

# Interview with French Artist Jean-Pierre Sergent: Art, Sex and Subconscious

French artist [Jean-Pierre Sergent](#) creates work that mines deep into the human mind, questioning Western society's relationship with nature and the Self. Enthused by the cultures of the East, Sergent uses the female figure in his work, which oscillates between cave art and pop art aesthetics. In preparation for his exhibition at [MAG Art Fair](#) in Montreux, we catch up with Sergent to discuss his practice and the spiritualism behind his work.



*Jean-Pierre Sergent in front of 'Mayan Diary', 3.15 x 6.30 m, opera scenography for La Traviata, at the Opéra-Théâtre of Besançon, France, 2007 | Photo by Yves Petit, Courtesy the artist.*

Kayleigh Moreno: Artistic practice generally begins very early in life, so let's start with your childhood to get a feel for your background. What was your childhood like growing up in [France](#)?

Jean-Pierre Sergent: I grew up being happy as a child, nothing specific to report except that I suffered from strong asthma attacks, which had probably forced me to reinvent a world where suffering was banned, a sort of a place where you get the freedom to breath, dream and live in harmony with the surroundings and with also a big expectation for beautiful things. Today I find this beauty in all the art works I am interested in. I also spent a lot of time with my grandfather, who was a really kind and smart man and who honoured nature a lot. So even today, as I went for a canoe trip in the Doubs river this morning, (which traces the border between France and [Switzerland](#)), I could still feel my grandfather's surrounding presence, as this was the place where he lived.

I also have to say that this part of France where I live now is really beautiful, as you can find mountains, lakes and rivers here, and the landscape is gorgeous. Spending time in nature really gives me a lot of inspiration for my work. Not necessarily some images, but most likely the sensation and the feeling of natural forces and energies.

KM: You started out studying architecture; what made you decide to change your path and become a fine artist?

JPS: Yes, I studied architecture for about a year and then decided to go to art school. I was not totally happy with the architectural practice, in which I had the feeling I had to deal with too many restraints. To become an artist was more promising as I could be more inside the creative process of art and life, in that sense having more freedom to express myself.

KM: Do you think that your architectural background has played a role in your use of unconventional painting surfaces?

JPS: At first, I thought I had totally wasted my time in this short year of studies, but in the long run I realised that it gave me some skills for drawing, [and] to visualise exhibition spaces. Also, I learned a new way to pay attention to how things are built and connected together, as well as how humans interact with their architectural surroundings. Now I can see the importance of the geometrical structures of my Plexiglas painting constructions (square Plexiglas panels mounted on the wall, side by side), which is the way I display my work in monumental mural installations. They are built like a wall of tiles and therefore could be seen as an

architectural plastic realisation.



*Installation of the show Nature, Cultures, The World's Origins, Farm of Flagey, Musée Courbet, France, 2012 | Courtesy the artist.*

KM: Your work on sex and rituals, can you talk a bit about what you are trying to convey with these works.

JPS: In fact I had a gallery show last year in Besançon, which is my home town actually, of large works on paper and decided to entitle it **SEX & RITUALS / WORKS ON PAPER**. Those two themes are really the subjects that have been nourishing the content of my art since I decided to exit abstract practice.

Firstly, sex is the main common thing shared and done by all human beings on earth and most animals. It is at the same time cultural, as every culture approaches sexual practices differently; this goes from Japanese bondage, to religious constraints, to seeing sex as only a way of reproducing the species without any pleasure and a lot of guilt. It's also of course nature as the primary essence of life, the first ever energy who created us. Also the libido through desire is maybe the most imaginative,

poetic and powerful force to help us (the human race) get connected.

Secondly, rituals. I noticed that a lot of iconographies coming from ancient civilisations — tribal, archaic, or prehistorical — were mostly those of rituals. All the scenes show priests, gods or goddesses regenerating the earth, the plants, the cycles of the sun and the moon, but also the rituals are reactivating births of the new generations throughout desire and love. As well as all the images from those cultures explaining how to transcend the absence of the dead, how to heal the sick, how to arouse desire, how to connect with ancestors.



*View of the Sex & Rituals exhibition in Besançon, 2013, France. Courtesy the artist.*

KM: Would you agree that your work is quiet pop art? Would you say you're trying to represent this bombardment of advertising we have in our society with the fact that nowadays sex sells?

JPS: I would rather say no, not at all to this question. Even if at first glance you can see some links and connections between my work and the 1960s pop artists, because I am using the same techniques as they were using, the images silkscreened on panels, but the images I use are not already famous

iconic images, but images that I deeply seek into what I am cherishing the most, which are the way to reconnect, throughout cultures or some practices nowadays. On top of that, to work with strong sexual content doesn't help me to sell more paintings; on the contrary, it's more a disadvantage. Also in advertising, sex images are there to sell something other than themselves, objects like cars, apartments, yoghurts, sodas and so on, but to buy an explicit sexual scene by itself as the only subject matter, is quite disturbing for the buyer. That's the main reason why Koons had chosen to produce puppies instead of ceramics showing himself having sex with the Cicciolina!

In fact, in my work, I am recuperating, recycling and transforming all those short-lived sex-porn web garbage-images into art.



*Mayan Diary # 31, acrylic silkscreened on Plexiglas, 1.40 x 1.40 m, 2008.*

*Courtesy the artist.*

KM: Your works are more than just sexualised illustrations; they delve much deeper into the social condition of the modern world, would you agree with this?

JPS: Yes you are totally right. I am trying to represent in my works some different way of thinking, different way of approaching colours and bodies, sex and death. Today everybody feels so disconnected from nature, that for someone living in a big city or even a small one, his only way to feel connected is through sex, that is the last and ultimate place where you can have a chance to feel again interwoven to the body of someone else and to experience pleasure, life cycles, love and a glance at universal bliss.

KM: Which artist or artists would you say have inspired your work the most?

JPS: In point of fact and surprisingly, it's not the artists exhibited in museums and galleries that inspire me the most now. I am mostly influenced by all works done before artists even had a name, and their works were at that time totally anonymous and sometimes collective, as in all the prehistoric cave paintings, the beautiful mural paintings from the temples and tombs in ancient Egypt, Mexico or India. During my formative years, I was influenced by the following artists: Filippino Lippi, Cranach, Brueghel, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, El Greco, Vermeer, Goya, Gauguin, Picasso, Morandi, Matisse, Rothko, Newman, Pollock, Klein, Beuys...



*View of the exhibition, Nature, Cultures, The Worlds Origin's, 3.15 x 6.30 m, 2012, Farm of Flagey, Musée Courbet, France.*

KM: How would you describe your work in your own words?

JPS: First, we have to put things in perspective: the art world and, to an extent, the world as a whole, is no longer a post-industrial, postmodern, or post-religious one, but I think it has become today a post-cultural world. In a few words, all that used to be known by mankind was given and transmitted to us by the cultures we all belonged to and transmitted by the ancestral teachings & traditions. Now all we need to know in order to survive will be used by contemporary computers in the purpose of making money and buying consumer goods, being 'happy' without any concern for our surrounding social environment. So the cultural links so important at one time are no more necessary and become just affective ones, that you can choose to use them or not. And of course as people are lazy, they prefer to use the channels of technology instead of the cultural ones, which take much more time to understand and to practise, but which can ground us deeper, with the help of poetry, painting, literature, music, dance, theatre, and spiritual practices, to all human beings, the earth, and the universe.

My work delves deeply into the human subconscious in order to show and remember all the different cultures I am interested in and which were so important (for those who disappeared) at some historical point. My paintings, as an art object, speak directly not only to the mind but also to the guts, the sex, to everyone's body energy as long as they are not blocked by morality, religious beliefs or social constraints. My work in that purpose is like a tool, like a can opener or a hammer, forcing the viewer to experience within his own body a kind of trance, an initiatory trip and to merge himself into a world of pleasures and colours without pain and suffering. But there, in that place, in that sacred ebullating area, still remain the necessary conflicts, the mixing, between life and death, beauty and ugliness, stillness and energies, flowers and harsh obscenities, straight geometrical patterns and the arousal of eccentricity of life sexuality into the universal demiurgic chaos.

*By Kayleigh Moreno*