

LECTURE OF THE ARTIST JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT AT CHARLES DE BRUYÈRES MUSEUM | REMIREMONT | FRANCE APRIL 28th 2019

PART ONE: HISTORY OF MY ARTISTIC CAREER IN: FRANCE, CANADA, USA & COSMIC REVELATIONS - [See the video 1/4](#)

Aurélien Vacheret (Museum Director): Good evening, the intervention of an artist in the exhibition "Charles de Bruyères invites" fifteen artists to the museum, which is a confrontation between ancient art, some paintings chosen by the artists of ancient works of the Museum and a work created by these artists that corresponds to their universe compared to the collections of the collector Charles de Bruyères. So I will introduce you to Jean-Pierre Sergent, who comes from Besançon and who has travelled, exhibited in the United States and in different places in France and Franche-Comté.

Annie Tremsal (Curator of the exhibition): That you are going to discover, because he has retraced his journey in pictures and I wanted to tell you the interest of this kind of conference, because discovering the universe of an artist does make sense! And you will see that there is an extremely personal journey and a contemporary transposition of all these works that he will show us!

AV: So the exhibition is running until May 19 2019 and I let Jean-Pierre Sergent spoke about his art.

JPS: Good evening, thank you very much to everyone here for coming despite this rainy day, but you have come all the way here from afar, so thank you very much. I'm going to try to speak a little loudly because the microphone is at the end of the room and we're going to start with this first part, which is the history of my artistic career. I was born in France and stayed here until I was thirty-three, and then I had the chance to move to Montreal and that's where I really started my artistic career. Because in France I exhibited a little, but I hadn't reached this professional level and I was able to really learn my profession as an artist in Montreal by being confronted with professional artists from all universes. And then in Montreal, I stayed there for a year and a half and I had an artist friend who said to me: "Montreal is not great, we have to go to New York!" I said good New York ok, but finally I followed him a little bit and so it turns out that after a year and a half in Montreal, I went to New York, where I stayed there for ten years! I spent ten years of my life there having three successive workshops: first in DUMBO, it's in Brooklyn and then in Chelsea, where all the galleries are now! And then finally to Long Island City (Queens), where PS1 is, which depends on the MOMA. In New York, I really met a great energy, a great multiplicity, a diversity to see things! That is to say, in France, we are a little restricted, subject to the enormous historical past! You can feel it very well in this museum. With the whole history of painting, European painting and therefore what I liked about the United States (the New World) is

that it is a country open to other cultures. We will talk about it in more detail when I show you the slides of the works that have influenced me and the works I have made in relation to these works.

1. EGYPT & COSMIC REVELATION

So I wanted to talk about Egypt before, because I also went on a trip to Egypt, when I was in France, again at the Beaux-Arts and there I had a kind of vertical revelation. That is to say, in Egyptian temples, one can feel what one feels in cathedrals in France when one is a believer. That is, at one point I was in a priest's cell that was perfectly cubic with a small square window on the ceiling and I was alone in that room and it came to me as a kind of revelation, a cosmic elevation. It is a journey into what is called the axis mundi, through which we can acquire another spiritual dimension. That all pre-industrial peoples knew or (still know) today. They used this axis to meet the spirits and to, one cannot say dialogue with the dead, but to be able to make a cosmic journey. And so, at that time, I was still at the Art School in Besançon, I came back from Egypt and I thought to myself: Art doesn't happen in museums or schools: it's really a physical experience! It's a spiritual revelation! So from then on, I became interested in what a spiritual process could be. And I also had this kind of revelation when I travelled to Mexico in the great museums such as the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, where we see these Aztec, Olmec, Toltec and Mayan works, which have these telluric and spiritual forces. Energies that I personally do not feel in European paintings. There are of course very rare paintings, for example one can feel a very strong spiritual dimension in the Italian primitives (also in Vermeer) because they had unconditional faith in God and what interests me is faith in something else. That's really what feeds me!

2. INITIATORY JOURNEYS & WORKS FROM ELSEWHERE...

So here we are going to discover some works that have nourished me, for example this prehistoric Venus, the Venus of Hôhle Fels, Germany -35,000, they are all beautiful! The Venus of the Espuge is beautiful too! They are very feminized, the genitals and breasts are very exaggerated! Because they are fertility statues. The world must be regenerated and its descendants ensured. So according to this prehistoric Venus I made a little drawing with another prehistoric Venus, it's from another statue! These are my first serigraphs made in New York. And I had the chance to visit the prehistoric cave of the Perch Merle, on the ceiling of this cave, there are digital traces and what interests me particularly in cave art is that they are almost always collective works. This drawing was completed during two, three or ten thousand years, we don't really know! It's like the rock paintings of the Australian aborigines, they were caves that were used for rituals, so they initiated the young people and each one added his own drawing. So what interests me is this temporal compression. Let's say that the origin of this drawing dates back less than seventeen thousand years and maybe it's from minus seventeen thousand to minus thirteen thousand, we don't know? Since artists and shamans came to

visit the caves, its burying itself again and were rediscovered and they came back etc. It's like Lascaux! And what interests me in these works is how to exit a single art work to enter into a collective one, because it necessarily has more strength! For me, that's my own opinion! So that's it, it's kind of my approach. And I used this drawing by Perch Merle to make this work called Suspended Time, which was presented at the Alliance Française de New York in 1998. And I really like this confrontation between the image, less than twenty thousand years old in contemporary places. What always remains in common is desire, it is life, it is the regeneration of life, the will to live, the desire to live! During my career, I have taken a lot of pictures in museums, this is a small Egyptian statue that is in the Louvre, which is not very big, we see that it is copper that is embedded in lead, and I found this woman's dress really so contemporary, beautiful design, it's fabulous! So I made a work on paper that we see here! And on this work; we see this Egyptian statue, I spent a lot of time reworking this image on my computer. It's not: we scan a photo and that's it, the drawing really has to fit perfectly with my idea and the artist's idea of the work he completed. And it is in this way that I feel in great connection with all these artists and craftsmen, who have created these works. Behind the statue is a drawing of a Japanese kimono, which forms waves like that and these waves represent for me the infinity and the waves of the brain. It just so happens that when you change your state of consciousness from Alpha or Beta zone, the brain waves change! And I saw the other day on the Internet that they could record the noise that brain waves make, it's fabulous, it makes a noise like electronic music. And we are all built of noise and vibration (quantum mechanics). That's what this work tells us about! So in Egypt, I had the chance to discover Nefertari's tomb with my grandfather and sister and to enter there, it is a totally strange and weird place! That is to say, the paintings accompanies the dead in another life, we really feel that it is a matrix of life. Because the colours are so vibrant and there is also this sumptuous starry sky above our heads (the power of art). I also did a work with these stars, but it's really like an inverted cosmogony, that is to say, it's the matrix of life! And to have had the chance to visit this tomb, it also gave me a great aesthetic shock and perhaps also a great joy. Because unlike other civilizations, Egyptian civilization is more anguished by death and survival in the afterlife, but artists have a very strong sense of form and color that they can bring us out of this mortiferous anguish. Oh! Look at that! It is really Isis who welcomes us with his vulture wings, like that. And it makes us think of the Tibetan people who when someone dies in Tibet, they give their remains to the vultures to eat. It is important to keep this cyclical relationship with nature. To be wrapped by some animal spirit. This is an Egyptian goddess whose picture I took at the Louvre too. I did that, because of course I was in New York on September 11, 2001 and it was such a disaster, that with many artists, we couldn't work for a long time. It was so horrible... but after a while, I was able to start working again, maybe two or three months later after that event, I started working on the theme of beauty again. For me this Egyptian goddess, she carries both water, she can carry water, but also funeral urns, we really don't know? She is

probably a healer, and all my work is a bit focused on healing the soul and body. Also sensuality, it is very voluptuous, I also worked for a long time on this drawing to make it perfect like that. And at the time (it's between us), I was very much in love with an African friend, it's true that her body gave me the idea to draw what we can call the anima, it's the feminine part that accompanies us. And I also worked on this Egyptian statue that is in the Louvre, it's quite another thing. It's a small statue made of clay and stitched into it: there are nine copper needles that are inserted into all the vital points. There you see the heart, the sex, the anus, the ears, the eyes. It is actually a fetish statue and they tell its story in the window in which it is presented (wrapped in lead sheet). So it was a lover who wanted the eternal love of his wife, or his lover, so, on the lead sheet are written magic love formulas and instructions for use of this statue that needed to be buried with someone who had died a sudden and violent death, so that the charm can work! So here we are really in the primary function of art: that is, to get us out of our human condition and into another multidimensional universe. And for me, that's the most important thing, it's absolutely necessary that art has a function! I made this little silkscreen print in New York and wrote the magic text, but it's upside down because I printed it on the back of the Plexiglas sheet. So, I wanted to talk, we're in front of my work with Adam and Eve, I'll talk about it in more detail later! We still have a big problem in the West with the representation of sex, whether male or female and therefore to see in Rome this drawing of a Roman priapic man, I think it's great, it makes us laugh! But for them it was normal (or satirical), to increase the size of the sex disproportionately. To talk about life in a simple, humble, humorous way and so often, we find this in my work. This is the work that is presented here at the museum, and I have used this phallic drawing extensively in my work in New York. In New York, I often went to the Metropolitan Museum almost every Sundays and in a large space, there were the great Asmat totems from Papua presented like that. Unfortunately, they changed the room a little bit (this is not a picture of the Met, it's in New Guinea), but anyhow, these totems influenced me a lot and made me think about one thing: at the time I was thinking, maybe there were a hundred thousand artists working in New York working immigrants like me coming from Germany, Korea, Japan or Mexico to make art and none of us were able to make such a strong work! The Asmat people were cannibals, I'll tell you a little bit about these poles, it depicted the succession of generations if you will. So there, we see for example the grandfather or the grandmother, sometimes it's men or women and then above we see the father or the mother, it depends, sometimes there are three or four successive levels... And at the top again we see the sperm spurting out of the man's sex (like a cosmic ejaculation like a Pollock's painting!) and the baby is all over at the end, see! So it describes so well what happens in real life! There we have no code, we have moral codes of course, but they talk about the regeneration of the species without taboos, through aesthetics, it is still magnificent these poles, I know very few art works that have this strength! Personally, I'm very impressed. And here too, it is also a statue, a skull and they kept these skulls

(stacked in rows) in their homes to live with, they were the totems of the ancestors and they lived in huts where the whole family was present there! I will talk about this a little further on when I talk about the North American Indians. This skull is embellished with feathers, it is the spirit of the dead that is present, that inhabits us and that has not disappeared! So I also did these works in New York in connection with this Asmat skull. I made one of the first works on Plexiglas, we can see the image a little overlaid, it is a little further away and we have to spend time to see it and there are in superposition symbols of vulvas that also come from tribal societies.

3. THE SHAMANIC TRANCES

Now, I need to talk to you about shamanic trances, because in New York, I had the chance to do shamanic trances under hypnosis and so in these trances, it is a bit of a cosmic journey, we are present... But not really there, it is ambiguous and ubiquitous. That is, we travel a little around the world and into the cosmos. One can find ourselves in Africa, in Siberia, into the sea... This is what all shamans tell us (who metamorphose into animals). Very often in trances, we die, so inevitably when we die, we have to wake up and there are spirits that rebuild your body. So in this drawing we see that there are four female spirits who have come to rebuild my body: a yellow woman, a red woman, a black woman, a blue woman. These trances impressed me a lot and marked my work very deeply. Likewise, it is another shamanic trance, during which I returned to the Earth center and Gérard de Nerval speaks very well about it in *Le Voyage en Orient*, where the great architect Adoniram burns himself during the construction of the Great Temple of Israel, he goes into a trance and meets with his ancestors spirits. It's a bit like that, when you merge with the center of the Earth, you meet your ancestors. I think we are all living memories of the Universe. So necessarily, we have these memories in us, and shamanic trances allow us to access them.

PART TWO: INITIATORY TRAVELS & INFLUENCES: CENTRAL AMERICA, INDIAN ART - [See the video 2/4](#)

4. CENTRAL AMERICA

Here I would like to talk about my Mexican travels, I thought this was nice, this inscription of "Guatemala" on a cactus! I like folk art, everyone's art. This statue is at the New York Museum of Natural History, it is a terracotta that is about one meter twenty, and it represents a priest who made a human sacrifice by flaying his victim and wearing the skin. During this ritual, he kept the skin on until it fell apart, sometimes for a month or more. Of course we judge that with our morals, with the way we think, but having read a lot about it and travelled a lot in Mexico, I don't defend human sacrifice at all, but I think it's important to keep rituals because it's what allows us to keep a connection with the earth, with life quite simply, with the sun. Because they had, for example, the month of salt where there was a festival to honor the salt! The month of rain, the celebration of rain, the celebration of trees, flowers...! And we no longer celebrate or honor anything. I am very sad about it, I am very sad

about it. This is the work I made from this picture! And every time I go to the natural history museum, I go to see this statue and I think to myself: Wow, it gives off a lot of energy! I had the chance to go with my friend Olga, who is of Colombian origin and we travelled a lot in Mexico and Guatemala; during these trips we went to see the pyramid of Uxmal. At that time, you could still climb on this pyramid: now it is forbidden in order to protect it! It is true that above, we also have this kind of cosmic revelation, feeling this axis mundi, to be at the center, not of the universe, but of a world somewhere that allows us to communicate, as the ancients said: to communicate with the Gods! This pyramid is fabulous because it is not square (like other pyramids), it is oval. And it's a very special shape, I really like this site, it's really fabulous! That's Chichén Itzá, you all know this pyramid, at the equinoxes the feathered snake god, Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent god goes down when the sun goes down the stairs of the pyramid, it's as if it comes to life, at the equinoxes you see the snake go down and people go there on March 21 and September 21. It is also an impressive pyramid! Inside, at the center there is the throne of the jade jaguar, it is as impressive as the prehistoric caves. It's a small jaguar and it is very powerful. These are Mayan skulls! They had a different relationship to death. We too, in this room of the Museum, we see a Christ on the cross, a descent of the cross, it's the same thing! Each civilization has its own iconography in relation to death! But this is more violent, it's less sweetened than our paintings. And we feel the energy that remains, we feel the reminiscence of the vital energy, the life-death transgression. That's a Mayan vase painting! I think it's really beautiful, see the costumes they wore With jade, quetzal bird feathers and flowers. Of course it was nobles or important warriors who wore this, despite everything it's impressive, French couturiers can get dressed again! There in front of a dressing like that, it's really something else! We're in another dimension! We're really caught up in a supernatural cosmic-magical dimension. This is a mural painting whose colors I admire... a fresco. Inspired by all these Mayan works, I started my series called Mayan Diary in New York. Here it is a priest who incarnates the God of the corn Wak-Chan-Ahaw and the ambiguity of this image is that we do not know if he is being dressed or undressed and then the women are naked; so the men are dressed and the women are naked, maybe it is the same everywhere in all civilizations? But I found it quite funny, very symbolic and I think there is a beautiful energy in this ritual! Here we see a proposal for a wall installation, which I did not end up exhibiting, with nine paintings on Plexiglas (4.20 x 4.20 m). We see the Mayan god in the middle and we also see drawings of shamanic trances.

A. T.: Very large format!

Yes very large format: 4.20 x 4.20 m. And, often I take pictures in museums; they are called patterns, that is to say repetitive patterns. It is important to know that many of the motifs that we think are decorative had a symbolic and social meaning.

(to be read: Patterns That Connect: Social Symbolism in Ancient & Tribal Art by Carl Schuster). We no longer know it, Claude Lévis-Strauss has also talked

about it a lot. They knew and knew very well what they were doing and I will tell you an anecdote: I read in a book on Mayan art that the woman journalist who wrote the book was walking around Yucatan or Chiapas. She had seen a Mayan woman embroidering tunics and she said to her: - "But your embroidery is so complicated, small and meticulous that no one can understand what you are doing!" The weaver simply replied: "Yes God can see it!" That is to say, today, art has lost the function of speaking to the gods as I said earlier. But in traditional societies, it's not art that they made, it's not folklore, they were really talking to something that connected them to the universe! And that's a very important thought. Here is a large paper with this drawing (pattern), which I have reworked on computer.

5. NATIVE AMERINDIAN ART

So I wanted to talk to you about Amerindian art, although I haven't taken many pictures of it, but when you see this work, for example, it's worth all the contemporary works. They have a culture, it's a bit stupid to say that, but yes, a culture is an innate worship of beauty. Women and men can do beautiful things; for us and for them beauty is a universal value at this level and the colors are fabulous. So, I come to talk about Georges Catlin who is an American painter that travelled to the Plains Indians countries in the early 1830s (North American Indians), left with his easel and painting equipment and painted the Amerindians, because their cultures fascinated him and they were disappearing! Of course we all know Edward Curtis who took a lot of pictures of Indians, but we don't know him very well and I had seen a retrospective of his paintings in New York (George Catlin and His Indian Gallery, National Museum of the American Indian). What is interesting in this painting is that it describes how the funeral rites of the Mandan (Sioux tribes) were practiced. First, the remains of the dead were placed on some kind of platform, which we have already seen in movies like Little Big Man, or other movies! And the body would decay like that for two or three years. This is still done today in Japan other countries where the dead are buried and then after a while they are dug up and put the ashes in a smaller urn. So there, once the skeleton has disintegrated, they put the skulls of all the people of the tribe in a circle. It's a different concept from home, where we often have family tombs, but here there's the concept of the tribe, the community and it's a more open concept; we're a little less alone and reintegrated into the universe. So I advise you to read this book by George Catlin because there are illustrations of these works and it also tells a lot of anecdotes, as well as the Indian rituals he attended (La danse du Soleil); it's fabulous, it's an important book! This is my workshop in Besançon where I repainted these skulls and placed them together, because I really like this idea of the circle, of continuity. According to this, I made this work on paper.

6. HINDU ART

Here is the Hindu art that fascinates me enormously: we see an Indian statue, with this sensuality, this lasciviousness, we don't have that in the West, we

can't really compare these two things, but it's still very rare to see: "This profuse sensuality that spreads like a river without a slope" as Marguerite Yourcenar, whom I will quote later on, says. There is no anguish in their erotic art. There, we see the lingam, the phallus representing the god Shiva. So in India, we can see this with the yoni, which is the female sex when walking the streets. Yet another Hindu statue: we see these breasts which are like the breasts of today's porn actresses, it is incredible that in the twelfth or fifteenth centuries, artists already had this idealized vision of a woman's body. But it is a generous and a little provocative vision despite everything and this body (of a deity) has this flexibility of people who do yoga and who practice spiritual awakening, because I don't think there are many women in the West who have this flexibility and sensuality today ! It is important how you build the image of your body and how you use it. I'm going to talk about an erotic gouache from Kamasutra! You realize that in the West, a work like this would be very difficult to present in a museum! It's still a problem...! These gouaches were made for the Mogul elite, maybe they were passing these images privately, like that, but the temples with their myriad erotic sculptures, were visible to everyone! So there was probably no censorship of erotic art in India, at least not at that time. Here, we see the goddess Kali beheading herself during coitus to regenerate the world and the universe (Kali of great wisdom nourishing the new life of her blood-nectar gushing from her beheaded neck). This image is somehow ultra-violent because we see Krishna and Kali making love, we see precisely the genitals in action and above, there is Kali's subtle blue body being decapitated, her blood flowing and her servants collecting this blood in bowls and drinking it to regenerate the world. All this takes place on a lotus flower, a symbol of great wisdom and spiritual awakening. It's images with an incredible evocative force, it's amazing! That's takes one's breath away, That's fabulous! The imagination of these Hindu artists is boundless. Even in our wildest dreams, we cannot dream of this scene (the Indian collective imagination is much stronger and richer than that of the West, except in our period of the Middle Ages and with Jérôme Bosch), congratulations to them! What also interests me a lot in Hindu culture is their yantras, their assemblages of geometric figures, here these triangles. This yantra represents a little bit of what we call the Big Bang (the Nava-Yoni Chakra floating in the original cosmic soup). This is the beginning of the beginning of the origin of the world, that's it! The triangles pointing down are female and those pointing upwards are male. It is an entanglement like the two principles that create life and the world. I made this work on paper and on Plexiglas, it is a large format: 1.20 x 1.07 m. This Indian drawing represents tree seeds and the evolution of levels of consciousness. That is to say, for Hindus, we do not only have one conscience, we have several, just as for Buddhists, there is not only one void, there are nineteen! So it raises questions, even if we can't understand everything about these different levels of consciousness. I have reproduced this little drawing in this work. I really feed on these works inspired by Indian metaphysics, because they represent something I don't know, something I feel intuitively close to in my very depths, but that I still have to go and find. Here is

also a work representing a yantra (the sacred point bindu of origins and return, with concentric circles representing the eternal cycles of cosmic evolution and involution) that represents a level of consciousness that spreads in the Universe as when we throw a stone into the water; and circle after circle, our level of consciousness increases. I should have quoted a book by Jodorowski that talks about awakening consciousness, but you can't talk about everything! And I love this little eighteenth century Indian gouache, it has always amazed me to see that, because it represents "The metacosmic void or pure consciousness" (the title is so beautiful and evocative!). We talked about consciousness and emptiness earlier and probably in the West, we have to wait until the middle of the twentieth century to finally talk about the concept of emptiness with artists like Yves Klein (*Le Saut dans le vide*), Barnett Newman (*Shining Forth, to George*) or Morris Louis (*Delta-theta*), American artists. Yves Klein was French, but Morris Louis painted colored verticals and the center of the painting remained empty! And emptiness is as important as void! Sometimes I use this idea of the frame to define the void. This work is part of the series I am working on called: *Shakti-Yoni: Ecstatic Cosmic Dances*. In this painting on Plexiglas, these are drawings of Japanese cherry blossoms (*sakura*), put together to cause, as I have already mentioned, a change in the state of consciousness of the brain. That is to say, when we are in front of this work, we no longer see the work, we feel that it titillates us a little bit in the neurons and that is what is important for me, it is to provoke a mystical revelation. I want to create something that vibrates and is alive.

7. JAPANESE SHUNGA & OTHER EROTIC WORKS

I wanted to briefly mention the Japanese shungas, where we see the genitals of the woman very well represented (the vulva with small and large lips, as well as the clitoris). There is a whole school of Japanese erotic prints, especially in the nineteenth century. In the following work too, where we even see a sodomy scene, it's quite rare, it's a close-up, the format is stretched into four parts, it's a work by Torii Kiyonaga, *Sode no maki*, 1785, which could be and is contemporary in its spirit. It's beautiful! And the pleasure shared is very well shown. I will finish with "The Origin of the World" by Gustave Courbet, because unfortunately in the West, we only have that painting of a woman sex! Some contemporary artists work a little on sexuality, but it must be remembered that for centuries, we could not have increased the number of genitals or sexual acts... In the Middle Ages, we could describe genitals, but then it was forbidden and erotic works were sold privately. So I wanted to pay tribute to this painting and to my friend Thierry Savatier who wrote a very interesting big book about this work: *The origin of the world* and with which I have already done several filmed interviews.

8. JOHN CAGE, BUDDHISM AND NATURE

I wanted to finish this part with John Cage (1912-1992), an American musician and visual artist, he was very influential in the seventies and at that time American artists were very influenced by Japanese Zen Buddhism. They had

all met or read (including Kerouac, you must read his Dharma Bums) the great Japanese Zen master D. T. Suzuki, who wrote a very large book entitled Essays in Zen Buddhism (the Bible of Buddhism), which is at least ten centimeters thick, which I read passionately and which is very interesting ! And all these artists have been greatly influenced by the void (great principle of Zen): what is the void where is the presence, where is the absence, who is present? And here we see him taking his huge brush dipped in ink, then walking on his large sheet of paper... and life passes like that and in the end, there is no more ink, no more trace, no more life, no more energy, we evaporate and dissolve in the universe. He is an artist I respect very much. I often take pictures of nature and this is a water lily that was in the Japanese pond (a little Zen) at my grandfather's house, it's to talk about him and pay tribute to the beauty of nature. I am always dazzled and amazed by it every time I encounter it... I think it is a beauty that touches me and soothes me. We have to look more deeply into things, but I often realize that when we are stressed and our brains are not available, we can no longer see this beauty and I think it is important to work on ourselves a lot, it is the same for works of art, it is the same for love and friendship. To access something, you need to free your mind, it is important and essential to clear our heads of all the things that embarrass us and prevent us from loving the world.

PART THREE: DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHAPE AND STRUCTURE OF MY PAINTING - [See the video 3/4](#)

9. PAINTINGS IN FRANCE 1984-1991

So here we're going to start on something else, I wanted to introduce you a little bit to how my work has developed over time. I lived on a farm in Charquemont (in the Jura Mountains), breeding American horses and I started painting by doing abstraction. I was then very much influenced by the American painting of Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko, because these painters were talking about something I didn't know, especially for Barnett Newman: verticality and for Rothko: colour and energy exchanges. That is to say, if you go to Beaubourg Museum and see Barnett Newman's big painting with the black zips, you can feel that he means the vertical position of man and woman and God in the center, it's a little pretentious! But I really like this vertical relationship to things. So I started painting verticals like that, it's very influenced by this American painting and I also started working on the square format and surrounding the square with a perimeter like that! And we will see later that my paintings on Plexiglas are currently built in the same way! It was in 1987 and now I'm still working on this square shape, the dimension has changed a little, I was at 1.30 x 1.30 m and now I'm at 1.40 x 1.40 m, so it's really changed very little. I was also working on the polyptychs, because I don't like the idea of the unique work, so we see three panels side by side and it's 1.30 high by 2.57 m long. Here is a painting with a transparent blue in the middle. I also made columns like this in five parts and I also started to integrate newspaper clippings, with numbers and symbols.

10. PAINTINGS IN MONTREAL 1991-1993

Now we're moving on to Montreal works, so I moved to Montreal in 1991 and continued the work on the columns, but I had met a gallery in Toronto and the columns I had made in France were painted on Masonite, of course Masonite is not a stable enough material and they didn't want to work with me if I kept working on this support. It was a big problem to resolve for me, because when you're asked to change the support you've been working on for years, it's not easy! So I thought about it for quite a while and thought why not try it on Plexiglas ! But at first I painted on top of it. After that, I started painting in the back to use its transparency effect. So I continued the series of columns by painting them on Plexiglas. I also worked on cardboard, with materials such as beeswax and scotch tape, also integrating press clippings. The good thing about living in Montreal or New York is that every Sunday you can buy The New York Times, so you buy that, it's four centimetres thick and you always find images that appeal to you! These are large formats that are: 2.79 by 2.24 m, in four parts, and I continued to work on this idea of the polyptych. Always with the centre and sides, I added numbers because I was influenced by Jung's book: Man and his Symbols, where he said that among human beings, there were four stages of spiritual development: the sportsman, the poet, the politician and the saint. I thought it was important to be all these men at once in one life! Because we can't be one thing only, that would be really sad ! And for Jung, the final evolution was Gandhi! I think that we can be all at the same time and that spiritual development is important. I also worked with the confrontations between the smooth and flat surfaces on the exterior panels and the exuberant material, overflowing on the central panel. This is really my last abstract canvas: it's a large four-part canvas that measures 2.76 x 2.76 m and I stayed in my studio looking at this canvas without working, because I had worked a lot in Montreal and I thought to myself: well, I can make infinite variations like many other abstract painters have done! But I was missing something! So I decided to reintegrate images into my art work. In this painting we see the images that appear with press clippings... in the material of the painting and in a more obvious way than before! There we see the manufacture of another series of paintings. I silkscreened my images directly on copper or zinc strips and I also glued silkscreened images on paper or cardboard in the paintings. So now we see this painting with an aluminum strip inserted in plastic construction nets. I really wanted to have a material and a very physical presence of my paintings at this time. We will then see the large size of these canvases! And when you're younger, you really want to live in the painting with your body, after that it changes. Here I am in front of a large square painting of 2.76 m. From that moment on, I also started to make assemblies with small plates of Plexiglas (35 x 17.5 cm). I took pictures of birds and trees in France during my summer holidays and went to screen print them in Canada!

11. PAINTINGS IN NEW YORK 1993-2003

I arrived in New York in April 1993. It was my workshop in DUMBO, right next to

the Manhattan Bridge. We can see all the pots of paint etc.... On this painting, we find the obscene graffiti that is displayed here. I then started to assemble these formats into squares that are 1.05 by 1.05 meters and since then it is the module I still use today! There we see images of giraffes, manta rays, women, it's a whole set of things. We discover here a larger format that is 2.10 by 2.10 m, we even see a Mexican human sacrifice, a painting of Fra Angelico, as well as a "primitive" fertility ritual with women wearing some huge phallus like that! I like to use images of rituals, because they show a human community that gathers to share something (the rituals creates the social cohesions)! Here are assembled three squares of total dimensions 2.10 by 6.30 m in a group exhibition that we organized in 1995 with other Brooklyn artist friends. It's starting to make large works! This installation is 3.50 by 3.50 m and has been specially created for another exhibition in a gallery in SoHo. This painting is : 3.50 par 3.50 m. This one is a little more erotic, it's a work that measures 1.40 by 2.80 m and makes me laugh, because at one point I started working with a gallery in SoHo and the gallery owner Eric Allouche came into my studio to choose works for a show and he burst out laughing when he saw this one: "Ah, you make me laugh Jean-Pierre, I think if Matisse were still alive, he would do a job like this! I said thank you! "But we can't show this in our gallery!" (in reference to the double penetration). We always have the same problem with works dealing with sexuality: this is the place where we can present it! It's a very beautiful piece! There we can find again the axis mundi, which is Maya, with the center of the world and the four directions and it is called: The dream of the imprisoned man, with the axis mundi and the vulva coming from a Japanese shunga drawing. This one is of the same series, with a text by the Marquis de Sade (Les 120 jours de Sodome). Indeed, from that moment on, I started to integrate images with very erotic, provocative, even obscene texts into my work! I was photographed in front of this large wall installation (Mayan Diary, 2.80 x 4.20 m, 2002, photo Charles Eshleman) that I had made at the Taller Bouricua, which is a Puerto Rican Cultural Centre located in East Harem. I was friends with the directors of the Centre and the architect Miguel Baltierra who worked there. So I had the chance to present this beautiful work in New York!

12. WALL INSTALLATIONS IN FRANCE SINCE 2004

Here, I am seen installing my paintings on plexiglass for the decoration of the Opera la Traviata at the Opera Theatre in Besançon in 2007 (photos by Yves Petit). The Opera technicians built a large panel measuring 6.30 by 3.15 meters, made of plywood reinforced with aluminium structures on the back and on which I hung my paintings on the floor. Then they lifted the whole monumental structure and hung it up above the stage! It was really a mystical, lifting, magnificent experience! Here I pose in front of the panel. They would move up and down the panel following the scenes of the Traviata! It was really a great achievement and the singers were happy to have sung in front of this colorful fresco and I was also very happy to have accompanied them in this erotic-mystical delirium! This was at the Mulhouse Fine Arts Museum (Mayan Diary 20), this wall was 10.50 meters long by 2.10 meters high and the

technicians built a wall especially to support the paintings. This painting is entitled: Indian Names, I made it for an exhibition in New York in 1999 and I love Amerindian cultures so much that I included a whole list of names of emblematic and famous Indian chiefs and shamans such as: Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Cuathemos, Black Elk, Chief Joseph etc... I had chosen all these names of famous Indians who resonated in my memory and to whom I wanted to pay tribute with this particular painting. Here I am in front of this large wall installation. Here we are at the Ferme de Flagey (which depends on the Courbet d'Ornans Museum), It is the house where Gustave Courbet was born and I was lucky to present a large wall installation: Nature, Cultures, The Origin of the Worlds, 18 paintings, 3.15 x 6.30 m in 2012. We are seen fixing the paintings on the wall with Velcro strips. I gave two filmed lectures with my friends Thierry Savatier (world-famous specialist of Gustave Courbet) and Laurent Devèze, (Director of the Besançon School of Fine Arts). This is in Narbonne where I exhibited in 2016. It is the School of Fine Arts of Besançon which presented and organized this group exhibition entitled : Is the artist a shaman? We see the technicians installing the wood panels on the wall. This installation: Shamanic Ecstasies And Flowers is 3.15 by 6.30 m. We're installing the last painting here! Exhibition on the theme of shamanism. You can see the scale on this wall installation! Here, it's with my friend Laurent Devèze.

13. THE SERIGRAPHIC TECHNIQUE

I wanted to briefly mention the silkscreen technique (which I use daily to do my work). It is a really old technique that satisfies me, because it is a rather sensual technique and requires many different steps. For example, we see here a positive film here. I am already working on the image on the computer and then printing the image with my printer on a transparent film. So we see some positive films, we find the patterns. Here we see the films I am assembling on the workshop table. My assistant Christine Chatelet took these pictures; here I am taping two films together to make them more opaque and that they block the light well when exposed in the light table. See, it's a very sensual work, silkscreen printing... The name silkscreen comes from silk, it's nylon nowadays, it's not silk anymore, but touching these screens is really very sensual! In addition to that the images are very erotic...! There I check if the screens are well cleaned because once the image has been exposed (the glue having hardened in the light) we clean with water everything that has been protected by the opacity of the film, to reveal the image! So I look to see if the image is properly cleaned. It's a little tedious work, but it's interesting! Here I tape the films on the screens before exposing them. Here are the screens that I place afterwards in the light table where I expose them to strong light for three minutes. Sometimes I take pictures because it's a bit like images of ecstasy, a bit mystical! Here is a picture taken by another friend Sonia Oysel, who came to take pictures in the studio in 2018. Here is a workshop view when I print my serigraphs, I always work on a small format: 25.5 x 25.5 cm. I also work in a serial way, with a repetition of images. I print twelve serigraphs on white BFK paper and yellow Wang paper in editions of five or mostly unique prints. Here I am seen screenprinting the ink with the squeegee. I use acrylic paint for

artists.

Public: Is that ink?

JPS : No, it's not ink, it's Golden or Lascaux brand acrylic paint and it's what gives a great density to the colors of my art works! We can see here how the paint passes through the silkscreen, in general, I put two to three layers depending on the density of color I need!

15. THE SHAKTI-YONI SERIES: 2016 - PRESENT

Here is now the series I am currently working on, I will read you this sentence highlighted in the text I wrote about it:

"It is jouissance that is the substance of the world. It is it that brings us closer to the divine state."

It is taken from the book: Shiva and Dionysus by Alain Daniélou. As I said earlier, it is interesting to talk about jouissance, somewhere to say that it is necessary, indispensable and consubstantial to life! There is no more to be said! I printed out nine hundred different of this series in the summer of 2018! It's very erotic content, and the problem is that it's hard to exhibit. My Zurich gallery owner Heidi is having headaches out because she can't sell it! Being an artist is already a difficult! But then with an erotic work like this, it's even more difficult! Maybe even Mission Impossible! But that's what I like to do and I think my work is important! I also use erotic texts retrieved from Japanese manga erotical cartoons! And this summer, I have a friend Rose, who came to visit me at the workshop from Australia and those erotical texts made her laugh a lot! Because it is very rare for the French to laugh in front of my work! It's funny because it's a very trashy thing, funny! She said to me: "Ah Jean-Pierre, you know women so well!" (she took silkscreens with her to be my agent in Australia and Asia!) It was really nice (like in New York!). It was really nice. I think that in France (essentially a serious country and only intellectually oriented) we are really very, very stuck with these stories regarding art and sex! Everything is so taken so seriously! But we'll see! We may soon have an exhibition at the Charles de Bruyères Museum on the theme of eroticism?

PART FOUR: EVE, ADAM & THE GRAFFITIS & QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - [See the video 4/4](#)

JPS: We are now going to talk about the work that is there, so the painter was inspired, that's what you told me Aurélien, by this engraving by Dürer from 1504.

Aurélien Vacheret: Yes, yes, and the funny thing is that in fact, when I saw the painting, I hadn't seen it very closely for a while, but when I inventoried it a few years ago, I noticed which animals were on it. They were almost all there! So there's a rat, a cat, a hare, an ox and I think that's weird, they're not all there! There is a little goat that is all the way up there perched on a rock and in fact when I looked at it very, very closely to try to understand, well they were almost all there, except that the varnish, the paint becomes opaque over time and

therefore it makes it less visible. So sometimes with an engraving, it makes it possible to better look at a work that we have before us but that we do not necessarily see.

JPS: Yes, so here I wanted to mention in the West this problem we have with sex representation, not only in the erotic act, but for the body itself! Since good, my friend Thierry Savatier has noticed that since ancient Greece, there are very few representations of the female and male sex in art. Or if the female sex was represented, it was represented without the slit or the hair. So we live...! Our collective unconscious is built in a schizophrenic way, because no one has a vine leaf on its sex! It still poses a problem with the way we are whole (complete) and how we experience our presence in the body.

"Listen to me, dear Sadhu! From the top of his head to the soles of his feet, man is poisoned by intelligence.[...]

On this tree is a bird, it dances in the joy of life".

The flute of the Infinite, Kabîr, translated by André Gide

So this is my work on display here: Eve, Adam and the Graffitis, in fact it's a work I made a long time ago. Annie sent me the picture of the Adam and Eve, I said yes! It clicked in my head, I had made it in New York in 1995. I had taken a picture of Adam and Eve, probably on the front of Notre-Dame de Paris or another French cathedral, always on the theme of the leaf (of sin), of Adam and Eve, on the representation of desire! And then in New York, I had printed a Japanese erotic graffiti on it and I drew a graffiti like that, a big blue sex like that! Just for the fun of it! You have to be a little subversive, provocative! Sorry!

17. SOME ARTISTS QUOTATIONS

I am actually reading a book by Marguerite Yourcenar where she talks about Gîta-Govinda, I have already read Yourcenar's book and then I read this Gîta-Govinda translated by Jean Varenne, it is a Hindu book of the twelfth century whose passage is as follows:

"Her hair rises and her whole body trembles when she reaches the peak, and the god of Love manifests himself in her cries, this unknown, sensual and pretty girl, who is having fun with Murâri! [...]

She conceals between her hips a sanctuary where the throne of Love is placed; he places a garland of stones to mark its Triumphal Gate!"

So we are still in this kind of joyful eroticism and in her book, Marguerite Yourcenar quotes Baudelaire and his *Fleurs du mal*, and so this text was Baudelaire eight hundred years ago! She says:

"At times, it seems that humour slips into these sacred scenes of Hindu statuary as in the work of our medieval imagers, putting into them the equivalent of that little muffled laugh, which is no less than sighing, one of the sounds of love. But nowhere is the almost unbearable nervous tension of certain Japanese licentious drawings, or the intelligent, almost dry statement of such a Greek vase on an obscene subject. This profuse sensuality spreads like a river without a slope".

I think it's perfect to say that, because often in erotic representations, there is

always this anguish, which is very present towards procreation and there we feel in India that procreation is joyful. There is also a pre-Inca civilization called Moche, in Peru, which has created many erotic pottery! They are absolutely fabulous too! I continue with Marguerite Yourcenar:

"What India adds to this immense cosmic pastoral ministry is the profound meaning of the one in the multiple, the pulsation of a joy that crosses the plant, the beast, the deity, the man. Blood and sève obey the sounds of the sacred flutist; the poses of love are for him dance figures." On some erotic and mystical themes of the Gîta-Govinda.

So there is this dance, this joy, this pleasure... It's a bit like Dionysus for us Europeans in Greece. I'm going to quote Andrei Tarkovski, because I'm on Twitter and they often present artists interviews and I found that what he said was very important about art:

"As long as man feels human, he will try to create something. What does creation actually mean by creation? What is the purpose of art? How? Why? Is it good, is it bad? Is it constructive or is it just art? But it is clear that art is a prayer, and that means everything! Through art, man expresses his hope and the rest is irrelevant. And anything that does not express hope, that has no spiritual basis, has nothing to do with art!" Interview on art

You can meditate on that! I also saw a beautiful interview with Joseph Beuys, who is a German artist that many of us know, in this film, he seemed a little drunk and spoke vehemently about art:

"Art therefore goes back to the creator process itself. Deep down, everyone knows that man cannot live without art. Without artistic education man would probably wither away and after 2000 years without art, he would probably lose his brain!" Art is food for man.

And it is a reality, we are no longer aware of what artists have brought us through history. Because we have been here for thousands of years (we artists) and we think that it is granted for good, but if art were to disappear, so would the human being! It's important to be aware of this!

I also like this sentence from Anaïs Nin:

"The great beauty of my life is that I experience what others only dream, discuss and analyze. I want to continue to live the uncensored dream, the free unconscious."

And it's true that many of the people I meet around me, I'm coming to an age where people take stock of themselves, many people have trouble with their own lives, they feel really frustrated and I think we should go to the bottom of things and go deep inside ourselves and be able to live our dreams as Jacques Brel said! And Anaïs Nin did it and Henry Miller did it too!

I will quote the American artist Barnett Newman:

"We need to go back to the beginning of art, as if painting had never existed." I think that for us artists, it is very important, because culture is like a kind of immensely tall building, but it is a building that is not two thousand years old, but a hundred thousand years old, two hundred or a million years old. Of course, we're above the building, at the top, since we're alive! All the people who disappeared before us, they all participated in building this building. And

for my part, I always try to return in my work to what primary energy is (the foundations of the building), as well as to our present reality: the body. And so what Barnett Newman says is very interesting!

"Go back to the beginning of art, as if painting had never existed."

And Pier Paolo Pasolini, who is a great thinker whose films are magnificent, says:

"Culture is a resistance to distraction."

Nowadays, it is obvious that distraction is culture! And that poses a problem for artists whose work has a content, it is that we are no longer heard at all. That's a really big problem! Since art becomes only this kind of distraction for rich people. I end with this sentence from Charles Bukowski that I found the other day on Twitter: "There is only one lesson life is trying to teach us: shut the fuck up and enjoy the view!" In other words: Wake up and smell the coffee! As they say so well in New York! That is, you don't have to ask yourself too many questions and then enjoy life as it is, that's all!

18. QUESTIONS - ANSWERS

JPS: So we'll move on now to the question-and-answer, if you ever have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them, if I can do so. So do you have any questions? Yes ?

The audience: I don't know if it's really a question, but it challenged me when at the beginning of your conference you talk about both physical and spiritual experiences, it's as if... I don't know, in my culture we oppose directly the physical and the spiritual experiences and in your work, it's at the same time?

JPS: Yes, absolutely yes, you can't have experience outside the body! Please do not forget that! I think it's a serious metaphysical error, it's a complete error. For me, because without a body, there is no vehicle. I often think about this and I know from experience that human beings are connected to each other. I don't know if you've seen this film: James Cameron's Avatar (2009), where people are more or less connected by some kind of fiber-energy systems, so I know from living experiences that we are connected like that. After beyond death, I really don't know! I know that there is the collective unconscious that survives, but when there are no more men, there will probably be no more collective unconscious! There must be life, and life is the body! I don't think we can think of spirituality outside the body! I think many cultures and religions have made this mistake, but I am not here to judge anyone.

The audience: My question is quite simple: Why did you decided to come back to France and are you fulfilled (I also experienced the same thing)?

Public : It's an artist who is speaking!

JPS: AH, ah, ah, ah! AH, ah, ah, ah! That's an interesting question! Yes, Being totally fulfilled in France is much more difficult than in New York, of course! But

you can't have everything in life, that's right, there are choices to be made! I was happy to make this choice to live in New York where I stayed for ten years, but it is true that being an artist is much harder in France than in New York, because artists are considered in a different way (as creators of wealth and culture!). For example, in New York, I was able to meet the greatest gallery owner in the world at the time (Mr. Leo Castelli). I called him and he received me. And in France, the situation is totally opposed, it is not the artists who are important, it is the gallery owners, it is the museum directors. Anyhow we have an exception here today with Aurélien Vacheret! but I have already had two exhibitions that have been cancelled in France because my work was too erotic for example! I really don't think if someone had signed up for a show in New York, it would have been cancelled for those reasons! But there are many other things in France that suit me: there is the beauty of nature that I have already mentioned, of course. That doesn't mean there's no nature in New York. But what I miss, of course, is contact with other cultures, other civilizations, other ways of thinking! But I've filled up with these energies, so I can't complain, ten years is quite a long time... There are a lot of artists who go to New York for six months and leave, because it's not an easy city to live in either! But I learned a lot of things there, it's true that I'm less fulfilled in France, but I can work here! So as long as I can work there, good with me!

Aurélien Vacheret: A little clarification on the painting of Adam and Eve from the museum or the engraving, there is a cat and a mouse, there are many symbols, Dürer has put many things in his engravings, these are images that are very, very rich. Yes, there is the cat and mouse, so with Adam and Eve it can be quite explicit and then the parrot is symbolically linked with lust, finally it is an ambivalent symbol. So even in this work there, eroticism is there despite the vine leaves. And also, someone who represented the bodies with the male sex is Michelangelo. After the Vatican was in a lot of trouble, so they had them repainted by an artist some time later and precisely, they gave him the nickname Braghettone, which is the nickname he got like that!

The audience: I was also thinking of another painter: Egon Schiele, who also painted many erotic works and who also pushed things around a lot! And Picasso too!

JPS: Yes, of course!

The audience: I have a question: In your work, you talk a lot about spirituality, but you stuck at a format? You seem to be very attached to this format, what is the connection, I can't really understand?

JPS: I am working on this square unit for practical reasons! Well yes, everyone has the right to do what they want (especially artists)! And for me it's practical because I can assemble works and build large wall installations. It's a formal decision I took, it's a bias, it's a work choice!

The audience: Ok yes of course!

JPS: Because I want Unity to be integrated into the Whole, I want to build a coherent group of paintings.

A. V.: It works like a module!

JPS: A module, yes, absolutely! And so I invite you to go to visit my website: j-psergent.com, where there are videos, I have done a lot of video interviews with my friend Marie-Madeleine Varet, who is a philosopher and researcher at the C.N.R.S., and we get along really well. Of course, there are the art works too! There are many texts, the texts are important too! And precisely in the text *De la beauté* etc, where I speak of beauty, the relationship to the body and the relationships I have towards other civilizations, other cultures. Here you have all the information to contact me, I am on social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube.

19. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

JPS: I really thank you very much for coming in such numbers tonight. I wanted to thank: Annie Tremsal, the curator of the exhibition of course, who put this exhibition together with a masterful hand and who did a really fantastic job with the fifteen artists present in this exhibition, Aurélien Vacheret who is here, thank you very much to the entire museum team, to Géraldine Couget, who took care of the communication and the film crew (Michel Renard) as well as the City of Remiremont. Thank you all very much, have a good evening and go home safely!

The audience: Thank to you!