

## **Interview between artist Jean-Pierre Sergent and Thierry Savatier (art historian, world-famous specialist of Gustave Courbet) | 5 Parts | Besançon studio | July 29th 2019**

### **1/5: INFLUENCES & FIRST WORK (France-Montreal) - [Watch the video \(in French with English subtitles\)](#)**

Jean-Pierre Sergent: Hello dear friend Thierry, it's a great pleasure to welcome you to the workshop. We had this interview project for a very long time and you came to the region to give lectures on Gustave Courbet. We are really very happy to welcome you at the workshop today. Thank you for coming. We will start these interviews quietly and I will answer your questions as much as possible!

Thierry Savatier: Yes, thank you Jean-Pierre! In fact, we've had this interview project for quite some time now and I wanted to ask you, it's true, a number of questions, probably with an art historian's approach, that is to say, I'm still very interested in chronology. It is a little bit about this type of orientation that I would like to ask you, in particular, starting with everything concerning your training, your first works, your influences too! There's a question that everyone always asks themselves when it comes to an artist, it's that we consider that an artist is someone a little particular and we wonder how one becomes an artist. So that's my first question: for you, how did you decide to become an artist one day?

JPS: It's not really a decision, it's a life path I think. Yes it's a path of life! It's not a decision, but you still need a lot of will to continue working as an artist, of course! And it's what fills me with joy and happiness. That's really what gives me the most happiness in life, being an artist!

TS: So, a path of life! So there was a time in your life, in your youth, when you thought that was the direction you wanted to go in?

JPS: At first I hesitated a bit. In my teenage years, as a young man, between writing and painting. Because both seemed important to me!

TS: We'll talk about writing later!

JPS: Okay, yes!

TS: Because you do have a whole part of your activity that consists of writing about your art, writing about art!

JPS: Yes!

TS: It's very important because a lot of artists don't do it! That's true!

JPS: Yes.

TS: And during your training, what were your main influences, the artists who influenced you, the movements and so on?

JPS: Yes, I'll always remember: I was on my farm in Charquemont and at that time I was breeding horses so I was out in the nature every day and I lived day and night with the animals. We had bought a book with my friend Sophie, it was *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein* by Marguerite Duras and on the cover of the book there was a painting by Mark Rothko. And suddenly it was like a revelation: I thought, of course, these are positive, negative, neutral energies; or masculine, feminine and God! So you can also discover painting through a picture, a postcard, it can come like that! Well, and then I had other revelations, maybe we'll talk about it in more detail... In South America and Egypt... But the first click, to want to be an artist, is a bit like that, it's to talk about spirituality, about the vertical and elevating approach of man.

TS: Yes, so you mentioned Egypt. We see influences in your work, starting with pre-Columbian, Egyptian, Japanese and Indian art, which is quite unusual for a French artist. What are the reasons that led you to look for sources of inspiration there?

JPS: Yes, well, I'm French between quotation marks, I'm also American! So I acquired this open-mindedness by going to live in the United States, there's no doubt about it!

TS: Yes, that's where you discovered these different arts, for some primitive arts, for other ancient arts etc..

JPS: Yes, yes!

TS: So I have another question that has to do with Japanese manga, because you use it a lot. You incorporate them in your works. You know very well when you look at an engraving of the nineteenth century Japanese Kuniyoshi, Hokusai etc., you know very well that you're dealing with Japanese art, there's no ambiguity about that, but as far as manga is concerned, do you consider that it's a Japanese art or that it's an art possibly mixed with, for example, Western cartoons?

JPS: Yes, of course, it's comics, yes!

TS: Yes!

JPS: But the Egyptians were already doing comics and so were the Mayans! Because they mixed image and text. The Maya, on all the bas-reliefs in the temples, there are always figures with images and writings... It's quite old, we rediscovered this in the twentieth century, with pop artists like Warhol, Rosenquist and Lichtenstein, but it already existed! If you go to Egypt, in the tombs, it's mixed up: the writing is mixed up with the text.

TS: With the text, yes!

JPS: And for me that's very important, because of course, image and text don't work the same way in the brain. So it's more balanced to use both. And to come back to this theme of manga: I'm influenced by it, but I mostly recover erotic, trashy, you could say, or obscene texts. Because it should be a humorous trigger; people should laugh in front of my paintings, but most people don't laugh, because well, art is not happy in France, it's a very sad, serious and tragic art!

So in New York, people laugh in front of my paintings, here it's very rare that it happens !

TS: So your first works in the 1980s, are abstract art works and already based on the square? It's very interesting, because the square is the standard form that you adopt today. At the time, it was already based on the square, and when you look at them, it probably had aesthetic links with Barnett Newman, and you practiced this art in the eighties when, at that time, people were already abandoning abstract art for the new figuration! So what motivated you to this abstraction, when the trend was more towards the new figuration?

JPS: Yes, but you know, I've always been a bit out of the market, out of the artistic movements and everything that was going on, because I lived on a farm, I didn't go to Paris very often! So the new extra, I haven't seen it, I've heard about it, but I haven't seen it! And what interested me above all was to acquire, to find this spiritual path in painting. Of which Kandinsky speaks very well in these writings...

TS: Yes!

JPS: Yes, for me and for these American artists like Rothko, Newman or Pollock etc. I think there's a very, very important spiritual dimension that's a little bit (for me) missing in free figuration. But that's my own opinion and I don't want to denigrate anybody's work really.

TS: And when did you reintegrate the figure in your work?

JPS: Yes, I really started that in Montreal, because I had painted a big canvas that was almost three meters by three meters and I stood in front of that canvas for a couple of weeks, it was like a culmination, a completion, the top of what I could do what! And then I said to myself: I can make variations like

many abstract artists do! But I found that abstraction was also a very solitary voice and I probably didn't feel like being alone somewhere! I'm a human being and I'm connected with others. So maybe I didn't have the strength to do an abstract work and I found that I was missing this very dimension of the body, which we'll maybe talk about later?

TS: Yes!

JPS: And that's when I reintegrated sentences, images of women or animals, that's it!

TS: And as far as the support is concerned, are you going to switch from a panel or canvas support to Plexiglas?

JPS: Yes!

TS: So that's something very, very curious because it's a singular choice, there are few artists who work on Plexiglas! What motivated you to choose this medium?

JPS: Actually it was due to a constraint, since it's an anecdote I often tell: I had to work with a gallery in Toronto, the Moos Gallery, and at that time, so in France, I was working on Isorel, but it's a material that's poor (in quotation marks) and acidic, so the works don't last that long, since they deteriorate over time. The director Jerry said to me: Jean-Pierre, I want to work with you, but you have to paint on another medium! So I was annoyed, because I had found my ideal medium: Isorel! And I could make modules out of polyptychs. And so I thought about it long enough and did some tests on PVC, on metal strips, and at one point I found Plexiglas, but at first I was working on Plexiglas as a support material. First it turned out that I painted on the front, then on the back and it became my favourite material and so I'm happy to work on that material now, yes!

TS: Yes, and you don't have any plans to try other supports in the future? Is it really the medium that suits you best?

JPS: So far yes! But if I worked on a larger scale, I would probably have to work with safety glass, but you have to think about one thing, it's that I'm the one who makes things alone (in quotation marks), so I can't print larger formats than that alone and also make large formats in safety glass, it wouldn't be possible in this workshop! There, so I would have to have them made, so at some point, maybe I will change scale if one day I really sell, I could think about changing scale, but for now, I claim this artisanal tradition of the artist in his workshop who carries out all the steps of the work from A to Z!

TS: So in 1991, you leave France to move to Montreal!

JPS: Yes!

TS: So was this choice motivated by the fact that you felt that French society no longer offered artists the conditions they needed to flourish?

JPS: I think so today in hindsight, but I didn't think so then. "Il faut aller voir" as they say, so I went and saw. No, I just followed my life's path, I followed my luck what! Yes!

TS: It's a spontaneous choice practically?

JPS: That's it! Yes! The director of the Moos Gallery said, "- Yes, I want to work with you, but you've got to come and live in Canada!" I said, "- Wait, I've got seventeen horses on my farm, that's a lot!" Then I thought about it for a while, I said OK, I'm leaving and then I left! Really without thinking too much and really somebody would have come to my farm some time before and told me that I was going to live in New York one day, I had never even imagined that was possible! So in life, there are always new paths opening up, that's what's fabulous, I love it!

TS: And once you arrive in Montreal, what will be your artistic lines of research?

JPS: Well, that's open, firstly because of the size of the space (for the format), which we don't have so much in Europe anymore, since we're a bit closed off from each other, and secondly because of the open mentality (to do the work we want to do). Both in a positive sense, that is to say that everything is allowed, and in a negative sense, that is to say that no one cares! But now it's happened in France too, twenty years later! It's caught up with me in France. I mean, French society has changed a lot, the ties between us are gradually breaking down, so that shocked me a bit. But what opened my mind was also to do what I wanted to do, without having any critical value judgement, because we know very well that in France, judgement is quite heavy, even murderous.

TS: Quite heavy, yes!

JPS: That's it, yes!

TS: And so that's where you choose the mode of expression of screen printing? Because it's true that even on Plexiglas panels, you could have chosen paint? What's the reason why you choose screen printing, which is still a technique that requires equipment and so on. And which is perhaps not as easy to implement as oil or acrylic paint?

JPS: Absolutely yes! Well it's always a happy coincidence as they say, I used to live right next door to a shop where they printed T-shirts. At the time, I reproduced images by photocopying them and then pasting them into my paintings or behind Plexiglas. And at one point I thought: maybe it would be nice to reproduce them by silk-screening them! Because by making a colour photocopy, I could have a blue, a yellow, a red, but I couldn't have any shades, whereas with screen printing, I have the exact shade I want! So it's a freedom with shape and colour somewhere! After the screen printing screen defines a dimension, but if you want to print bigger, you take a bigger screen!

TS: Yes, it's more flexible!

JPS: That's it, whether it's photocopies or transfers.

## **2/5: LIFE AND WORKS FROM NEW YORK - [Watch the video \(in French with English subtitles\)](#)**

TS: So two years later, after you moved to Montreal, you move to New York. Was New York a city that offered more facilities for an artist than Montreal?

JPS: Yes, it was the city of artists when I was there. That's true! We were all going to buy our supplies at Pearl Paint (on Canal Street), it's a paint store that was five floors high with very competitive prices and it was artists who held the shelves... It's a city made for artists, there are so many galleries, gallery owners, important people from the art world. Everybody was passing through at that time! Maybe a little less now, I don't know? Really it was the place to be and I don't regret it at all, because it kind of gave me an international dimension.

TS: So you stayed in New York until 2005, during those twelve years, what were the links you kept with France? Did you come back from time to time, did you follow the French art scene a little bit, through the press or something else?

JPS: No, not at all, the French art scene didn't interest me at all! I wasn't interested in the French art scene from there! But, of course, I came back to see my family once a year to see my grandfather and my parents, my family was here so I was happy to come back to France. I came back to see my roots and nature too! Speaking of that, I wrote a little text that I wanted to read to you...

TS: Yes of course!

JPS: Because it's important to say what happened for me in New York, so I'm going to quote this excerpt from my Notes: "My time in New York was a revelation to me, an initiation, a becoming... A bit as if I had previously been

incomplete, underdeveloped, pretentious and stupid (I don't want to insult anyone, of course! That's what I thought.) Like those negative films that are revealed in photographic baths or those botticellian, virginal, impenetrable, undefiled virgins who suddenly and brutally discover the ecstasy of sexual rapture..." That is to say that for me New York has really been a revelation: so much on the order of sexuality, art and spirituality. I really became someone else there! I acquired another dimension there! And it's this dimension that I wanted to talk about.

TS: Yes, and so this city of New York, which is indeed abounding, had replaced Paris from the end of the Second World War, can we say that?

JPS: Yes, absolutely!

TS: Had replaced Paris as an artistic city, so that's what attracted you for sure as well?

JPS: Of course!

TS: While they were in New York, precisely in this artistic milieu, your most striking encounters?

JPS: I will say on a personal level, it's my wife Olga, who is of Colombian origin and we had a really good time together, very, very strong and we had the chance to travel together to Mexico and Guatemala. And professionally, it was the meeting with Mr. Leo Castelli, who was the director of the Castelli Gallery, who made all the Pop Art artists known worldwide, such as: Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg, everybody... Andy Warhol, all of them. And when I met him, (really, I called him and he received me)... I can't say that he became a friend, but he became a reference and a support and he was someone who had this simplicity and this great happiness to be with artists, for him Art was really essential! And to have had the chance to make this beautiful meeting, he was a little bit like my grandfather! My grandfather had experienced both world wars, when he was born (in 1907), at that time, there was no telephone, there were no cars and he had an innate sense of right things. Sometimes he would say of someone: "You are thinking all wrong!" and today I think we all are "All wrong!" That is to say that we no longer know how to live together, with nature with everything and I think that Mr Castelli was someone like that too, yes!

TS: And did you work with him?

JPS: Unfortunately no, because at one point I had gone to see him to show him my work (I was in Montreal at that time) and he asked me: "For how much do you sell this painting?" I told him about \$800 and he said: "You know, a big gallery can't work with you, because that doesn't cover the cost!" And of course, there's this problem that's tenfold today, we'll maybe talk about it later,

but there's always this problem of the right selling price of the artwork!

TS : Yes, it's true that we will have the opportunity to tackle the art market. So as you mentioned Latin America, the geographical proximity of New York allowed you to travel there, how did you discover in particular the pre-Columbian arts?

JPS: We had the chance to travel to Mexico City, with my friend Olga, also to Oaxaca, Yucatán and Puebla, where I bought those masks that you can see behind us in the studio and it was a true revelation because I had never seen such strong art works anywhere else!

TS: Yes!

JPS: And also in the pyramids of Uxmal and Chichén Itza... And also all the indigenous populations that are the Mayas. When you go to Chiapas, there are a lot of indigenous people who remained, who were not exterminated like in North America by the Westerners! So there is still about a third of the population that is still indigenous. And so, it gives an important and different energy from what we feel in Europe!

TS: So it's true that when we talk about Latin America and energy, we always tend to refer to Antonin Artaud!

JPS: Yes, of course!

TS: Antonin Artaud went to Mexico in 1936 to visit the Tarahumaras and it was presented to him as an initiatory journey, and he said he wanted to look for, and I quote: "A new idea of man." Was it also your goal to look for a new idea of man in Latin America?

JPS: It wasn't my goal, but that's what I found there! That's what I found!

TS: Yes!

JPS: That's it, it's a match, a connection!

TS: It's a discovery due to chance in a way?

JPS: Well, if chance exists, yes! It would be more like a coincidence!

TS: A coincidence! So Artaud has some very interesting quotes about his experience; for example, he says: "The rationalist culture of Europe has gone bankrupt and I came to the land of Mexico to look for the bases of a magical culture (the term is interesting) that can still spring from the forces of the Indian soil." When he says that, he is clearly defining a process that will turn



his life upside down, but did you feel the same need in the end? A West whose culture was failing and a possibility to find a kind of intellectual regeneration?

JPS: Of course, yes! Yes! Spiritual as well!

TS: Yes!

JPS: That is to say that this relationship to the Earth, to Nature, to the Sun, to the Cosmos... They were still making human sacrifices to regenerate the Sun God! That's pretty strong!

TS: Yes!

JPS: Well, I'm not defending that at all, but as I often talk about in my interviews, they made offerings to the flowers, to the flower gods, to the rain gods! It's a respect for the whole world. Whereas our current approach is completely upside down, that is to say that we destroy and enslave everything: flowers, trees, rivers, everything is polluted, everything is destroyed. We use everything! And so their approach was diametrically opposed. So Artaud undoubtedly found this approach going towards the world, whereas we (occidentals) do the opposite, we are destroying the World. But you're talking about Antonin Artaud, he's an author I particularly appreciate, I love Héliogabale or the crowned anarchist and his book on Mexico is very important! Afterwards, people often use the term magic, like Lévi-Strauss with his magical thought (*pensée magique*), for me this term of magic displeases me because we think that it is something which would be in the field of magic precisely, which would be outside the world, a particular identity. I think it's more in the realm of knowledge. It's not magic in the literal sense. You see, the shamans learn for twenty years to understand how the vibrations of the energy of the trees and of nature work, do you understand? That's a knowledge to me! For us it sounds magical, because: Whao! It's amazing! It's a term that we commonly use, but sometimes, it bothers me a little bit this term of magic, but hey, we can't use other words, unfortunately in the West, we don't have other words! For me, it's a different reality, it's like quantum mechanics! It's another level of reality!

TS: So it's interesting, you just talked about shamans and other realities. When Artaud goes to Mexico, so he goes to the Indians, he experiences the peyolt, this little cactus that allows him to go to another world.

JPS: Yes!

TS: And on your side, do you talk a lot in your texts about shamanic trance?

JPS: Yes!

TS: So, I'm interested and intrigued, what were those shamanic trance texts about?

JPS: A shamanic trance is a shamanic trance! That is to say that you leave with your spirit in a second or higher state of consciousness!

TS: Yes!

JPS: That's what people feel when they're on drugs, but I did it under hypnosis.

TS: Under hypnosis?

JPS: That's it, under hypnosis! Yes!

TS: With I can imagine a specialist?

JPS: Yes, exactly!

TS: And who undoubtedly also had this orientation towards a transfer to an artistic world?

JPS: Yes, that's it! It's the artistic world, the world of poetry, it's the world of shamans, it's the opening to the energy of the World somehow! The understanding, the fusion with the energy of the World!

TS: And that was in New York and not in Latin America?

JPS: Yes in New York, I had the chance to meet this beautiful person!

TS: And how did these trance-like moments transformed your approach to creation?

JPS: It allowed me to access a fluidity in my work. Because I have to say things clearly, painters do work that is completely frozen! That's what I name a "window painting"! But in trance, there are no windows, no limitations! That is to say that it is open everywhere in the cosmos! It is a multidimensional and spiritual opening!

TS: Yes!

JPS: And so my work, I hope at least, has this multidimensional dimension. That is to say that I can dare to show a Buddha next to an erotic text or next to a Mayan ritual! I can mix everything and that's what happens also in the trance, it's this perpetual, endless mixing... You transform yourself continuously into a whale, you transform yourself into water, you transform yourself into the sun... You merge endlessly, it's a perpetual merging, from the

beginning of the trance to the end of the trance: you merge, you transform yourself; you merge, you transform yourself! And then you also have the animal spirits guiding you, it's a very, very strong experience.

TS: Yes, so you create in New York regularly, at the beginning of the 2000 years, you go to exhibit your art in galleries and Cultural Centers etc. What was the reception of your work by the public or the press?

JPS: Yes, I think my work was well received in New York, I think better than in France. Although my gallery owner in SOHO, Éric Allouche, said to me : "Oh the Americans don't understand anything about your work!", but they don't have any aprioris, whereas in France I am confronted against a strong systematic negative apriori of the public, which doesn't respect my work at all, there is an incredible gap ! So I like the New York public better, I don't know the public in Texas or anywhere else!

TS: Yes!

JPS: And the New York audience... And most of all, they have this humour and this joy, they're not impressed by all the European culture, like we are in here with the art in the museums! I would quote Bonnard who said, "The best things into museums, are there windows!" And so our culture is completely museified, ossified, sclerosed in France, yes! It's terrible! Our culture is sterile, there's no energy left in Art! That's what I'm saying, but maybe I'm wrong? Whereas in New York, we don't have this finality of art which must be art with a capital A, or culture with a capital C! They don't care, it doesn't matter!

TS: I had been struck in the United States to see a big difference between an American elite who have a very developed knowledge of art, who collect and so on. And then the middle class, who have no interest in art, who have no idea about it... And I had asked this question to American students at New York University, who had said to me: "Yes, but in France, you have access to art one by one, through free art for example, or through reduced rates for young people, whereas in the United States, if you want to have access to art, you have to pay each time". Do you think that outside of the New York elite, that's exactly...

JPS: Yes, yes I understand!

TS: Do you think that in the United States in general, the artist is considered?

JPS: Yes!

TS: Yes?

JPS: Well outside of New York, excuse me, I was coming back to New York!

Yes, I really don't know? I don't have any experience outside of NY, I didn't go to live in Miami, no! But I felt much more considered in New York than here, (especially as a creator of wealth !) But that's it, that's life!

TS: Yes!

JPS : But to come back to France and the situation of art in general, I think we've now entering a post-cultural society. That is to say that culture is no longer important, whether it's in France, the United States or anywhere else. Maybe in China they are using this cultural side to create a market artificially. Among the first hundred (most expensive) artists on Artprice, there are fifty Chinese artists!

TS: Yes!

JPS: So they arriving into the art market with financial arrangement! Art and the market is another problem, maybe we'll talk about it later on: the function of art and all of that! But is it easier to access art in France? And it's not true! For example at the Metropolitan Museum: You pay what you wish! That is to say that you go in, you pay a dime if you want to pay a dime ! Not all museums are like that, the MOMA is expensive, you have to pay, but there's always one evening a month that's free, Thursday evenings are free! But I didn't feel like that, I don't know, I haven't lived in other parts of the United States!

TS: If you had to take stock of your New York experience today, what would it be?

JS: It's 100% positive!

TS: Yes.

JPS: Yes, I don't regret anything!

TS: And then in 2005, so you leave New York to come back to Franche-Comté, to settle here in Besançon. What motivated this choice? Did you need to find your roots, was it for family reasons or...?

JPS: Yes, it was for a whole range of things, yes, yes! But especially rents were going up all the time in New York.

TS: Yes!

JPS: So it was becoming unmanageable.

**3/5: CREATION PROCESS, BODY & SPIRITUALITIES - [Watch the video \(in French with English subtitles\)](#)**

TS: So now, Jean-Pierre, I would like to talk about the process of creation and then the relationship to the body and spirituality. You've already mentioned this very interesting theme of spirituality several times. I once asked Leonor Fini if when she started a painting she was sure of the final result? And she said, "No, the painting evolves by itself and I never know what the end result will be." Do you think, when you start a big Plexiglas, for example, do you have a clear idea of the result?

JPS: Yes!

TS: Or, can things evolve there as well?

JPS: Absolutely not, on the contrary, I don't know at all what the result will be! Since I'm working upside down and the Plexiglas is masked with an opaque film, so I can't see what's going on there. I see it in reverse, upside down as they say, so before I put the final touch with the brush, I have absolutely no idea, but even when I put it on, I don't know what it's going to look like, so I find out when I finally take the photo of the art work, when the Plexiglas is finished! And that's very, very important for me because often the thought directs the artist's idea towards something like a kind of masterpiece thought, in quotation marks (masterpiece already existing!), and that's not what you have to find at all, you have to find unchained freedom; and total freedom is precisely not knowing what you're doing and being in the flow of the unconscious, my unconscious and the collective unconscious. And what allows this, this great freedom, is not knowing in advance what you are planning to do!

TS: Yes, so when one look at your works, one can feel a real closeness with nature, taken a bit like a mother earth, in a way, a nourishing mother earth and energy source and with which you feel in communion?

JPS: Yes, absolutely!

TS: Quite clearly and does that not explain why Western art, which comes from societies that are much more interested in dominating nature and for that reason the reference is biblical in the Genesis! Don't you think that your influences, which come rather from animist or pantheist cultures, can be explained here? Because there, we respect nature, we live in harmony with nature in these cultures?

JPS: Yes, absolutely, excepted... I was going to say within some artists "friends" paintings, with painters like Brueghel or Bosch...!

TS: Yes!

JPS: Who painted those incredibles hysteric-erotic-cosmic deliriums! In there,

we're in the midst of a total "madness", in quotation marks! As in "magic", in quotation marks! They are artists that I respect deeply. Also Vermeer, I have to say I have a great affinity towards his work, I find that a very important spiritual dimension emerges from his paintings, as an internal prayer. Or with some of Rembrandt's portraits like this one. I don't denigrate all Western thought. There are artists who have been able to find the inner dimension of things and who impress me a lot!

TS: Yes, it's true that when you talk about Brueghel and Bosch, they also interest me a lot! I don't feel this spiritual dimension in Vermeer so much. Maybe I'm wrong? Even if I do really like Vermeer anyhow!

JPS: Yes, yes!

TS: What surprised me a lot, with Vermeer works, was the very small size of his paintings. Whereas with Bosch, on the contrary, or Brueghel, we often have to deal with rather large formats! Yes, the relationship with nature...

JPS: Ah that's essential!

TS: Among the Flemish realists, it's very, very important, yes! So most of your works fit into the square format.

JPS: Yes!

TS: That's your basic form (your module), it's a choice, but they're heavily filled and they leave little room for the void! In comparison, for example, I'm referring to Malevich's White Square on White Background!

JPS: Yes!

TS: What is your main necessity to fill up the surface like that?

JPS: I have nature as a great master! And nature never leaves gaps! Although philosophically speaking, I'm really interested by the void of Buddhism thoughts, which describe eighteen or nineteen forms of emptiness, but I like to fill things, I like the abundance of things in my life! And in nature... as soon as there's a tiny empty space, there's a tree that grows into that space... A grass, a flower that grows, everything is in competition like that, to burst out into the world! It's gushing out to the world somewhere! Yes, I want my painting to be a gushing out to the world!

TS: Yes, it's a beautiful formula, a gushing out to the world!

JPS: Yes, well, yes, that's exactly that!

TS: So, in your interviews that you're recording, like ours, which are available on your website, you insist a lot on this aspect of spirituality and in fact, to make a parallel, religions, for example, that's a very personal opinion, but religions are for me the last place where you can find spirituality. Because I find that religions rely first on power, through injunctions or prohibitions imposed on the faithful, and then on money, because we can see it every year or at least periodically, there are financial scandals in the Vatican, not to mention the American televangelists or certain imams who build colossal fortunes at the expense of their believers. So finally, I don't think there is any spirituality in religions anymore. But, don't you think it's in art that spirituality can survive?

J-PS: That's a big question, the answer is probably yes! Because since the dawn of time, we artists have been talking about this relationship to the world, yes! Way beyond, precisely, social and religious structures. But at the beginning religions started from a good intention; it's always the same sheet, it's always going wrong afterwards!

TS: It got out of hand?

JPS: When you see Pasolini's movies, I saw *Théorème* again the other day and his questioning was often: where to look for and find spirituality nowadays? And the only person in *Théorème*, who finds his spirituality, it is the maid, coming from a peasant background and who at the end of the film goes up to her roof and accesses God! And all the others characters, from the Roman "bourgeoisie", in quotation marks, can no longer access spirituality. And you can feel it today that people can't no longer access their spirituality! Even through religions! Is it definitely lost? Yes or no? So maybe artists can access this infinite part of ourselves that connects us to the world, to the cosmos? perhaps? It's a challenge!

TS: Yes, so you're often saying that spirituality is disappearing, that it has even disappeared in art! And I always think of Jean Carzou's reception speech at the Academy of Fine Arts where he accused Cézanne and Picasso of having more or less destroyed painting, of having been gravediggers of Art! Yet Marcel Duchamp seems to me to have been much more, through his ready-made works, or through his interpretative relativism on which all interpretations are equal, he seems to have been much more radical! At what period in art history can you situate the disappearance of spirituality in Western art?

JPS: Yes, one can say that, in quotation marks, but for me it's the Renaissance, without any doubt!

TS : The Renaissance?

JPS: Because human philosophy then placed man at the center of the world. From that moment when man is located at the center of the world, everything is possible, that's what we can witness today!

TS: Yes!

JPS: Yes, and paintings from that time on, are always portraits, it's this character that's important, it's a bourgeois or noble woman who's important, that is to say that we have left this global, collective world, to enter an individual world. That's what I feel very strongly. For example, before, with the Italians primitive like Giotto or others, we still feel this spiritual dimension!

TS: Yes!

JPS: One can feel it in the colours, in the purity of the colours... It's a bit like the Egyptian frescoes... Where the blues (lapis lazuli) are magnificent, the ochres are magnificent! There's a sense of pureness (immaculacy) and this pureness has nowadays totally disappeared... Maybe with the invention of the oil technique (which darkened the colours) , who knows?

TS: Yes!

JPS: Because fresco is a much simpler and more beautiful art technique! I'm going to digress, but it's like in my painting, it's not oil, it's acrylic paint! The colors are very deep, also with the Plexiglas that magnifies them! For example, I would like to invoke Matisse; for me his most important works were done at the end of his life with his cut-out papers! Because his assistants used to paint bright colours on papers and then he would simply cut them out! And that's of an extreme simplicity, that is to say he just cut out the shape! You have to find simplicity in art, yes! With simplicity, I think you can access to a certain form of spirituality!

TS: So when we look at your works, we are struck by the repetition of certain motifs, such as the bird or the lotus flower, or here one sees it, frieze shapes that sometimes cover the whole painting. Isn't this repetition a way of bringing the viewer into a spiritual trance, a bit like the whirling dervishes that dance in circles in a very repetitive way, or the Hindus or Buddhists who will repeat mantras until they are practically exhausted!

JPS: Yes, it's about the exact same approach, yes. You understood correctly what I want to do! That's exactly that! Through repetition, one can change the brain waves, to access spiritual ecstasy, yes absolutely! Yes, yes!

TS: It's practically a hypnotic approach in a certain way?

JPS: If hypnosis allows access to trance, yes!



TS: Yes, okay!

JPS: Thus, that's a path! Yes, exactly!

TS: So in your works, these serigraphs, you're going to superimpose successive layers, so much so that in reference to Jackson Pollock, I think we could call it a vertical dripping! These images express at the same time and often in the same work, a spirituality and an eroticism that is sometimes very bold, by the way. In our Western cultures, whether we like it or not, strongly influenced by Platonism and Christianity where body and mind are perfectly separated, one being supposedly elevated, the other being supposedly despicable, a hiatus is formed between the superimposition of the two, or at least the fact of putting both on the same level... How did you manage to establish this synthesis, coming from a Western culture?

JPS: Absolutely, yes! Well, that's Pollock's lesson, that is, he was in the middle of his painting, throwing paint on his canvas fixed to the ground!

TS: Yes!

JPS: And he had learned that from the Navajo Indians! That's what the Navajo do: Sand Paintings, drawings on the sand (the ground). They would put the four directions (axis mundi) and then add this relationship to the cosmos, this relationship to the colours. It's really... We can talk about verticality, but I am always painting flat, so I'm working on Earth somewhere! Yes, I'm working on the Earth.

TS: Yes, you work flat like Soulages works flat...!

JPS: Yes, absolutely! That's my body moving into the painting, yes, I'm in painting.

TS: It's quite physical, especially when you use the printing table, I suppose?

JPS: Yes, yes! It's very physical, yes! And sometimes tedious, all the steps of screen printing are interesting, but it's true that cleaning the screens with the Karcher, sometimes I could do without it, but it's good and all the steps are interesting, even the work on the computer to draw all the images, all that's interesting!

TS: So eroticism, as we see it in a certain number of your works, erotic art in our societies which are supposedly free, but where at the end we are confronted with a lot of taboos, especially since a relatively recent time, between religious or right-thinking pressures and then now even with anti-sex feminism. The heirs of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine Mackinnon! For erotic art

it seems more and more difficult to find its room both in galleries and exhibitions and even among collectors! Your works are full of eroticism, what is the reception they have towards the public, the press, even collectors or the art world when you exhibit them?

JPS: That's a very good question and there's a lot to say about that! The press is concerned, in general it goes very well, because they like to talk about my work, except for a few rare exceptions. But for the public and collectors, it's another story... People don't buy my art, because, who buys art in France nowadays? The "bourgeoisie", in quotes! And they can't and won't put my art in their homes! I do have doctor friends who tell me : "Oh I talked to my friends and they can't absolutely not put that in their sitting room." They can't! It's prohibited! And so it becomes very complicated to survive as an artist! I just had lunch yesterday with Heidi, my gallerist from Zurich, who came to pick up some works for my next exhibition in Lugano, at Wopart, a contemporary art fair of works on paper, and she told me: "Jean-Pierre, you're out of reality, we can't sell your works!" She's desperate. Because quite rightly my works speak of this universal vital energy. It's all about sexuality, but in fact, it's the vital energy that concerns everyone of us! And honestly, people are completely dissociated from their bodies, totally apart from it! I have to find people who are a little bit "enlightened" or crazy, in quote marks, who might like my work, like Dr. Gachet with Van Gogh, you hear what I mean! I have to find some people like that! I had found a few people like that in New York and Montreal, but unfortunately in France, I have a hard time finding collectors, that's artists life!

TS: I saw for example that you're exhibiting in China!

JPS: Yes!

TS: But the relationship of the Chinese to eroticism is really very ambiguous. I remember, for example, that the Chinese translation of my essay on the painting: "L'origine du monde", the publisher, so that it could be published, removed all reproductions of the Origin of the World in the book, including in the illustration in the book! So we have a book about a painting, but we never see the painting! How do the Chinese react when they see your works?

JPS: Listen, to tell you the truth, I don't know, because the people who exhibit me there and my friend Xiwen Yang don't communicate much about it, but it's true that I have a big solo exhibition in a Museum in Shenyang, China until September 15th and I don't get many reactions, I don't really know! The works are exhibited there, we'll see! Maybe they're going to burn down the museum or close it down? I don't know, I'm not there, so they won't murder me!

TS: I can imagine!

JPS: But I can't say I do provocative work, Pasolini said he was a agitator, I don't think I'm provocative, I just paint what I want to paint! Somehow I am like the madmans or the deviants, I say what I want to say and then you get it or you don't get it! That's it, I can't deal with the public's judgment, because that would be lying to myself!

TS: So Théophile Gautier in his preface to Mademoiselle de Maupin, we are in the 1830s, it's really very, very early, had laid down the principle of the empowerment of Art. That is to say, of an art which, in the end, should not submit to any judgement, except aesthetic judgement of course, but certainly not to morality, in the sense of the "moraline" (Christian morals) of Nietzsche and Baudelaire had the same idea since, when he wrote to his lawyer during the trial of the Flowers of Evil, that there are two morals: "One for poets or geniuses and one for the little rascals!" The expression is quite amusing! But how do you feel today about the attacks that are being made today against the freedom of creation, especially about erotic art, in the name of contemporary good sense?

JPS: I think yes, we were freer in the sixties and seventies, in terms of art and freedom of expressing ourselves! Freedom is narrowing again, unfortunately. But there are also a lot of contemporary artists who play provocation. So, well, some artists are doing well, even very well, playing provocatively of course! Like Banksy with his self-destructing painting that sold for two million pounds, well, he's playing provocation! So it serves a number of artists. That situation is harming me because I have a lot of trouble presenting my work of course, I've had several exhibitions that have been cancelled because of its erotic content. I can exhibit, but even so, every time I do an exhibition, I say to myself: "Here, I'm going to be able to sell one or two works!" and each time, it's zero paintings sold! So you go back home and say to ourselves, is it worthy continuing being artist?

TS: Yes!

JPS: It's true that you need a lot of resilience and you don't have to believe in yourself too much, but you have to have an incredible desire to live, you need to have an incredible dire desire to live and to be an artist in a society that is so contemptuous of creation! I find that European societies... but some countries have a different attitude and I think that France's attitude towards artists is terribly unfair!

TS: And which countries would be more open in your opinion?

JPS: I would mention Switzerland for example, because they have grants and foundations to help artists. I always remember, to quote what I know from Montreal; all my artist friends had grants at the time that were between ten thousand and thirty thousand dollars a year. So, they are considered as

professionals artists, they do a job, they present their work to the commission, which says: it's a n interesting job, an excellent job, or you are recognized internationally, so they give you thirty thousand dollars to support you! Because one know very well that few artists sell, it's a reality!

TS: Yes, it's a reality!

JPS: I once called my friend Anita in Montreal and told her, I'm not going so well as I'm not selling anything! And she said really surprised and disappointed: "Ah, but there are no grants for artists there in France?" I just said : "No, there aren't any grants for artists here, in France!" So that's a real humongous societal problem. And it's the same for farmers, can you imagine that in this country, a peasant commits suicide every other day! The same for the writers also, you hear them talk, they can't live from their writing anymore! Did it ever existed? Could artists have made a living from their art at a certain time, I don't know! But it's a fundamental question? We should think about it all together. I really don't think that politics can do much about it, it's at the level of personal and collective consciousness! I often have dinners with doctor friends, which are going off-piste skiing and spend ten thousand Euros to go skiing at the North Pole (or buy a Porsche!) and it wouldn't even come to their mind to buy me a small print for five hundred Euros! Nowadays, we're really in a difficult and inextricable situation, even me, I can feel like Artaud's quote: "Exited from life!" Because we are no longer part of society! We're back in the time of Van Gogh and Cézanne! I saw the other day the film about Cézanne (Cézanne et moi) with Guillaume Canet and Guillaume Gallienne, and what a shitty life these great artists had! It's really sad and it's disgusting!

TS: Yes! And it's perpetuating, it's coming back today!

JPS: Yes, it's coming back today! I think that in the sixties, seventies, artists were able to make a little bit more money and then the "bourgeois", in quotes, were more educated and bought a lot more. They used to go visit artists' studios, artists were more integrated, but now we're totally out of the picture, we're completely ostracized, we're totally pestiferous! Yes!

#### **4/5: THE ROLE OF ART AND OF THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY - [Watch the video \(in French with English subtitles\)](#)**

TS: So Picasso said: "Art is not chaste, it should be forbidden to innocent ignorant people, never to bring into contact with it those who are insufficiently prepared for it. Yes, art is dangerous. Or if it is prudish, it is not art anymore!" When we look at contemporary artistic today production, don't we have to deal with chaste art, that is to say, art that is destined never to offend the sensibilities and never to provoke any brainstorming?

JPS: Yes, absolutely, that's what I understood in New York, it's in fact what we

call political correctness!

TS: Yes, exactly!

JPS: That is to say that today, ninety percent (you can say a number like that at random!) but you can think that 90% of art is politically correct, so it's not art anywhere anymore! Because artists make a product, which is saleable internationally. We can see the example of Damien Hirst, he had exhibitions in Larry Gagosian's seven galleries: in Hong Kong, New York, London, Paris and so on. So people who go to the opening have a passport that they get stamped, if they have seen all Damien Hirst's exhibitions, then there is a lottery and someone (a lucky man!) can win a Damien Hirst work at the end! It's a (luxury) product like any other, it's pure marketing. And so the spiritual dimension has completely vanished. And it is this kind of art that floods the market and the press, because the other art that speaks of true, true things, of the essential, no longer exists (or is never shown)! We see it with Jeff Koons, we see it with all the "great artists", maybe at the beginning, in the past, these artists made interesting works, but it really became a commercial commodity (a pure mystification!).

TS: A consumer product!

JPS : That's it, unfortunately, but we're up against it because the real market has been completely smashed, destroyed, because the only works that are selling, are selling from \$50,000 to \$100,000 and up to millions of dollars and the other middle sizes galleries are closing, the average galleries are closing, since nobody buys art anymore, except the very, very wealthy (billionaires). And that's the discussion I had yesterday with my gallery owner Heidi from Zurich, she told me that there were artists who sold works for 10,000 CHF. about ten years ago and now it's selling at the Zürich flea markets for 100 CHF. The middle market has completely collapsed (in twenty years) and it's hard to recreate a second market for the so-called middle career artists like me, for whom there is not any market at anymore!

TS: Yes!

JPS: That's a really serious problem and the art that's being sold is really a consumer good, it's like toothpaste!

TS: So, since we're talking about art and the art market, I wanted to ask you about the role of art and the role of artists in society, even if it's difficult to give a definition of art, I think everyone has one! But couldn't we, paraphrasing Fernando Pessoa, who spoke about literature, saying that: "art exists because life is not enough?"

JPS: Without a doubt, yes, yes! Well, it's true for artists! For creators! Yes, it's

true that we like to have an enriched life... We artists of course, more in depth, more in richness, more in beauty, more in colour, of course! That was Gauguin's approach and wishes...

TS: Yes!

JPS: That's the typical example of Gauguin, who was really bored in Europe where life was pitiful and greyish and who went to the Marquesas to find happiness in the sunny Islands with the sensuous beautiful women. Yes, life is also about women, it's also about earthly foods, of course, that's what I like about the Mayan. Writer J. M. G. Le Clézio (2008 Nobel price) said in his books: *La fête enchantée*, that undoubtedly among the Embera of Panama, it was the place where women were the most sensual in the world! It's true that in France women... Well, I don't want to offend anyone, but finally sensuality has completely disappeared!

"The beauty of Indian women is luminous, it comes, not from within, but from all the depths of the body, just as the beauty of the skin of a fruit is illuminated by all its pulp and by all the flesh of the tree that bears it. Indian beauty is not noticeable. It does not seek to be noticed. It is neither disdainful nor provocative. It does not measure itself against any ugliness, it does not transfigure, it does not idealize. She is there, only, triumphant. alive, external brilliance that has no other reason than sexual attraction, then fertility." Haï, J.M.G. Le Clézio

JPS: That's a big problem though !

TS: Yes!

JPS: That's a big problem! Why would sensuality disappear? And why can't the "so famous" couturiers with their stupid dresses and despite all their means, can't they find back sensuality? I think sensuality has to do with spirituality! Someone who emanates spirituality, automatically has sensuality, it's connected somehow! And for art it is the same, art can't give out or offer anything and if there is none inner dimension deeply attached to it, it remains a closed and selfsufficient object.

TS: So this is art in itself, let's look at the artists, we know that Plato wanted to banish artists from his ideal city, because he considered that they only offered illusions of reality! On the other hand, we had Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who we can really talk about here in Besançon!

JPS: Yes, yes!

TS: Who gave to the artist a role in educating people, but in the end, when you look at the method, it may have led to the totalitarianism of the 20th century,

whether it was Stalinist neorealism or Nazi neorealism, what do you personally think is the role of the artist in our society?

JPS: Firstly a thought: to say what should be art or the role of the artist, it's very, very dangerous! Because it escapes any formatting to any idea, that's it!

TS : Yes!

JPS: So, from that statement, all I can say is that I am here to testify. We are a particular generation as we are witnessing the world disappearing, vanishing just in front of us. And maybe my role and the aim of my art is to testify, to show that I met such such flower, I met such ritual (at last through images), I had such and such experience, I met such and such a character... That's why I do record a lot of interviews; because it's an encounter, life is full of encounters and art is an encounter as well! And so at one point I met Barnett Newman's work, I met Pollock's work...

Now I rather encounter the spiritual dimension of Indian (from India) cultures, I read a lot of Hindu novels. I like Hindu thought very much! I like it all! And all that informations are aggregated into my work, it's testifying to all this diversity of the world which is now reduced, which is abolished: by the capitalistic one-track thinking, by the credit card, by the commercial world. All that frightens me very, very much, because people today are so formatted, so conditioned, that I don't even want to meet anyone anymore, it isolates me and therefore, necessarily in this loneliness, I try to find an opening through my art!

TS : So precisely, art history shows, with hindsight of course, that artists, and in particular the most important artists, felt the evolutions of the world, whether positive or negative, long before the others and even before they happened. I'll take about Guernica, Michel Leiris, when he sees Guernica says: "Picasso sends us our letter of mourning: everything we love is going to die." And his words, which he wrote in 1937, are going to lead to the Second World War and all the consequences we know, what kind of world do you think we're heading to?

JPS: Well, World War II was terrible, obviously, except that, we humans all together "We got over it!" in quotes. For example, German artists did a great job of regenerating the art world, artists like Richter, Beuys, Baselitz or Kiefer did an important job. We're talking about artists here!

TS: Yes!

JPS: And Guernica, of course, told us that the modern world was over (barbarism was there!). Except that it has regenerated itself! Whereas now. Nature won't be able to regenerate itself, eighty years later, it's definitely over! Animal Species are disappearing, Nature is polluted and disappearing... So our generation is literally confronted with this huge problem of the "world's

disappearance", in quotation marks. And then what will happen in one hundred years? I don't want to be apocalyptic, but even so, it's regardless really scary to be an human being today! This morning they said on the radio that we've already exceeded the quota of what the Earth could produce, we're always living on credit, on stilling and borrowing to Mother Earth, it's no longer possible!

TS: Is this vision of the future a bit dark somehow, does this vision have an influence on your creation, do you integrate it in your works now?

JPS: Not so much, I don't want to work in fear, I learned a lot from Jean Giono, who survived through both world wars and in most of his books there is a feeling of joy of being alive and hopeful!

And also within some connection between living beings! And I want to keep this notion of hope and communion between beings... or between colours, between forms... I really want to have a "Dionysian" spirit, I want to regenerate the world anew!

TS: It's a beautiful expression: to fertilize the world anew! Yes, it is!

JPS: Yes!

TS: That's also the role of your art works without a doubt. There's a quote by Barnett Newman that I find interesting, he says: "that you have to go back to the origin of art, as if painting never existed!" That's a very radical approach, but does it fit with your conception of creation?

JPS: Absolutely, I understood that among American artists, because for them, painting was the European painting and they understood that they had to detach themselves from it, that they had to forget about it. Most of them were Europeans who had just emigrated after the First or Second World War, who had come to New York to meet this artistic effervescence and they very quickly understood that they had to get rid of the Bourgeoise painting! Here, Newman doesn't talk so much about the prehistoric origin of art, he talks about destroying painting as a painted object in museums. There are also many artists who said that museums should be burnt down. Of course, because the development of culture, are layers of thoughts that accumulate successively, become stratified, it's like philosophy! And so, if you start from a guy who has a false thought, like, let's say Pascal or Descartes or Nietzsche or whoever? This false thought accumulate itself over time, so you might as well go back to zero, do tabula rasa and create what you feel like expressing personally! Of course, you can never go back to zero, but be the closest to the absolute zero and boom! Then you can say: "I'm like that, I think this, I want to do this and I fuck you!" And of course it makes a lot of noise!

TS: Yes!



JPS: It's like Pollock, you can see he started from scratch, he would say: Fuck off, I paint on my canvas, I piss on it, I ejaculate on it and I even I fuck you! So... (chuckles) Ah... (Laughs) Yes! He even took a piss into Peggy Guggenheim's fireplace on a Christmas Eve! She invited him over and and he pissed in the fireplace! That's what artists are all about ! Fuck you! We do everything that we want to do!

TS: Yes, precisely on this role of artists and art I'm going to quote Picasso again, because I find it very interesting, so Picasso stated: "No, painting is not made for apartments decoration. It's an weapon of offensive and defensive warfare against the enemy." And when he said that, he wasn't necessarily referring to Guernica, he was referring to his entire body of work! What do you think of this conception of art as an instrument of offensive and defensive warfare?

JPS: He is absolutely right, yes! That's Life we're defending, we are fighting for it! Yes, yes! And I'll go back to an anecdote, I had a show at the famous Plaza Hotel in New York where I exhibited some large papers works and a lady who was very interested in a piece of art said: "Oh, that's really nice, I like it, but couldn't hang that in my kitchen!" I replied: "But you couldn't hang a Picasso in your kitchen neither!" Referring to your quote which is correct! And the problem today is that people, the newly rich, buy art to decorate their kitchens! And real art, you can't put it in your kitchen, it's not its place!

TS: Yes!

JPS: You can't put a white square on a white background (Kazimir Malevich, 1918) in your kitchen! Because it's something other than just decoration! Neither of course a Mondrian painting, unless you have a Mondrian poster, because one went to see his exhibition! But otherwise, one miss the spiritual dimension! You don't put a Giotto in your kitchen neither, because that's not the place! And so, the huge problem today is where is art located? What is its place, its role? Is it still in museums? Is it in the Contemporary Art Centers? No, certainly not! When one go to see exhibits in the FRAC, we feel like puking, we feel like committing suicid! Art isn't there!

TS: Yes!

JPS : So finding the right place of art for me, it's a serious and real problem! Nowadays, it maybe on the web? Maybe art has its place there now? It maybe a new way to spread ideas and works, even if we don't sell anything by this mean! But that maybe the only way to survive and be heard! Because artists always had found solutions to present and diffuse their work, so maybe it's there now on the web, I really don't know, but I hope so?

TS: On this subject, what exactly is your view on contemporary art today?

JPS: Yes, it's quite... I would say quite contemptuous, except for a few artists like: James Turrell, (Shirin Neshat and some German artists). But I don't know enough (or anymore!) about the contemporary art scene, because I can't go to the big fairs, but sometimes I go to Basel Art Fair and I'm completely flabbergasted by the sidereal, abysmal emptiness, the lack of content (total emptiness), the lack of courage and honesty of the works and the artists presented.

TS: Precisely as you're talking about Basel, so what is your view of the art market today?

JPS: Yes, for me the market destroys more artists than it creates dynamics and opportunities. The market is destroying things right now! Talking about my personal case, as I'm not in the market, I'd like to get into it because maybe so my material life would be easier, or not, we don't know? And you know, there are probably artists who are doing well economically and maybe their life is not easier after all?

TS: When one see the price levels that are charged at public auctions for example, it seems that this art has become highly speculative. What's your opinion on that?

JPS: Yes it's a reality! Yes people buy art to speculate!

TS: We even see banks or financial organizations buying a Picasso or a contemporary artwork to lock them in a bank safe, more or less!

JPS: Of course, yes!

TS: And at phenomenal prices!

JPS: But art is the best investment you can ever make! Because in a few years you can multiply your investment by ten times!

TS: Yes!

JPS: So it's good if it brings money to some people. It keeps the big galleries running, living famous artists have plethora of assistants (100-200...), there's a huge business around it. They are publishing books, catalogues, good for them! But in contrast, there are a lot of artists today who are starving to death, that's the back stage of this story!

TS: Yes, in your imagination, if you had to gather together a few works of art from all periods, all artists combined, to create yourself then, not an imaginary

museum because the definition of Malraux is much more complex than the meaning of my question, but a small ideal museum in your home, what would be the works you would choose?

JPS: Yes, probably a Japanese Shunga erotic and in random like this: an Egyptian mural fresco, a Mayan vase, I think they're beautiful, the colors are magnificent!

TS: Yes!

JPS: An Aztec statue, ah yes, it has a great energy! A Vermeer, a Giotto, a Rembrandt: the Man on the Staircase (Philosopher in Meditation) which is at the Louvre, I really like this painting, yes! And probably a paper cutout by Matisse.

TS: Yes!

JPS: And then I don't know, the shamanic masks of the West Coast of the United States, yes! All the shamanic masks... Ah yes, I'm captivated by the beauty and greatness of this kind of works... By the way, André Breton collected them. They are masks carrying of incredible intelligence, yes! And then some drawings by Artaud, Yves Klein's blues, well, it's huge what I like (I forgot Frida Kahlo)... And then of course the drawings completed in the prehistoric caves !

TS : Yes, the prehistoric cave drawings!

JPS: For example, the drawings of the Pech Merle cave with its digital tracings on the ceiling, one have to think that this work was done collectively, that is to say that the drawings were made over millennia, during several years and by several generations and this collective work impresses me a lot, because I like what goes beyond the individual to enter the community. That's what you can feel in my work: I like to put together works realised by different artists and at different times.

## **THE IMAGINARY MUSEUM OF JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT**

- Shunga, Sode no maki, Torii Kiyonaga, Japan, 1785- God of Death Mictlantecuhtli, Terracota, Mexico, 16th century

- Isis in the tomb of Nefertari, 19th dynasty, Egypt

- The goddess Nut swallowing the sun, Egypt

- Fresco of The Bird Man, Tlaxcala, Mexico, 700-800

- Painting on classical Mayan vase, 800
- The Dream of Innocent III, Giotto, Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi, Italy, 1280
- Mochica vase, Peru, 200-600
- Self-portrait on the Mexico-United States border, Frida Kahlo, 1932
- Deer Blood Drawing, Joseph Beuys, 1960
- The Fall of Icarus, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, 1558
- The theatre and its double, Antonin Artaud, 1938
- Sort, Antonin Artaud, 1939
- Digital tracings, Perch Merle Cave, Paleolithic, France
- Scene of the Well, Lascaux, Paleolithic, France
- Filippino Lippi, The Triumph of Mordecai, 1475
- Philosopher in meditation, Rembrandt, 1632
- Paleolithic Venus of Willendorf, Austria
- The Lacemaker, Vermeer, 1671
- Eagle Mask, Kwakwaka'wakw, British Columbia, Canada, 19th century
- Kuskokwim Mask, Alaska, USA, 19th century
- Bird Mask, Kwakwaka'wakw, British Columbia, Canada, 19th century
- Metacosmic Void, Pure Consciousness, Indian gouache, 18th, Rajasthan
- Goddess Kali beheading herself during coitus to regenerate the world, India
- Feminine divinity, Temple purana mahadeva, Rajahstan
- Yves Klein, Anthropométrie form the Blue Period, 1960
- The Sadness of the King, 1952, Henri Matisse
- View of Toledo, El Greco, 1600

- Totems Asmat Bisj poles, New Guinea

TS: So in fact, unlike many artists, you write about your art and these texts show that you have an approach that is intellectually very elaborate, why do you consider this writing work necessary?

JPS: I mean it's necessary sometimes, because sometimes it's a reality, I don't have money to create new art works. Like for example for two years, it was in 2014 and 2015 and I didn't have money to produce, so I wrote this text *Influences*, which is fundamental and I started writing because, once again, it's important to testify! I like to do both, but of course it's more fun to work with the colour and the images, you know! I like the materials of ink and paint, I also like to touch the paper! But I also enjoy writing and also adding images to my texts and then of course, we can talk a little about philosophy, different approaches, how men at a certain time were thinking! For example, Buddhist concepts, you can hardly show them into through image, apart John Cage, who made ink works on large papers scale that made five or six metres long, he inked a really large broom-brush and painted on the floor as if it meant the passage of life and at the end human presence is dissolving, the presence disappears into the void and these are very beautiful works! But Buddhist thought, except for the Japanese who are impregnated by its philosophy, for me it's very difficult to implement it plastically, that's true!

TS: Yes, there is a real cohesion, for sure, between your texts and your art works and above all what surprises me in a certain way in your texts is that they are perfectly readable. So it may seem paradoxical, but we can see that artists, and even more so philosophers, critics and art historians, when they talk about the art of others, often have an almost esoteric, almost abstruse language which, by the way, repels the general public who would like to understand them. So why did you choose to escape this hermeticism or this temptation to hermeticism in your texts, by making all your texts easy readable by the reader?

JPS: I'm not trying to escape from anything or any thought, it's not in my nature!

TS: Yes!

JPS: I'm really an humble person, easy going and down to earth. You have to know that I've been raising horses for years and that every day I would train my horses and feed them; each day I had to take care of the foals etc. So I am into the objective reality of everyday life and my work too, it's the same with silkscreen printing my body is very present in the work. So if you are present with your body, you cannot go into delirious intellectual thought in denying your body. And I think that in my writings my body is also truly present, maybe it's the real presence of the body that is important, yes!

TS: Yes, and which therefore gives back to the writing, a great simplicity!

JPS: Yes, I hope so! I hope so! It's very nice what you are saying about my writings and I appreciate it very much. Because it seems obvious to me to write intelligently, I wouldn't like to write for people who couldn't understand me but maybe it's the case, I really don't know, one never know?

### **5/5: BEAUTY & QUOTES - [Watch the video \(in French with English subtitles\)](#)**

TS: So, Jean-Pierre, there is a question one might ask today, we also asked it in the past, but I think that today, even more so, both for artists and the public, it's the question of beauty! It's a question you've addressed, especially in one of your text: De la beauté etc., and in this text you call upon a certain number of authors, writers, especially 19th century writers, and Huysmans in particular. The question I was asking myself is: what are for you, on the subject of beauty, the founding texts?

JPS: Oh yes! That's a big question! I'm going to quote a few examples, it's my sentence, about what I think about beauty: "Beauty is a necessity of life: it's the quintessence of life itself!" That is to say, one has the impression, that in nature, everything is beautiful, in quotation marks! That is to say that it is a functionality! In order to survive, you need beauty! So it's beyond philosophy, it's beyond the aesthetic debate, yes, it's the sine qua non prerequisite for life. But I wanted to come back to the writer friends of the nineteenth century, who, more for me than the painters, were able to feel where this beauty hide. Because Huysmans talks about it very well but I have in front of me an extract from the Temptation of Saint Anthony of Flaubert and so this monk Saint Anthony stays in his cave and everybody comes to him and explains to him: "Look at the beauty of life and enjoy it!" Even the Queen of Sheba comes up to him and says: "Oh... Enjoy the life and fuck me!" But he refuses every single desire, he wants to remain in his ascetic dimension, between quotation marks, spiritual, monotheistic, where access to God requires the self-denial of the world! So Flaubert shows that it's the opposite: it's the acceptance of the whole world, of every desires, that gives access to God! So I thought of this: One must not miss one's life by accident or intellectual or spiritual misunderstanding. And I think that today, many people are missing their lives, perhaps I will quote a few excerpts from Saint Anthony, for example from Manes, the Bard: "He makes his globe turn; and adjusting his words to a lyre from which crystalline sounds escape: Souls who come out of this world emigrate to the stars, which are animated beings." That is to say, beauty is a cosmic thought; it's a connected thought. That's what we have to understand. Beauty is not on the outside, it's on the inside. It is within the body, when we see how the body functions, everything is marvellous everywhere!

TS: Yes!

JPS: Everything is beautiful somewhere, the eyes, the ears, it's incredibly beautiful! And all the functionality of it all, how it organize... Well, then you can think that it was created by a deity, or not! But it does exist and so beauty is a tribute to the living! Here is a quote from Krishnamurti that I like very much and I love to watch his lectures, he is somehow a wise man and he talks about beauty saying: "When we see a wonderful mountain, crowned with snow on a blue sky and the deep valleys that are in the shadows, their great splendour and their great majesty completely absorb us; for a moment we are completely silent because their majesty invades us, we forget ourselves. Beauty reveal itself when you are not present. The essence of beauty is the absence of "self". The essence of meditation is to explore the renunciation of the self." So, it's to forget oneself somewhere, entering a wonderful world, it's like Alice in Wonderland, it's all about entering a wonderful world! It's about letting go, about being happy to be alive! Being alive: it's a joy!

TS: And you alluded to the beauty found in nature, and it's true that this brings you closer to Gustave Courbet who is, as you know, an artist who is dear to my heart, and we are here in Franche-Comté!

JPS: That's it!

TS: And Courbet defined beauty, as opposed to the beauty academic canons, which is a completely artificial, retouched beauty...

JPS: Yes!

TS: He used to say that beauty is in nature! And I think that applies quite well to the approach you have and even to the text you just quoted, because indeed, beauty is where you are not! But he does make a reference when introducing this concept to a snowy mountain, there, we are in the center of nature!

JPS: Yes, we're absent somehow, but we're merging with nature, yes, it's really paradoxical. And Courbet, when he paints these women, they're real women, you have to have a relationship with reality.

TS: Yes!

JPS: It's like those artists who paint their flowers and think it's beautiful, but it's not nearly as beautiful as a flower!

TS: Yes, of course!

JPS: It's in that sense that I am claiming a bit to access the energy of the world. It's pretentious, but, well, Pollock had this pretension too, to enter the energy of the cosmos! So maybe I'm doing it or not? but it's my own way of accessing this soul of the world, between quotation marks!

TS: Yes, beauty as a result of the soul of the world! I think that's a good ending statement!

JPS: Yes, but I would also like to quote a Hindu book, which I am reading and I wanted to finish our interview with it.

TS: Yes, I would!

JPS: I read a lot of Hindu authors and this book is: *The one who wore skulls in earrings (Kapalkundala)*, by Bankim Chandara Chattterjee and it's two young heroes who meet; the hero is saved from a dramatic situation where a tantra adept wanted to eat and sacrifice him to the goddess Kali, to regenerate the world, in quotation marks, he says:

"That too, he thought, was written! He had forgotten what all Bengalis know: the art of let us being guided by circumstances."

So finding beauty is also to let us be guided by circumstances and not be influenced by dogma! It's also about being able to be free to make your own choices. That's what I found and completed in New York City! And then afterwards, the priest who saved them offered flowers to the Goddess Kali: "He recited a sacred formula on her (on the statue) before placing this flower at the feet of the Goddess. Then he remained still for a while in contemplation. - You see," he finally said, "the Goddess accepted our offering. The flower didn't move and stayed in place, it did not fall off. The prayer I had expressed in making this offering was therefore received with kindness. So, you can go carefree in company of your lover."

And for me, my art is like an offering to the world, like this!

TS: Yes!

JPS: It's something that I place at the feet of a goddess, imaginary or real, to wish everyone a good path, a good life, it's a bit of an incantatory act somehow!

TS: Yes, that's it, we're rejoining again spirituality!

JPS: Absolutely, yes! Thank you very much dear Thierry for coming, thank you for this beautiful interview, I hope people will appreciate it and good luck to all and see you soon Thierry!

TS: Thank you Jean-Pierre, thank you for having me in your workshop!



JPS: You're welcome, goodbye!

TS: Goodbye Jean-Pierre!