: firstly, it's a male glaze. And second, it's a Western perspective on cultures that aren't his own, even if he has experienced them! But that's not the point! You're talking about the trances, actually! You've experienced it. So, that's not the issue. There you go, that's a question I wanted us to discuss together, you see, that's it!

- **JPS**: Okay, so we'll do our next interview on that, to be continued in the

next episode. Do you have another question?

- **AM3**: But don't just brush off the question!

- **JPS**: No, but I can't right now because, well...

- **AM3**: His question is very, very interesting, and I'd like to hear your answer!

- **JPS**: Yes, well, obviously, I'm a man—I won't deny it! Yes, it's true! Well, then, do I have to apologize for it?

- **AM3**: That's not the point!

- **NB**: That's not what I'm saying!

- **JPS**: But do you want to phrase it differently?

- **AM3**: But we get what you're saying—we're waiting for your answer!

- **JPS**: Yes, but well, maybe I don't have the answer to that question; I'll admit my ignorance here!

- **NB**: I don't think I need to rephrase it, but in any case, the question isn't about apologizing; that's not the point. The question is—we could say "owning," though that might not be the right term—to actually own this gendered position that exists, and at the same time, to put it to work.

- **JPS**: But absolutely not at all it's not about gender, but about DESIRE! You see, in desire, the Gods are simultaneously men and they are women! I mean, there's a whole spectrum, an interchangeability, an assimilation, a circulation—there's a whole exchange taking place when you create art! so you can feel both man and woman. You can't be just a man, and well, that's what it means to belong to the world and to humanity, I think. Anyway, that's my point of view!

- **EW**: So you feel like both a man and a woman?

- **JPS**: Yes, I feel myself surrounded in one or more energies, and energies aren't gendered : SEX IS ENERGY! I say yes, that's it, yes, it's indefinable... An orgasm is indefinable. When it happens, it's overwhelming. Precisely, there's no word to define it, as it's ecstatic! And

so, in my work, I often talk about orgasms, so unavoidably, it may have this aspect which cannot be specifically defined... Sade talked about this at length, but I think Sade would be much more gendered male than I am. But then again, I don't exploit the humiliating and degrading side of women in sexuality at all; for me, they are, after all, the vessel of pleasure. But maybe I'm just deluding myself! In any case, I love this relationship of desire between man and women, this interconnectedness we all share. I hope it lasts because the world is beautiful this way!

- **EW**: Actually, it's a hymn to creation!

- **JPS**: Ah, yes, absolutely! It's a hymn, but it's neither religious nor atheistic; it's spiritual, but I don't know, even a little beyond that... I try to navigate a little beyond cultures, even if I come across a Christian work, like, for example, I read the work of Marguerite Porete, who wrote her book "*The Mirror of Simple and Humble Souls*" in the 13th century and was burned at the stake for writing it! Which is a magnificent and powerful work, which I feel very close to!

- **AM3**: It's a work about love above all! It's about love!

- **JPS**: And about desire, yes, exactly!

- **AM3**: And love mainly!

- **JPS**: But it's precisely beyond that. Yes, but it's not gendered, precisely. She's in this universal Love, of Divine Love. Like Hildegard von Bingen, it's the same! And Frida Kahlo too—she's a woman who also speaks of her life, her desires, and her suffering!

- **AM3**: It's different; you can't really compare Porete with Frida Kahlo!

- **JPS**: As for me, I'd say yes! and why not!

- **AM3**: It's not the same kind of celebration. Frida Kahlo was immersed in carnal love, whereas Porete was immersed in spiritual love.

- **JPS**: But how do we know that? No, no, I don't believe in that kind of separation, not at all! Because what she writes is very carnal. It's very carnal, really, it's very pleasurable! Oh yes, exactly, she feels her body! A lot of people talk about spirituality without mentioning the body!

Whereas we must never forget the body! And so I get a bit of that same physical impression, even in the works of Nancy Spero or other American artists. It's interesting. I love all artists who works with the body. I really love Rodin's erotic drawings! I also adore Antonin Artaud. Not only does he talk about the body, but also about magic, spiritual interconnection, performance, and insult.

- **AM3:** Yes, but strangely, you love the body, you're an artist, but you don't treat paint as a material to be transformed, worked on, or explored!

- **JPS:** No, because that bores me and I'm not an alchemist!

- **AM3:** So, you are denying your body, because here, it's very aesthetic, it's done with a pencil...

- **JPS:** No, I don't deny my body—no, not at all! Because I've worked with the material extensively and for a long time; I used to paint in Montreal, creating works three or four centimeters thick, with impasto this high! And canvases three meters by three meters. But I found that—and you're right—I found the body's energy; but elsewhere! And well, I think the mind can understand and feel the body through my flat color fields. When you look at a Matisse, you feel the dance! And if you don't feel the energy in Matisse's "*La Danse*"? Then, yes, maybe it's better to go see Rodin's sculptures. So maybe yes, some people need the physicality of the body. I don't really need it because the idea just springs forth into the art work. And when I work, screen printing is very physical, very tiring, and very bodily. When I am silkscreening y body is very present in the act of screen printing!

- **AM3:** Yeah, but that's no small thing.

- **JPS:** But here, on the screen, you can't really see the visuals clearly!

- **AM3:** It's the medium for accessing something, but the result doesn't show the transmutation of the material: it's smooth, it's clean, it's sanitized!

- **JPS:** Thank you, but what you're saying is very insulting!

- **AM3:** No, no, it's not an insult!

- **JPS**: But yes, of course, because quite the opposite is true: when you stand in front of my works—you have these projected visuals here... but when you're physically in front of my work—the director actually came to see my exhibition in Besançon, and she could attest to this—it's a completely physical experience! Because you're standing in front of eighty square meters of paintings, and your body is part of it. So please, let's talk about things we actually know before insulting artists, if you don't mind!

- **AM3**: But I'm talking about the small painting right there, on display at the museum! It's very beautiful, and I love it!

- **JPS**: Yes, but if you can't physically step inside it, there's absolutely nothing I can do about that. And besides, it's not my fault, as they say!

- **AM3**: But don't take it as an insult! You're the one reading it that way, but that's absolutely not what it is!

- **JPS**: No, but you're telling me that my work is flavorless and infertile. Well, not at all, because you have to be able to engage with it. But you're right—maybe in this staircase, you can't physically engage with it? But in any case, everyone who comes to my studio to see my wall, for them, it's always an emotional shock!

- **AM3**: Certainly, yes!

- **JPS**: Yes, but now, we're showing you some visuals that aren't exactly top-notch, but I stand by my work. That's all! Because this isn't a neutral kind of work, precisely. And to tell you a short story, a year ago, some people came to my studio—a woman who had worked at Beaubourg, at the Guimet Museum—and she came with a friend who probably had no artistic background, well, I assume... And this woman said to me: "*Mr. Sergent, your work on the wall makes me want to dance!*" So I'm directly contradicting you and I flat-out disagree with you about what you just said because my work is neither neutral nor barren! There you go. But, on the other hand, the lady, who had studied Art and Culture professionally for twenty or thirty years, didn't feel that energy! So, well, it's pretty tricky, as they say in English... Not everyone connects with my work, and that's normal, but some people do...

- **AM3**: No, but it was just in relation to what you were talking about! I

was making a connection between what you're saying and what I see!

- **JPS**: Yes, yes, of course!

- **AM3**: I'm not insulting you; I'm not criticizing your work. It's just how I feel about what I see and what you're saying! That's all there is to it! I don't want to upset you...

- **JPS**: Well, thank you for your comments, but of course, when faced with a project like this, there are bound to be thousands of questions that come to mind! Do you have any other questions, perhaps? Well, thank you very much, Ms. Director, for welcoming me here to this beautiful museum, where I have nothing but fond memories, and I certainly hope we can work together in the future. And thank you to the whole team. They've been a huge help with communication and everything. Thank you to the cameramen Bernard and Jeff, and I wish you all a wonderful evening. I look forward to seeing you again soon. And if you ever want to stop by the studio, it's in Besançon. Thank you very much, and goodbye...

## - THE DEFINITIONS

- **1**, *Shakti*: means "power," "might," "strength." In Tantrism, this word refers to feminine energy, the active principle of the force that animates both the Universe and all the living beings that inhabit it.

- **2**, *The metacosmic void, pure consciousness*: a Hindu concept inspired by the title of a small 18th-century Hindu gouache (Ritual Art of India, Ajit Mookerjee).

- **3**, *Tantrism*: refers to a body of texts, doctrines, rituals, and initiatory methods within Hinduism. Etymologically, it is the combination of two Sanskrit words: *tanoti*, meaning expansion, and *trayati*, meaning liberation, which gave rise to the word *tantra*, "expansion-liberation." According to Tantrism, sexuality is a privileged path to the spiritual. It is therefore sacred.

- **4**, *Kālī the "Black One"*: In Hinduism, she is the goddess of preservation, transformation, anti-morality, and destruction. Those who worship her are freed from the fear of destruction. In art, Kali is often depicted in copulation with her iconic elements: Multiple arms signify her countless abilities. A protruding tongue symbolizes the consumption of vices. A garland of skulls and a sword demonstrate her role as liberator

from the cycles of reincarnation

- **5**, *Shiva*: “the good one, the bringer of happiness,” is a Hindu god; he is depicted as a yogi possessing universal, supreme, and absolute knowledge, even in a state “beyond knowledge.”

- **6**, *The Upanishads*, book (800–500 BCE): From the Sanskrit *upa*, meaning physical displacement, *ni*, meaning downward movement, and *shad*, meaning to sit, conveying the idea of “coming to sit respectfully at the master’s feet to listen to the teaching.” It is a collection of philosophical texts that form the theoretical basis of the Hindu religion

- **7**, *The Bindu Point*: In Hindu metaphysics, Bindu is considered the point from which creation begins and can become unity. It is also described as “the sacred symbol of the cosmos in its unmanifested state.” It is the point around which a mandala is created and represents the Universe in its entirety.

- **8**, *Vīrya*, is a Sanskrit word meaning “effort,” “perseverance,” “diligence,” “vigor,” “energy,” “heroism,” or “enthusiasm.”

- **9**, *Dharma*: the Order of things, the Universal Law. And, consequently: Hinduism, the human (religious) form of the Cosmic Norm.

- **10**, *Samâna* (vital breath): is a Sanskrit term that corresponds, in Indian philosophy and more specifically in Yoga, to the flow of vital energy.