

Interview between artist Jean-Pierre Sergent and museum director Xiwen Yang about the exhibition "Eros Regenerating Life" at the Ailleurs Arts Museum in Shenyang, China | Besançon studio | June 18th 2019 - Download the PDF - [Watch the video](#)

XW: Hello Jean-Pierre!

JPS: Hello Xiwen!

XW: I am very happy to see you every summer! And since we started working together three years ago, I hope that what I do to promote your work is fine with you? What do you think of that?

JPS: Of course, first of all, it's very good to see you! It's great to see each other every year! And, it is also a great honor and privilege to be able to show my work in China! Of course! And you do an excellent job there, because you make my work known not only to the Chinese public, but also to the Chinese artists who come to my studio every summer! So it's a great seeing each other, it's a great cultural exchange really!

XW: So next month, on July 13th, we will have a big solo exhibition of your work at the Ailleurs Arts Museum in Shen Yang where we will present about sixty works by you: large paper works, medium and small formats as well. Currently my team of curators is preparing all this and together we have chosen to ask you these seven questions to you:

JPS: Yes, of course!

XW: So I came to ask you these questions. We talked a lot about your work with the whole team and they are all challenged by the many images of nature present in your work, there are also elements on ancient human civilizations?

JPS: Yes, yes!

XW: And they're very curious about the relationship you have between these two elements?

JPS: The relationship between nature and culture?

XW: Yes!

JPS: To talk about that, I have to say that I lived in New York for a long time! So I have been confronted with "thousands of civilizations", both in museums and in my personal life. I have met so many people from different worlds... and I think one culture can't bring us everything. That's why I like to talk about ancient cultures because often contemporary thought is restrictive in relation to spirituality. We know that there are many cultures that are interested in spirituality; each has its limits, everything is relative, as they say! By working with other civilizations with different ways of thinking, I can open my mind and for an artist, it is essential to be open to the world! In addition, I also want to mention the problem of all these traditional civilizations disappearing. On a daily basis, thousands of languages or dialects disappear every year and thousands of images also disappear, since rituals are no longer practiced. Many of the images used in my work were images of rituals, practiced to regenerate life and nature. Exactly, we're returning back to nature, we'll talk

about it again! And when you see what is happening in nature, with this ecological disaster, it really raises big questions. And I mean my love for butterflies, for trees, for leaves... for the sun and it scares me that all this will disappear before our eyes!

XW: All right! At the same time, you answer my second question, we also talked a lot about your different experiences, your different approaches. First, when you were young, then in Montreal and New York. You are very interested in Mayan culture and other Amerindian cultures?

JPS: It so happens that thanks to my wife Olga, who is of Colombian origin, we have often travelled to Mexico and also to Guatemala, and of course it is an emotion to find ourselves in front of this amazingly colorful multitude of clothes... And indeed, all tropical countries have this vivid sense of color! So it has brought a lot to my work by regenerating it! Because in France, I remember that when I was at the École des Beaux-Arts, the only colorful harmonies I liked were: brown, white and black! And so I had to learn to love color (it is not for granted), precisely by travelling to Mexico and also in front of the works that are in the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico, these Aztec, Mayan, Olmec or Toltec works have a power that is quite rare and that I have never seen elsewhere! What I'm looking for is the vital energy in a way! Where to find the vital energy? personally I no longer feel it in European paintings and so I am really going to look for it somewhere and this energy must correspond to my own energy! And also to my sexuality, because it's certainly important: Energy = Sexuality = Life! That's it! That's it!

XW: Okay, so it's all came from that moment, all those questions?

JPS: These are species of revelations that are accumulating! Yes, over the course of my life!

XW: All right!

JPS: Also as I often talk about it, I had the chance to experiment with shamanic trances, so inevitably in these trances there is an energy that we don't meet elsewhere!

XW: I don't know if you also know the shamanic culture of origin of my city, it's very strong too!

JPS: Of course I know there are some in Korea, China and Tibet as well of course! Exactly! Exactly!

XW: Because I know a musician who is inspired by this, it's very strong!

JPS: It's very important but unfortunately, these cultures are disappearing, since temples are being destroyed, monks are being killed, everything is being destroyed! We really need architecture, we need places, we need sacred places, and above all an untouched Nature! Since we destroy everything; nothing matters anymore today, it is difficult to continue with these practices but also to feed the collective unconscious! Because I think our collective unconscious is getting poorer every day somehow!

XW: So it created a very strong connection with your work? That's how it accumulated?

JPS: That's accumulated, yes, yes! But I have always been fascinated by the works made by shamans, but until you experience the trance, you can't know

what they're talking about!

XW: You are also reading a lot?

JPS: Yes, of course!

XW: Because you travel much less than before?

JPS: That's it! Yes, yes, it's true! But that's life! You know Homer says in the Odyssey that the Gods have decided not to give everything to men at the same time: health, wealth, glory and love! That is, there are times in life when you can travel, others less so! What is important is to stay curious and be happy with what you are doing! This is very important!

XW: There is also a main question, we would like to know how you would like to talk about your work, how you would like to talk about it? What message would you like to send to the people watching you? Or who follow you on Facebook or on your website? What would you like to express most of all in all your work?

JPS: Yes, it's the vital energy! It's really a testament to the beauty of life! It's pretty amazing! Yes, I am really fascinated by life, by beauty! That's really the most important thing! There's the color too! There are many very bright colors in my work!

XW: That's right! Okay! Okay! The other question also, it's curious, there are a lot of influences from Japanese culture in your work? Especially about eroticism?

JPS: Yes!

XW: I know that when we met, you talked about it during your exhibition at the Besançon Biennale and so after that, I too realized that it was quite difficult for the public to understand such a work! As your work is really intriguing?

JPS: Of course!

XW: People ask me a lot of questions about it, what do you think? Despite this problem, you continue this work on eroticism and every year I see the evolution of your new work!

JPS: Well, I keep working on the subject of eroticism because, it's not that I'm provocative but nevertheless, around me, I feel that people are completely closed about it! Sexuality is a liberation! And anyway, real art must be transgressive somewhere! I don't feel this transgression, because I like doing this kind of work, and that's why it's important! It's true that sometimes it raises questions! But it's mostly about selling, it's quite complicated to sell this kind of work! But it doesn't matter, I continue on this because it's really the subject I'm passionate about! Because it's not only the sexuality I'm talking about, but it's also mystical ecstasy and it's ecstatic trance, if you want! It's like a shamanic trance, of course, sexuality! It happens sometimes, it's Kundalini! It's Shakti! The feminine energy... all that! When you go to India you see it in temples, there are erotic postures with gods copulating like that! It's really honoring life! I suffer a lot in the West because life is so repressed through religions. And all monotheistic religions have violently repressed sexuality, it's quite strange! It's quite strange! I really want to be beyond these problems of religion and morality. I think I'm into something universal! A universal energy!

XW: Yes!

JPS: Energy does not question itself! It just is!

XW: Yes, but is Japanese manga quite new? It's not like you're inspired by Van Gogh, for example?

JPS: Yes, yes!

XW: The ancient Japanese culture?

JPS: Yes, but unfortunately, I have never been to Japan. I have had several Japanese friends and of course I know a little bit about this culture. I really like Zen Buddhism, which is also present in China. I read a lot of books on Buddhism, because I'm interested! There are lots of shapes of voids! Lots of forms of consciousness, which we don't have in the West. So that brings me a lot! Yes! But getting back to manga, it is mainly the obscene texts from manga that I use! But if not, the images I get are from popular pornography! Sometimes I work on bondage! It's questioning people, but when I talk about it, I say it's the bond that unties! That is, the man or woman must be in ecstasy in front of the universe!

XW: But when you talk or write about this manga work, do you also want to express beauty?

JPS: Yes, that's it, of course! It's beauty, because there's nothing more beautiful than the face of someone who's in orgasm! Moreover, in the West, it is Christ who is in ecstasy in death. There is the Virgin Mary who is sometimes in ecstasy when breastfeeding Jesus, but she is never in ecstasy when creating Jesus, since he was not created somehow! It's a different concept, it's a problem anyway! I remember, I saw a report on television, about wild animals in Japan and salmon going up the river and at the end, you know! Males throw their sperm into the river and at that very moment, they have that figure of ecstasy! When they go back into the universe, before dying if you want! So even animals It's a little ecstasy before death! There, so even animals have this ecstatic figure by copulating! It's something that goes beyond us, we really enter into the continuity of the species, the continuity of the universe, the big magical karma! We regenerate the world somewhere! In ecstasy!

XW: All right, OK! My second to last question: had you thought or reflected on Chinese culture? To eventually add these elements to your work?

JPS: Yes, of course! But unfortunately I haven't travelled there yet! I have seen beautiful exhibitions of Chinese art at the MET and Guggenheim! And I remember a horse carriage that brings the soul of the dead into the other world; that's an idea I want to develop! There also is the Bi (magico-cosmic) stone circle which is also very interesting! Eternity!

XW: It's complicated!

JPS: Yes, it's complicated! I don't have the tools to work on this subject right now. For example, I am very interested in the I Ching (Tao) with horizontal bars like that (solid and sequenced). Well, then it has to come at some point in my life! Before travelling to Mexico I didn't know Mayan culture at all so it's always encounters that I have to experience, yes of course!

XW: But normally Chinese artists have their own vision, isn't that the same as what you say?

JPS: Yes, that's right!

XW: What is original?

JPS: Yes, it's true, but you can have revelations and the will to talk about it! In front of architecture, in front of a suit, in front of a pattern! You know I work a lot on patterns too...

XW: Well, I'll continue, the last question! We would like to ask you this question: what will be the most positive point of this new exhibition for you?

JPS: For me, it's only positive, because you're showing my work in a museum in China that you just opened; so it's fabulous for me, of course! And besides, you've already taken works on paper, you've framed them! So for me, there is only something positive in this experience. We have to work hard on communication so that I too can share information with people about this exhibition here in France. So that people can know, be interested and talk about it! Even if they unfortunately can't go to the exhibition!

XW: That's it, I also wanted to know, since you can't come, can you imagine the difference between the audiences, because you do a lot of solo exhibitions in Europe, especially recently in Switzerland and France?

JPS: That's it! Yes! Yes!

XW: I think you regularly go to Facebook to see my images where we interact a lot? How do you imagine the museum?

JPS: I see that there are a lot of people, I see that the places are beautiful so it can only be beneficial for both of us! And then we'll see, maybe one day I can go to China? We'll see, it's in the plans as well, of course, gladly! And also to meet a slightly different audience, because I often say it, the French public is a little jaded about art! We saw at our last exhibition last year in Arbois, we didn't have many people! But if there are young Chinese people who are interested in art, it's also good!

The problem is that my work is aimed at people who are over fifty years old, because talking about spirituality and understanding it requires having had a whole life journey already! Yes, of course! And when you're young, maybe you can take an interest? But we haven't experienced it! Because the experience of the body is important, to be able to understand the work of art! That's what you have to understand too. That's what I always say: to make an artist takes twenty years, plus twenty years afterwards! Because you have to go to school, then forget what you learned in school. It's a life story, except for a few artists like Basquiat, who were very, very early! But most artists as for example Mark Rothko, who used to paint like Picasso before making his abstract paintings! And then after twenty or thirty years, we make an original work! That's what Picasso said: "You copy, you copy, you copy and then one day you miss a copy and you make an original!" That's it, you really have to find your own voice, not only for the artist but also for the spectator. It's a parallel process! And despite all the culture we may have, we can take a lot of art and art history classes! But until we have had a physical revelation, because art and painting is what it is: it is a physical revelation! You really have to feel in your body: wow! There's something that upsets you, that pierces you and takes you to another place! So that's it, don't despair. In my work, there are also many ways to get in! One can like the color, one can like the shape, that's it!

XW: You know that right now in China, there are two Picasso exhibitions!

JPS: Oh yes!

XW: Right now!

JPS: Oh well yes, that's great!

XW: So it is also progressing in China! As we did your first exhibition three years ago, in Shanghai....

JPS: Yes, yes!

XW: Remember? It was a small solo exhibition with small formats on paper and for this new exhibition this summer, it will be a big step forward!

JPS: Yes, I imagine so! And it will be in several rooms?

XW: Yes, in six rooms!

JPS: Oh yes, fantastic!

XW: There will be many important people from the City and also a lot of art aficionados who are still following our exhibitions! And the exhibition will last two months!

JPS: Oh well!

XW: So it will be a great exhibition and during the summer holidays!

JPS: Oh, beautiful!

XW: That means there will be a lot of traffic!

JPS: Oh, I'm really happy about that, yes!

XW: It may be a good time to say a few words to the audience in Shenyang where so far few people know you, but thanks to this exhibition...

JPS: Yes!

XW: Maybe a lot of people will know you and be familiar with your work! We're starting, it's like a start!

JPS: Oh yes!

XW: Can you talk in front of the screen and say something for them?

JPS: Yes of course: Welcome to the show! As they say in New York! Welcome to the exhibition! It is a great pleasure to exhibit thanks to my friend Xiwen in this beautiful museum! And don't be afraid of art! Because it necessarily questions us, as we said earlier. It raises questions, but you have to go with respect for yourself and for the artist, because the artist is not there to invalidate you, to bore you, it is there precisely to enlighten you and to reveal all these magnificent energies that comes from life! And I often talk about that: you really have to have a free mind to see art! And if you spend your time on your smartphone, you'll never really see a work of art! You really have to spend an hour or two sometimes! It's like a cosmic revelation! It takes time! And, also it's like a dream, you have to accept to be subjugated and carried away by the work, to let yourself go, that's it! To let it go, as they say, is very important in front of a work of art! And well, it will be a pleasure to meet you soon!

XW: Yes of course, I also hope soon, maybe one day for the second or third exhibition!

JPS: Oh, yes, I would love to!

XW: And then you will come to China to share your work with us!

JPS: Yes, and we could also present a large wall installation of paintings on Plexiglas!

XW: I'm waiting for that too! Thank you so much! Thank you!

JPS: Thank you Xiwen, thank you again and be happy my friends! It's important!

XW: Great! Thank you! Keep up the good work and we'll see you next month when I get back!