

INTERVIEW ARTIST JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT
WITH ART CRITIC [BENGÜSU ALEYNA DEMIRCI](#),
"[İLE SANAT, BİLİNÇ VE KOZMOS ÜZERİNE](#)" |
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Arete. Konseptler Yayınlar Sergiler Hakkımızda

JEAN PIERRE SERGENT İLE SANAT, BİLİNÇ VE KOZMOS ÜZERİNE

Arete. x Dialogue serisinin konuğu Fransız sanatçı Jean-Pierre Sergent. Bilinç, doğa, spiritüellik ve kozmoloji ekseninde şekillenen sanat pratiğini, üretim sürecini ve geleceğe dair projelerini ele aldığı kapsamlı söyleşiyi keşfedin.

Bengüsu Aleyna Demirci
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Artist working in his studio #10, silk-screening his images, photo by Lionel Georges, July 30th 2024.

The guest of the Dialogue series is French artist Jean-Pierre Sergent. Discover this in-depth interview in which he discusses his artistic practice—shaped around the themes of consciousness, nature, spirituality, and cosmology—as well as his creative process and future projects.

1. For readers encountering your work for the first time, how would you describe the central ideas that have guided your artistic practice throughout the years?

My work: it is consciousness in action—revealing Life! It's is a commitment to showcase nature, all the living creatures, and cultural differences in all their glories and integrity!

I find and seek for meanings, from past and contemporary images, gleaned from drawings, potteries, mantles and sculptures, that are carrying beauty, wonder and significations during our common long past human history. Those meanings could be spirituals, religious like rituals, coming from Pagans, or animist group of people or cultures, from high antiquity to current examples and from "countries" from Mexico to Japan or Australia etc...

I need to get meaning out of every single art concept and any preconceived idea that I wish, and despite all the obstacles I've faced (very few sales of my artworks), throughout my art career, to get into galleries, i am cast back in true Life energies again! Perhaps, in a presumptuous reversal of logic, a call to action! A spell!

A few sentences, about the history of my art practices and its development:

I painted abstractions from 1984 to 1991, then after having moved in 1991 to Montreal, I started silkscreening images that I found, that were worth showing. I moved to New York in 1993, where I started to print my images on Plexiglas panels, first a small one (35 x 17,5 cm), then in a unique square format of 105 x 105 cm. Since then, I work alternately on Plexiglas or on paper. My work have been exhibited in numerous galleries and Museums of several Countries around the World and in September 2019, my monumental work of reverse silkscreen paintings on Plexiglas: "*Four Pillars of the Sky*", was exhibited until September 2023, in the two stairwells of the Besançon Fine-Arts & Archaeology Museum (the oldest Museum in France). This was a fresco-installation of seventy-two paintings covering a total surface area of eighty square meters, which was on display in the museum for four full years. To date, it is the my largest and most monumental mural installation.



Artist working in his studio #10, silk-screening his images, photo by Lionel Georges, July 30th 2024.

2. Your work brings together spirituality, cosmology, organic forms, and contemporary visual culture. What first drew you to these themes, and how have they evolved over time?

Well, while living in France, my work was mainly abstract but little by little, over the years, and after having moved to my art studio in Montreal, it became very clear and obvious to me, that painting just abstraction coloured fields, as beautiful the paintings could have been at the time, wasn't enough to express all the feeling I do have, as an artist, in front of the whole diversity of Life and all the different cultures from around the World. As said Claude Lévi-Strauss in his outstanding book: *We are all cannibals*:

"Nearly two thousand five hundred years ago, Herodotus, while visiting Egypt, was astonished by customs that were the opposite of those he had observed elsewhere. The Egyptians, he writes, behave in every respect in the opposite way to other peoples. Not only do women engage in trade while men stay at home and weave, but the men begin the weaving from the bottom up and not from the top down as in other countries. Women urinate standing up, men squatting. I will not continue the list."

So, as for, at this moment and time, I started reintegrating, into my visual iconographies, little by little, being so much curious about all kind of differences of human behaviors depicted in those images, that I needed to show, to share them, being good or bad, beautiful or horrible, crude or sensual, spiritual or grotesque! Most of those images are belonging to "THE GLEANER'S SHARE". Montaigne, a French writer of the XVI^e century, explain what it is: "If we have enough left over to make an impression (with money)—this surplus of fortune's generosity—let us allow it to flow a little more freely at the mercy of its servant; the gleaner's share." from *On Vanity*, Montaigne (1533–1592).

This left over part, thrown away by the unbridled capitalist system, like scraps left for the dogs, the poor, and the animals; this share of the gleaners—which Agnès Varda so masterfully depicted in her magnificent movie "*The Gleaners*", 2000, in which she shows poor people scavenging for food in supermarket dumpsters and in fields—is exactly the part I recuperate as a primary material for my work, because news paper clips and pornographic images that are recovered from the internet, are free of copy right.

Anyhow, at that time, in Montreal I was choosing and cutting out from the famous and enormous Sunday New York Time news paper and then silkscreened them afterwards.

As a proof of that, just last year, I found, hidden into my storage room, a huge black leather forgotten portfolio (90 x 65 cm and weighting around 15 kgs), with almost 300 art prints from Montreal (1991-1992) and New York (1983-1994), freely screen-printed, as if in a spontaneous gesture, a leap into the unknown on sheets of newspaper with some others on art papers.

Doing so, my reflection was, in photographing in my studio, all of those ancient prints, last year; that since my first years in America, all the images I had chosen to print, were displaying, as you so rightly asked me: some images describing sensuality, desire, strong art pieces revealing a spiritual content and presence. Sometime also, violence of some disruptive and disturbing capitalist destructions... As well as a lot of photos of animals in the wild, in their freedom, all those themes haven't change a bit over the years. Excepted that nowadays, I am not anymore going to Museum shooting photos of some nice art pieces, neither buying books, like sometime, in going visiting the MET every Sunday, neither from news papers... But I collect them directly on what I find on the internet. It's much more simpler and easier, but the subjects stay the same and my statement is to recreate and redesign every image or information into art. It could be also texts, that influences me as well, as I am also collecting and copying extracts of writing from the books I am reading on a daily basis into my "Notes from Besançon" website page.

Once again, as you said it, it's always done with a specific and positive

intention to showcase, in my art, all the World's cultural diversities and mix them together, in a kind fusional state. What have to do the Aztec Xipe Totec "Flayed One", a statue of a priest, located at the Natural History of New York, with an image of a Japanese woman body in bondage? Or a contemporary pornographic image of a woman in an ecstatic orgasm surrounded by three phallus ejaculating sperm all over her body? And what has to do an Hindu metaphysical and highly spiritual yantra with a middle age drawing stating in latin: "SILENCIUM EST" (SILENCIUM IS), they all are part of things created, ex nihilo some how, by human being, as you are and as we are all! One can reflect on cultural opposition on this small quote of the book I am actually reading:

"I have no doubt of it. Wild life is so simple, and our societies are such complicated machines! The Haitian touches the origin of the world, and the European touches its old age. The gap that separates him from us is greater than the distance between a newborn child and a decrepit man. He understands nothing of our customs or our laws, or sees in them only obstacles disguised in a hundred different forms—obstacles that can only arouse the indignation and contempt of a being in whom the feeling of freedom is the deepest of all feelings." Denis Diderot, *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*

Nowadays the World is still in a great turmoil and changes, upside-down, it's perfectly clear also in my art with its global accumulation, and the aggregation of different multicultural images that enables me to exit any sensation of belonging to only one-and-only culture, even the best of the best, which ever could be that one? But I am really happy to be living in France now, where we can be free to express ourself, as an artist and we are having also our "freedom of thought and speech", which is unfortunately not the case, in most of the countries around the World, freedom is so important to me... Ultimately artists are here, perhaps, to alchemically transform society's crap into Art.



Portrait of JPS at work #7, Summer 2003, in his studio in Long Island City, Queens, New York, USA, photo by Sachie Kumano.

3. In your recent lecture, *The Shakti & The Metacosmic Void*, you explore ideas that extend beyond conventional understandings of reality. How do these philosophical and spiritual investigations influence your artistic process?

When talking about reality, it needs to be said about what kind of reality we are talking about? Is that reality of the actual knowledge of Western science? If it is so, I must say that my art is totally misunderstood here, in my country, France, where there is a deep rational mainstream idea and a strong atheism and materialism which lead to a misunderstanding of every spiritual practices as a whole and all diversities of behaviours... French people are very reluctant to embrace any other way of thinking, like animist, Buddhist, shamanism and certainly not Tantrism...

Personally, I don't want to and cannot fight against that kind of miserable and poor understanding of Art, Life and Cosmos as energies and entities. As I think that mankind deserves more than what we think we are made of: skeleton, muscles, sex, and blood; and that even our body system and consciousness and souls are much larger parts with our inner energies and forces. What I am personally seeking, is not different from the knowledge of ancient cultures, those which had a strong and immanent spiritual presence. As an example, this concept of the "Metacosmic Void"

was discovered in a really small gouache paintings from India of the XVIII century. This is what I said about it in my last lecture:

"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 to myself: "Well? What on earth is that?" Because, there's just the "border", there's no subject matter at the center, there's nothing. It's empty, it's truly the Void, and it challenges frontally our rational mind, in a way."

I found often into Eastern concepts and ideas of religious thinking many answers of my interrogations, like the paradoxal thinking, which interested me during my working process reflexions, such as the Tantrism in India:

"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." in *"The Secret Teaching of the Divine Shakti"*, by Jean Varenne

Such as in my work, I am also exploring all kind of paradoxical sexual energies such as the "Shakti, which means "power", "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." All of my art is about that, the transmutation of some flat ordinary images, inert, ordinary, dirty, vulgar, and obscene into a Force-Energy, a Karma-Energy full of colours and vibrant of Life-Forces! By merging them together with other meaningful images like old spirituals genetic patterns, mixing them during the working process in order to achieve a kind of "Grande Œuvre", the alchemical Great Work which mean, changing matter, throughout a kind of magical and powerful means of creation to sublime the inerte matter: image into energy! With a deep will of transgression assumed, to enter, to achieve a state of ecstatic and transgressive trance, as such as in a shamanic trance... That's the true secret mechanism of art!

4. Many contemporary artists focus on political or social issues, while your work often turns toward consciousness, transformation, and metaphysical questions. Why do these subjects remain important for you today?

Yes, it's absolutely true that I don't really recognize myself in the mainstream global art market of today. And even rarely, when I am going to some main stream Art Fair Market, like the most famous Basel Art Fair, I am always leaving the place with a deep nauseous feeling! I feel absolutely sick and extinguished, even exhausted! So much money, so much talent

and energy, so much time to create art works which are just mirroring contemporary society in its wholeness, or showing just the opposite, the darker side of it. Which end up being the same at the end, it's all about being the most famous artist in the world, having the most powerful demonstrative artist statement, making the most amount of money on an art piece and generally selling art the utmost price at the richest people collecting art throughout the World! All that seems to me totally useless, utterly hopeless, paradoxical and ultra-kitschy...

As for me, an artist should stay a creator and a messenger of pure beauty and energies. Not that I have no interest in social or political issues, neither to sale my art to hypothetical collectors. It just that I do have the deep feeling that art, is a special gift, a blessing and a curse, of course, that can and should open the utmost consciousness of firstly the artist, quite obviously, as we need to work on trying to dig deeper and seeks and collect the most information that we can, into the collective unconscious, in order to be a kind of witness, a seeker, who, like a solitary hermit monk of the good old time, has a full understanding of the world that surrounds him, but goes farther and deeper beyond all borders and barriers into some deep conscientious fields and levels of understanding. We artists, have somehow the possibility of sharing, into our art, our ideas, thoughts and emotions on the vanishing worlds around us today: traditions, nature, animals, plants, social connections, primary cultures or even kindness, love, compassion and desires... which can affect and change us, artists, throughout our artworks and secondly, as by a singular ripple effect, which can be sometime a period very long and taking infinite time, finally the viewer!



Portrait of the artist in his Besançon studio #2, silk-screening his images, photo by Sonia Oysel, July 7th 2018.

5. Your large-scale installations invite viewers into immersive visual environments. What becomes possible when painting expands beyond the traditional frame and enters architectural space?

Yes, absolutely, I want to get myself and my art "out of the frame", out of the narrow scale, out of the box: "Sortir de la peinture fenêtre" is one of my main wishes, statement or requirement, removing paint from its traditional window-frames, even as big as it could be! By throwing away, any injunctive, structure and aesthetic assumptions, historical or social dogma as perspectives, morality, rules of beauty, or any other normative aesthetic dictates! I really want to enter into beauty as a whole sensation, as an energy. And with some of my large scale paintings installations, the largest one was on display at the Museum of Fine-Arts in Besançon "The For Pillars of the Sky", a 80 square meters large and was composed by seventy two painting covering the full walls with a total size of 80 meters. Being in front of such a monumental art piece bring and engages the viewer, not only intellectually, as within just a glance at art, but also physically with its own body and it own knowledge, fears, desires and believes.

I am not so crazy about the term of 'immersive' which is a word really over used these days, even if I find it totally accurate. But I would prefer the

notion of the "Oceanic Feeling" well described by French writer Saint-John Perse, or the "collective unconscious" largely used by Jung.

"The Sea, woven within us, down to its bramble thickets of the abyss, the Sea, within us, weaving its great hours of light and its vast trails of darkness—All freedom, all birth, and all repentance, the Sea! The Sea! At its surging tide, In the rush of its bubbles and the wisdom infused in its milk, ah! in the sacred boiling of its vowels—the holy maidens! the holy maidens!—The Sea itself all foam, like a Sibyl in bloom upon her iron chair..." in *Amers*, Saint-John Perse

As today, people are so lost, so lonely, so isolated, so unhappy that they definitively want to immerse themselves into something larger, in order to get lost, to disappear, for no more know what they seem to be themselves. In order to forget about their absolute nullity and their egotistical despair. As an example, you can see on any art driven Instagram account, some art curators or art aficionados, that they all are taking photos of themselves in front of any art works they are passing by (even in changing their dresses in order to perfectly fit with the paintings main colors) in some galleries exhibitions or Museum shows.

For me this is immersive and immersion. But, it feeds itself with a totally narrow egoistic external feeling, with absolutely no fusion, neither interconnection, with the work, it is just camouflage and mimicry... Trying to be part and merging into an artist painting universe such as those of Van Gogh, Gauguin or Rothko, doesn't work that way, it's never so easy! If you haven't experienced yourself the suffering, the joy or even the deep despair of an artist life, it's seems to me complicated, even absolutely impossible to receive firstly, the message, secondly the energy of that particular work. Maybe art is reserved to privileged people, or maybe not at all, it just a thought!

But none of those contemporary funky people would ever have the true experience of the "oceanic feeling", the universal fusion into an art piece. Just for example—and for a laugh—here's a little personally interesting fact that illustrates exactly what I mean: I had lunch, two weeks ago, with a good friend of mine, while chatting freely with her, she told me that she had been hurt very deeply, when about two years ago, during an other lunch, she had asked me why, she couldn't cry in front of any Rothko paintings during her visit at the Mark Rothko exhibition at the Louis Vuitton Fondation, in Paris in 2024, as most people had tears in their eyes in front of those paintings. At that moment, in that exhibition, she felt completely, lonely, helpless and lost. I did answer her at that time, that it is neither necessary not a norm to cry in front of a Rothko painting, and that it was under no circumstances to be considered an obligation. And since she kept questioning me, I then explained to her, that sometimes, at some point, one needs a cultural initiation or an introduction to enable you to enter the world of a particular painting... or even a personal souvenir,

some body experience, a shock, like pain, loss, desperation or joy in order to enter into the inner world of an artist. What I had been telling her was an absolute truth which really upset her, however it was perfectly true. What to do then? "*Do not be struck dumb by the true dragon.*" is a saying Fukanzazenji, Dogen Zenji, quoted in *The Snow Leopard*, a must read book by Peter Matthiessen

I guess initiation, culture, knowledge and, above all, ultimately, getting rid of your ego are absolutely necessary, in order to enter and appreciate fully, for example, some works of Veermer, Fra Angelico, Caravaggio, Pollock or a Mayan Temple, Pygmies loincloths (Africa), Asmat totem poles (New Guinea), etc., etc.

Somehow, you need to have a sort of humility and love towards art and every artist's life, in order to be connected, to "understand" and comprehend the energies of any Art! Could it be at times prehistorical or contemporary, that doesn't really matter. And Rothko was rightly saying about his paintings: "Perhaps to dominate the viewer's field of vision and thus create a feeling of contemplation and transcendence."

Getting back to my art, it is somehow, about the opposite of a monolithic regular single painting, because its large format composed of multiple paintings on Plexiglas, a panoptic view (a complete and continuous view of an entire interior space), which bring the viewer to a higher level of consciousness and to an other level of understanding of the "The Cosmic Mechanics of Life". The large scale of my works, as you mention it, could become like an architectural space, a safe englobing house, protecting like a tomb, like a womb, an Indian tipi, a yourte, where some kind of magical connection and healings could happen and proceed. Talking about this painting as expansion into a new dimension and presence of my large mural paintings installations, you are totally right! It's a fact, I have have been lucky enough to visit some Egyptian Tombs and Temples, in 1984, with my grandfather Maurice and my sister Marie-Paule, being there, physically, alone sometimes, into some man-constructed huge spaces, highly decorated with hieroglyphs images all over the walls, with beautiful colors... This had put me into a kind of mystical and cosmic state, a revelation, an initiation. Into those monumental collectively build architectures, but still done by little humans helpers, as we are: architects, craftsmen, sculptors and painters, like me, who had collectively build a "sacred machine" a mystical architectural structure, capable of defying time and even the dreaded death! As cave painting, European Cathedrals, the great wooden Buddhist temples, the Mexican Pyramids etc, all those great works that deeply inspired me, have been completed with, what we can name collective collaboration, intelligence and social connection and organization.

So this veridic fact, sparked in me a need to no longer be just myself, an artist, but to expand my own being tenfold and, through sheer will, to

belong in a multiplied way, by permanently putting my ego to rest and reintegrating myself into the vast human community. To become Japanese when I paint an erotic Japanese bondage, to become a Siberian shaman when I draw a shamanic drawing, to become Hildegard Von Bingen, when I copy one of her drawings, to become an Aztec sacrificial priest when I copy the statue of Xipe Totec, 'The Flayed One', and to become a whale when I paint a whale. All this might be considered madness, or transgression, or totally schizophrenic, but I think it is, in fact, the true and real mystical journey of an artist. As truly, at some point, you absolutely must merge with all of living beings! Even if, during this terrible process, you have to completely destroy yourself and be utterly annihilated...



Artist working in his studio #20, exposing the silk-screen frames with the positifs films, photo by Lionel Georges, August 13th 2024.

6. Nature appears throughout your work not merely as a subject but almost as an active presence. How has your relationship with nature shaped your artistic vision?

Yes, absolutely, Nature is essential for me as it should be for everyone. Luckily, it's happened that I was living, all by myself, like a monk or a

mystical hermit, for about ten years, from 1980 to 1991, and full time, into a farm, located in the beautiful Jura Mountains, just at the Swiss border, where I was care-taking and raising goats and horses and training them; at the end I had a herd of 17 horses all together... Needless to say that I was really desperate when I had to sell them all, in order to move to Canada! To have experienced this very intense and profound physical, bodily and spiritual interaction with animals, whose power far surpasses your own, teaches me, firstly humility and being really respectful, to pay attention, to be kind, to be patient, then to be gentle, as when you are asking animals to do something they don't really want to do, you need to have a great attention to them and being a good listener as well as being present at all instants, as you need, at any time of day or night, to be there for them. If for example, a mare was about to give birth on a certain night, you need to sleep in the stable, in order to be there to help her giving birth and taking care of the foal. So this presence at any moment of time is developing in you, all your senses and antennas in order to be able to react quickly to any problems that may occur.

Nowadays, I am living not too faraway from that place and can go canoeing in the Mountains on the Doubs River, separating France and Switzerland, during summer time. As you mentioned it, being there, alone on the water, you can feel an active presence, strong and untouched and eternal, one can hope so!

Immersing yourself in nature is like stepping into a neutral space, in the sense that it doesn't give a damn about you being there, so it teaches you, by its total indifference, a total unwavering humility. You need then to destroy completely your ego and brain thoughts, erasing them thoroughly! And I particularly have noticed for example, even if I don't really have a stressful life, despite it; when going canoeing or walking in nature, it's always taking me about half an hour in order to be in full harmony, in full exchange, in full peace with myself, into this fusional state with the elements : Water, Wind, Rocks, Trees and Animals; in order to reintegrate our full self and at an higher state of consciousness. Nature takes time and you also need to take this time in order to be fully be present. I strongly believe that it's exactly the same about approaching true Art! In my art, during the working process, I am also using mainly natural pigment as: mars red, burnt sienna, yellow ochre, zinc white, or bone black etc - everything is coming from Earth and Nature... And some images of animals, encountered spiritually during some of my shamanic trances, as 'animal spirits guides' could help also other people to find their way throughout spiritual paths. They are: Horses, Goats, Hawks, Snakes, Bears, Hummingbirds, Eagles, Whales, Jaguar (*el Tigre*, in Mexico) or Ants... There are always present and part of my human history, as my ancestors, into my memories, and often also, in my powerful spiritual dreams... gratitude and respect to all of them!

Also, nothing can be taken apart from Nature as a whole, as everything is interconnected, that is also a concept and a working process that I do use fully in completing my art. Nature and Art are closely related and for us, human, one cannot exist without the other. Nobody will ever clear the Sun, the Water, neither the Sex, neither the Female Body, neither the Vulvas, neither the Dicks, out of my paintings. They are fully integrated and are full part of the human Odyssey.

7. This interview will be published for Turkish readers. Is there a particular aspect of your work, artistic philosophy, or research that you would especially like to share with audiences in Turkey?

Well, unfortunately, I never been to Turkey, but it seems to be in-between some political change for freeing women's rights and in a balance between conservative traditions and access towards more freely democratic States as European Country. I like to salute all the Turkish readers, in hoping that all of them are feeling well and happy with the life they are living. If there are some artists reading this article, I would like to wish them good luck for getting their art to be well known, even if it's a really difficult and harsh choice to choose that way of living. But, as for me, It's the only viable option, the only path, there is absolutely no other way and I enjoy taking it. As my grandfather Maurice used to tell me: "Artists are very important to society because they leave behind them, when they died, a pile of wood larger than the one that was there when they came to birth." I believe that artists are here for a reason, even this mission, to be the witness of our common contemporary life, trying to change things a bit and mainly listen, observe, and report: *"If we have even briefly touched upon beauty, then we will not have come to this Earth in vain."* Jean-Claude Carrière



Portrait of JPS at work #7, Summer 2003, in his studio in Long Island City, Queens, New York, USA, photo by Sachie Kumano.

8. Looking ahead, what questions, ideas, or territories are currently driving your artistic research, and what can we expect from your future projects?

Yes firstly, I like to thank you very much, dear Bengüsu Aleya for your really kind, great, interesting and challenging questions for this new interview, it was a great pleasure doing it and I hope I answered them clearly and that the reader could have some idea about the complexity and the deep meaning of my art works. And if you are having any question, please don't hesitate to contact me.

As for the projects during this year 2026, I started, last fall, a new collaboration with Chrissy & Andrew Moore Art Advisory; located in Edinburgh, Scotland and I hope they will find a way to exhibit my art over there. In the next few days, I'll start working again on a next series of works on paper that I started in 2022: "The Shakti Yoni, Ecstatic Cosmic Dances", a series of unique silkscreen prints on medium size paper (100 x 70 cm). I am also working a lot on writing some texts, editing films and subtitling them in French and in English, luckily, I finished, a few weeks ago, all the editing of the filmed artist lecture I had given on March 13th at the Mulhouse Museum of Fine-Arts, where I had also a huge monogamic exhibition in 2010 (in the full Museum floor). I hope that after this article, maybe some people could be interested in showing my art in Turkey, in Gallery, Contemporary Art Space or Museum, that could be great and challenging, let's hope for it and I am leaving below all the informations to contact me.

I like to thank you all, in wishing you a great day and a beautiful Spring time,
kind regards from France,

Jean-Pierre Sergent, Besançon studio, Sunday June 7th 2026 (text kindly proofread by Johnes Ruta - [Azoth Gallery](#), New Haven, CT, US)

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