

TRANSCRIPT OF ARTIST FILMED CONFERENCE GIVEN BY JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT DURING HIS EXHIBITION: "POLYPHONIES : ARTS, CULTURES & CIVILIZATIONS" ON MAY 15 2022 AT THE ORANGERIE GALLERY IN SAUVIGNY-LÈS-GRAY, FRANCE

Artist talks about his work and the traditional and ancient cultures that have largely influenced him during his career. Filmed by Lionel Georges.

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PART 1/4 I, THE INFLUENCES AND APPEARANCE OF EXTRA-EUROPEAN ARTS IN MY WORK, NEW-YORK YEARS (1993-2003) - [Watch the video](#)

Hello everyone, thank you for coming here to this beautiful Galerie de l'Orangerie. Christine Herrgott, who is a childhood friend of mine, welcomes us and I am going to make a presentation with some of my works related to cultures that have interested me during my artistic career. I've lived in New York quite a bit, I've also traveled to Mexico, Guatemala and I'm interested in a lot of cultures, what we call the 'primitive' (root) cultures, before we called them 'archaic' cultures. So this is how it will be: the conference is entitled: Polyphonies: Arts, Cultures and Civilizations. By way of introduction, here are a few pointers; I read a lot of books and there are sometimes things that challenge me, so I will start with Fernando Pessoa:

"Everything human moves me. Everything moves me because I have the vast fraternity with true humanity. And my heart is a little bit bigger than the whole Universe." It's true that often, artists, have a bit of this particular sensitivity; and we are moved, we are touched, by perhaps more things than other human beings who leave for other things, other horizons... Whatever... There is also Costa-Gavras: *"We do not live in Disneyland. We live in blood and in time... We live in a tragic world."* It's true that we see it, today, with this terrible war in Ukraine, and it's true that often life is tragic... of course, there are also friends who disappear, or we are confronted with suffering and the loss of loved ones so, I think, we must take that into account in the work of every artist. I am reading a book titled: *The Snow Leopard* by Peter Matthiessen: *"All phenomena are processes, connections, everything evolves and this evolution is visible: it is enough to open one's mind by meditation or to pull down the screens that obscure it through drugs or dreams, to see that nothing has precise limits, that, in the endless interpenetration of everything that constitutes the universe, a molecular flow, a cosmic energy vibrates in stone and steel as in flesh."*

This is a thought that many traditional cultures have, which is that, everything is alive and everything vibrates at a certain state of vibration. I did another interview with a doctor who does quantum medicine (Dr. Jean-Louis Garillon, June 30, 2019) and it was really interesting to talk with him. My work is based on all these vibrations-energies.

I'm going to talk about the influences and the appearance of the extra-European arts in my work. Because it happened after I lived in New York, where I used to go regularly almost every Sunday to the Metropolitan Museum or to the Museum of Natural History; and in these Museums I discovered a lot of works coming from cultures that we are not used to see. To explain a little bit what is the work of an artist (its genesis): I draw sketches at the beginning, and so here, I will show you some preparatory sketches of works.

I - 1 THE PREPARATORY SKETCHES & DRAWINGS, NEW-YORK, (1995-2003)

Here we see a set of drawings, it was at the time before computers, so I took a lot of photos or I made a lot of drawings and I made a lot of diagrams of things that challenged me. And there, I made a whole diagram where I wanted to talk about energy: that is to say that I wanted to confront our contemporary cultures, versus traditional cultures. What we see in traditional societies, what I saw there, so I talked about energy, simplicity, life, Feng-Shui, color, light, nature (which is the most important), purity, joy, dance, the self, unity, freedom, communication, the sun, love, offering, silence, the individual, beauty, space and especially the four cardinal points, I will come back to this later.

And in our societies; well, living in New York, it's a beautiful city but still, we are immersed in the most total contemporaneity: stress, business energy and all that...

So in our societies, I personally felt these energies:

stagnation, depression... (Well, not even mentioning the situation in France as it's really the worst of everything! As everybody is depressed in this country!) The lack of time, the dissociation, the noise, the aggression, the repression, the multitude, the money, the underworld, the industrial, the loneliness, the predatory system, the dirt, the ugliness, the darkness, the crossroads, the disorientation, the low ceilings as they say, the prison, no light, the culture-nature opposition. I'll come back to that later. These are a bit of clichés but that's what I'm interested in developing in my work. Here, you can see how I work. For example, I wanted to put a skull and crossbones, trees... It's a whole set of images that creates a coherent whole because my works are constructed like assemblages and I like to assemble as many things as possible. Here also, it is a work on Plexiglas; at the beginning, I assembled small formats which have the size of these small rectangles on Plexiglas... Here, we see an African mask and there are often indications of colors: black, sky blue! African mask! Here we see Pygmy drawings because going to the Metropolitan, I often bought books, because of course, it was before the invention of the Internet, so I was lucky enough to have a little money to buy some books and the drawing below is a work of the Louvre from the twelfth century, the Middle Ages. This is to explain how I mix things up. This is a map of the New York subway and I burned the map to place a colored mandala inside. It's the exact opposite: it's a spiritual circulation within a material circulation... I used to live around here, by the way, just in Queens Plaza. Here are some drawings, you see the diagram of the woman in this piece, there was also a drawing of an Asmat book. I am very influenced by Asmat cultures of New Guinea which may seem to us to be very violent cultures, since they were still cannibals, at the time when Michael Rockefeller went to see them; and therefore, it is pure energy! It is life with pure energy! There is also a horse skull... And we can see here, a part of this paper which is exposed in the Gallery, which you will see later. There are also drawings of manuscripts from the Middle Ages, drawings of Arabic origin, drawings of Greek origin...

I - 2 THE SERIES "BEAUTY IS ENERGY", NEW-YORK, (2002), AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, ART, VIOLENCE, SEX AND DEATH

I am going to present the series "Beauty is Energy", it is a work that I realized after September 11, 2001, after all this violence that stunned us all... And I could not work for almost three to four months. Finally, I got back to work by starting this series. Here, in the gallery, you have several works that come from that period. So Art,

Violence, Sex and Death. I quote Octavio Paz, who is a Mexican author, I like his work very much because, as he is inscribed in Mexican thought and he also lived in Paris, he was between the two cultures (even three with India!) and he can tell us very interesting things about the societies called 'primitive'. He says that: *"The cultures called 'primitive' have created a system of metaphors and symbols that, as Lévi-Strauss has shown, constitute a real code of signs, both sensitive and intellectual: a language. The function of language is to signify and to communicate meanings; but modern man has reduced the sign to pure and simple intellectual meaning and communication to the transmission of information. (This is exactly what we are experiencing today!) We have forgotten that signs are things that are sensible and act on our senses."*

That's exactly what I want to do in my work: to act on the senses! Here, we see a work that shows an Aztec human sacrifice, with erect sexes, there is a coelacanth behind it, there are Pygmy drawings that I showed you earlier, so it's a whole set of things that accumulate and intermingle like that.

I quote from Black Elk, who was one of the last chiefs and medicine men of the Oglala Sioux, he talks about the Sun Dance which is called: Wiwanyag Wachipi: "We are connected to all things: the earth and the stars, everything, and with all of this, together, we raise our hands to Wakan-Tanka (the Great Spirit) and pray only to Him." He's still talking once again about how these people are or were connected together. So here we see what I talked about earlier with all the fetishes, the earth, the stones... I'll expand on that later in more detail. This image is presented here. I took these elements from a text by an Amerindian and what interested me was to know what he was talking about, because we don't know anything about it, and he evoked Elements: the Sky, Fire, Water, Earth, Stone, Wood, Wind, Clouds; Symbols: the circle, colors, adobe (the house), rituals, fetishes. It speaks of the Unconscious: the mind, dreams, symbols; Concepts: beauty, the sacred, eternity, the world, infinity (a concept that is also disappearing a little bit nowadays); Cosmogony: the Sun, the Moon, the Cosmos, the Stars. It is very important to reconnect like that to the Universe...

I come back to Octavio Paz in:

Conjunctions and Disjunctions, The Order and the Accident

"In one way or another, through ritual or philosophical resignation, man could reconcile himself with his misfortune. Such a reconciliation, illusory or not, possessed a specific virtue: that of inserting misfortune into the cosmic and human order, of making the exception intelligible, of giving a meaning to the accident."

That is to say that we, faced with the accidents of life, we no longer have the necessary rituals to be able to face them and it is a little that we miss... I am going to speak about the rituals with Xipe Totec, it is a statue which is in the Metropolitan Museum, which is called 'The Flayed One', that is to say the skinned alive, we have this beautiful work here. And I will show you the picture of the statue that is in the Metropolitan Museum, it is a red terracotta of human size, the incarnation of Xipe Totec, Aztec God of renewal, of nature, of agriculture and of rain. He flays and strips himself to feed humanity, symbolizing the corn grain losing its husk before germinating. This statue has really an incredible strength, when you are in front of it it is really impressive! It is not like the current contemporary art! Here, you have another statue of Mictlantecuhtli, the god of death, his name means Lord of Mictlan, domain of death, the lowest place of the infra-world, it is in the Templo Mayor of Mexico City. Having traveled to Mexico, I realized that the works that these artists

made had a power that could not be found anywhere else. They were really integrated into life in a very accurate, very violent but very real way. Here too, we see the same God of Death, this is an Aztec drawing.

Here, we see this work exposed. You can feel my Mayan inspiration but this is a memory-drawing of a shamanic trance and it would be a little bit too long to explain all that... It must be said that practically, at each trance, we die; and that afterwards, the spirits rebuild our bodies, so that's kind of what it describes.

PART 2/4 I - 3 HOMAGE TO THE SELKNAM, ALAKALUFS AND HAUSH INDIANS OF TIERRA DEL FUEGO IN PATAGONIA - [Watch the video](#)

Nowadays all of whom have disappeared, because they show what Art is in a primitive society. And so, this is also a serigraphy that is not shown here but is in my studio and I found that this man gave off a presence, it's as if he had survived death because someone took a picture of him and it's a bit like a ghost or a pure spirit. Fortunately, there were already photographers who took pictures of them and so that's how they dressed up for their rituals which I'll talk about a little later. It's quite fascinating, they are a bit like Santa Claus in a way. So there unfortunately with the backlight here, we can't see it but this work is presented, it's black on black. And these men had made the longest journey from Africa, they are those who went further, and 14,000 years ago they arrived in Tierra del Fuego at the very end of the world, at the other end from the African matrix of man.

We can see them here "decorated" with symbols that I do not know of course. They made plays like that, finally rituals. You can also see this, it is fabulous. In Anne Chapman book's *The Selknam rituals, When the Sun Chased the Moon*, she talks about these rituals:

"On the stage of the Hain, inversely symmetrical to the Moon's celestial home where she receives the spirits of the shamans who visit her during the eclipse, we see underground and celestial masked spirits charged with incredible power appearing and opposing each other, naked on the snow and inflicting cruel and degrading trials on the kloketen, the young initiates, which will lead them to maturity." (In fact, these are initiation rites of passage). *"Daughter Snow, mother Wind, husband Rain, erotic clowns and aggressive towards women, indulging in impure games, ballerinas, cuckolds, grotesque buffoons, all this comical and teasing world frightens the young and mocks the women until they take their revenge in a small way."*

In fact, there still remains often a main problem in those traditional societies, it is that women often do not have their right place. I wrote an article with a Turkish friend (Tulika Bahadur in 2018) for her traditions are constraints more than anything else, so it all depends on the cultures, obviously it is also necessary to take this largely into account! Here, we can see Selknam women who look healthy and happy. It is a tribe and they live together, which we have lost a little today. And there it is the most horrible photo that I can know, that is to say that they are English hunters, he is called Julius Popper hunting Indians with his men near a dead and stripped Selknam... Here it is very, very violent and unbearable because Indians were hunted like rabbits. In 1996, died the Indian Lola Kiepja, the last descendant of these people. It is a very sad news, because that means that their language disappeared, their rituals disappeared and we do not know, we do not know any more and today so many languages and so many cultures disappearing that it is a little my role of artist, to speak about it.

I - 4 EGYPT, BEAUTY, WOMEN AND OFFERING GIFTS IN OPPOSITION TO VIOLENCE

I wanted to come to Egypt. In opposition to all this violence I have just spoken about and the destruction of all the first cultures, I found in this Egyptian statue, which is in the Louvre, a kind of appeasement. That is to say, she carries water or funerary urns and makes offerings to the World. And drawing this image appeased and calmed me down a lot and so here it is: I drew it like that! It's truly the opposite of violence, it's pure generosity, the true offering and appeasement of suffering and death.

I - 5 THE "SKY UMBILICUS" SERIES, (2007) JOURNEYS TO THE BEYOND

In 2007, I started a series untitled "Sky Umbilicus", there are some exhibited here. And it's a reflection on how the first or Egyptian societies or for example in the Antiquity; used animals bodies and spirits to travel to the beyond, to the after life realms. So we have this silkscreen print here. In many traditional cultures, the soul of the dead passes through an animal, here we see that it is a deer; to then enter again the into body of the naked woman. I thought this image was superb, it is a beautiful metaphor of the afterlife. Here, is the goddess Nut, whose body unfolds above the Earth to protect it. Her limbs must touch the ground and symbolize the four cardinal points. She swallows the Sun with her mouth in the evening and spits it out with her sex in the morning.

It is so beautiful and poetic, it also symbolizes our daily life, the cyclic rites of sleep, awakening, food, sexuality. It is something complete and harmonious and there are also the pillars of the sky that support it here like I Greeks.. Here we see the Apis bull that carries the mummy to the afterlife. This is a photo I took at the Metropolitan Museum and I found it very beautiful as a symbol.

I - 6 MURAL ART, MONUMENTAL, TRANSCENDENTAL AND BEYOND DEATH

My trip to Egypt in 1983 with my grandfather Maurice made me discover something that I didn't know at all, that is to say that most of the artists of the ancient times worked only in the memory of the dead and that, we see it with this first photograph taken at the time of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922; and it seems that these statues go out in the present after 3 to 4000 years of underground life, and I pay more homage to the artists who were able to carry out these works, which survived until our days, than to Tutankhamun... But anyway... I really think that artists are important. And so I had a bit of a revelation in the tomb of Nefertari, which you can see here, it's what we can call: Total Art. When I discovered this and get back to the School of Fine Arts in Besançon, I said to myself that Art was not to be understand and learned in schools, so I slammed definitely the doors of every schools and went elsewhere to develop my work more freely.

One can see here what it gave on me, what this influence of the mural Art gave on me, it is what is exposed presently: [4 Pillars of the Sky](#) at the Museum of the Fine Arts of Besançon (and which will continue for a certain time). So there, I wanted to speak a little, very, very briefly about what one can name.

II THE INDIVIDUALIST AND MATERIALIST IMPOSTURE, THE CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL DEFICIT, THE ONLY MATERIALISTIC AND PORNOGRAPHIC SOCIETY, THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE RITUALS, THE NATURE AND THE TRANCE...

II - 1 THE FASHION INDUSTRY

I came across these images the other day and I thought "Wow, that's out of the way!", unbelievable! These are models wearing like smoke bombs and parading on to Mahler's 5th symphony, so we've really reached the quintessence of the ridiculous. And this one, it's someone who wears some pieces of wood nailed over her head and who parades like that... Well, it's true that our societies are reaching completely absurd and stupid drifts that don't make much sense anymore, it makes sense only for the rich and famous, as it is commonly said! And as Pierre Bourdieu said: "*Taste is the disgust of the taste of others.*" It illustrates exactly what we have just seen, that is to say that a few people, because they have the political or economical power or because they are big galleries owners, impose their tastes on everybody somewhere, because as soon as this information is widely diffused, we are obliged and forced to see them; and that we agree or not because of course there must be a large diversity of things, but there, it is terrible, because it doesn't mean anything at all: just a statement! (even a true imposture!)

II - 2 THE RITUALS OF 'PRIMITIVE' SOCIETIES

I oppose to this (the contemporary destructive madness), the rituals of the 'first' societies. Here, it's a little girl embracing a calf. Here, it's the same, it's a calf that is in a house where they have made drawings of offerings, for this calf, and I find that quite touching.

Here are two Hindu women, who draw a drawing of offering and hospitality, to welcome the gods in front of a temple, with chalk and they redo the drawing daily... it speaks of the ephemeral. And here are also daily offerings, to the *Lingam* and the *Yoni* which are the male and female symbols and it says: "*Absolute stillness and ultimate movement are the nature of Shiva.*" Because for them, the god Shiva is both, this immobility and this enormous, dynamic, cosmic energy. It is a bit the infinite and the present; and it is this complexity and this paradox, which have disappeared with us. We no longer think in a paradoxical way but only in a linear way...

II - 3 THE PAINTING'S SURROUNDINGS AREA AND THE SACRED PAINTING

In order to speak about this Plexiglas painting that is there. I discovered this image the other day, it is an Indian statue that was recently discovered. Around the statue, there is all this ornament that enhances it, that defines it as a sacred work; and in my work, this is exactly what I do with the sacred checker borders that I put around the Plexiglas.

Régis Debray talks about it very well in his book *Jeunesse du sacré*: "*A metaphor. What does it teach us? That a promised land open to all winds would cease to be so. And that the fence (cordon, balustrade, hedge, barrier, rood screen, chancel, curtain wall) is at another level than the scroll or the palmette. It is not ornamental but it's transcendental.*" That means, that the perimeter defines something that must be respected somehow. And so, here is the installation scheme of my works on Plexiglas... Of the perimeters patterns of my works on Plexiglas.

II - 4 THE WHOLE AND ARCHAISM

I will quote Novalis who is a eighteenth century German romantic writer:

- *The Disciples to Saïs* by Novalis: "*It does not seem wise to want to seize and*

understand a human world without being full, oneself, of a blooming humanity. None of the senses should be asleep, and if they are not all equally awake to the same degree, they must all be on the alert, none should be oppressed or slacken."

It is so important to understand this complexity of the world, I spoke about it before; and, the more you open your consciousness (I will speak about it later), the more you have the chance not to miss some important things. For example, here, I took this photo of a Greek deer, archaic in the Metropolitan Museum, as always, and here is the work that I made of it: a work on paper of large format and it is a work that I also printed on Plexiglas. And this is a doodle, these are erotic doodles with a doodle-drawing that I made myself because I want to enter into the chaos because, often, we find fully, in the chaos, the strength to create, the great strength of creation as it is really important to work with all the energies available.

PART 3/4 III THE HOPE IN ART AND IN LIFE, REINTEGRATION OF COSMIC ENERGY AND NATURE THROUGH SEX ENERGY - [Watch the video](#)

III - 1 THE NEW SERIES "SHAKTI-YONI: ECSTATIC COSMIC DANCES". THE ART, SEX AND DEATH, ALWAYS...

I take a quote I said in an article in the Presse Bisontine in March 2013, I had an exhibition then called: "Sex & Rituals", I said then: "*Sex is the only energy that opposes death!*" (as well as Art, eventually?) And of course, without having to think about it too much, it is obvious that we are all alive because there was sex to bring us into the world. It's an essential and primary energy and I can't understand how the West can't integrate this energy in its logistics (in its imagination) because if you go to any museum in France, there is nearly absolutely no work of art showing an act of penetration. Sex is never integrated so, it is taboo, we made sex taboo. And the reasons why it is taboo would be way too long to enumerate here. So, here is the little series of "Shakti-Yoni"; it is a Hindu drawing with all the important chakra points of the body. We see the vulva, the navel, the breasts... It is sure that in the East, they had a much more thorough knowledge of the body than we do with, for example, acupuncture and all that... The body is managed totally differently. Here is a little silk-screen print, you have the chance to see it for yourself. I wanted to quote Hildegard von Bingen because in the 13th century, there were many Nuns and Monks who, in their religious practices and in their drawings (Hildegard von Bingen made some very beautiful drawings), understood the celestial cosmogony. You can see here that the Earth is not flat. It is a set of things, it rotates and they understood these energies that create and nourish us. And I made a drawing after another drawing of Hildegard von Bingen, here, these are the concentric circles and I am going to speak to you about it at once by quoting:

- *Mu, the Master and the Magicians* by Alexandro Jodorowsky

"The acquisition of fluidity is like a stone that falls in the middle of a lake (the mirror of the Self). From this shock, a circular wave arises which gives birth to a larger one, the circles continuing to multiply until they cover the entire surface of the water. The expansion of consciousness is like this but with a difference: the mental lake is infinite..."

From the moment you start to become aware of things, it can only get "worse" in quotes, deeper and that is a very interesting, challenging and spiritual deep process.

III - 2 THE AZTECS AND MAYAS OF MEXICO AND GUATEMALA, THE SKULLS

OF THE DEAD AND THE AXIS MUNDI

Here is a work of large format on paper, which I also printed on Plexiglas. And, to see all these Skulls... This screen print of the invitation should be here, too. I don't really know why the Aztecs and the Mayans talked so much and crudely about death and life; but, well, I happened to take some pictures over there and you can see these skulls piled up like that. You can see also this iconography, also of course, in our Middle Ages, where one often can find skeletons, skulls and things like that. You see, it's so alive, it's of an incredible strength. The artists had this strength and power... And I think that what is important for an artist is to have a vitality. So at that time and place, we can feel very strongly the amazing vitality of those artists. Here is the Pyramid of Chichén Itzá in the Yucatán and I had the chance to see this pyramid, in the center of which, there is another pyramid inside, at the core. Because often, these pyramids were built one on top of the other (like the Egyptian pyramids) and in the exact center of this pyramid, there is this little throne of the Red Tiger Jaguar (*El Tigre Rojo*) and it is in the exact axis mundi of the pyramid. That is to say, it is the place where we can communicate with the spirits, the gods and the ancestors. So, we have here a diagram of the pyramid of Tenochtitlán. There is the axis mundi, the four directions, an earthly level: North, South, East, West, and 13 celestial levels, 9 levels of the subterranean underworld. That is to say that like that, the shamans could travel from one level to another. This is quite interesting since we only travel horizontally. Well, we are lucky enough to be able to take a plane or to go scuba diving, but somewhere, these are other higher spiritual levels. And here, I am talking about Black Elk again, making an offering to the four directions. Black Elk was a great Indian chief and medicine man.

Black Elk's account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux

- *The Sacred Pipe, the liberation of the soul*

"The pipe contains, or really is, the Universe. But since the pipe is the Universe, it is also Man and the one who fills a pipe must identify with it, thus establishing not only the center of the Universe but, also, his own center; he 'expands'" (I want to talk about this expansion, it is important. I think artists need to expand themselves and not just stay at their own levels of evolution, it's very important!) "expands to the point that the six directions of space are in fact, brought back into it." (In other words, he eats and is eaten, it's a bit complicated but you can see that in tantric rituals too). "It is through this 'expansion' that man ceases to be a part, a fragment and becomes whole or holy; he breaks the illusion of separation."

I've talked about this before. Here are some other works I did with the Chaac, Mayan Rain God with his lightning axe, he strikes the clouds and triggers the thunder and rain. With also, around him, a drawing of a Navarro blanket; which sacralizes the blanket a little bit, with these crosses that are reversed. I also want to talk about the four directions, it's also a large work on paper, so I took an Aztec drawing with trees and insects and you can see the four directions that bring us to the center. When you are lucky enough to be in the center, you can make these shamanic journeys. Here we see the Aztec calendar, with all the animals that embody all the months:

- *The Aztec Calendar, or Mexica "Was intimately linked to the mythology of the ancient peoples of Mesoamerica. Based on astronomical observation and expressing a system of beliefs loaded with abstract representations (deities, symbols, numbers, colors, which combine and reflect each other), the 'Mexican' time was not radically different from space conceived as a heterogeneous medium and endowed with singular properties according to the cardinal orientations. Also, unlike*

our mental habits, it was not perceived as linear (our own time count), but was apprehended in a cyclic way, through three parallel and imbricated accounting systems highlighting elaborated astronomical knowledge."

That's also why I'm interested in these cultures, because they have three calendar systems integrated into each other and it's very interesting! Here, we see a small serigraphy which shows that every 52 years the Aztecs extinguished all the fires, in all the country (of Mexico) of all the fire-places and the fire was, then, redistributed from Tenochtitlán, of the fire of the central pyramid, in all the country and we see, here priests who carry Fagots of wood lit and who redistributed this fire, in all the country. So, everyone, if he lived more than 52 years, had the chance to see this ceremony once or twice in his life, these rituals which were important. Of course, this festival centralizes political power, but nevertheless, it is a beautiful image: to extinguish everything and start the world again. It's a bit like our New Year's Eve, but that was every 52 years... It depended on their cyclical calendar. Here we see Ixchel, the Mayan goddess associated with water, her name means "Lady Rainbow", it is also a work on paper. We see that she is pouring down waterspouts on the World and that she wears bones on her dress and snakes on her headdress. She is really impressive. It's not like the fashion shows that we talked about earlier... It really means something and it's in the energy of the World and the Universe. Here I wanted to quote an Aztec prince-poet Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin, who lived in the fifteenth century, it must be said that this is not a society that lasted very long, just from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, he said:

"Should I perish like the flowers that fade?

What will remain of my reputation here on earth?

Will nothing of my earthly power accompany me?

At least my flowers, at least my favorite songs!

Earth is the place of fleeting and ephemeral moments.

And it is thus, in this place, that in some way we must live?

Is there any joy left, any friends left?

Or is this only the place to discover one's face, alone, in the mirror of Life?"

Pre-Columbian Literature of Mexico, Miguel León-Portilla

It is a very beautiful poetry and we could say exactly the same thing today because we always have the same questions about life and about the ephemeral passage on this Earth. And he loved flowers, it is a beautiful poem... I want to talk in a few words about the India of Benares:

III - 3 INDIA OF BENARES, SPIRITUALITY-ETERNITY

Indian spirituality also nourishes me enormously, although I have never had the chance to travel there. I wanted to quote Pierre Loti, who is a Western writer, because quoting Hindu authors and the Upanishads etc. is a bit difficult for us to understand, but Pierre Loti says very rightly in his very beautiful book *India*:

To Benares among the theosophists of Madras

"Heaven without a personal God, an immortality without a precise soul, a purification without prayer..."

I find that he has said it all in this sentence. And further on: *"And soon the immense thought of this multitude flies away to the unfathomable beyond where all our ephemeral individualities must, later on, melt and sink."*

This is beautiful too, and at one point he quotes the Brahmins comparing their

philosophy to ours, they say:

Brahmins, "Our (Indian) philosophy begins where yours ends."

And for having read quite a few Western and Hindu philosophers, I agree with this thought perfectly. This is my own personal opinion. So there, you can see a little Shakti-Yoni screen print where you see a yantra, like this; it's the circle and the Square, quite simply. It must be said that the Hindus often speak of emptiness and the Buddhists also, it is a notion that I like to grasp in my work. This is also a "Shakti-Yoni" print. And here is another screen-print with a deer that comes from a drawing of a prehistoric cave. Here we also see a yantra and it corresponds perfectly to the term *shakti-yoni*, because we see the square which is the *yoni* and the points which are *lingam*, the feminine and masculine elements. And all these interconnections between the Man and the Woman, create what we are today: LIFE! Here we are, we have finished this little conference. If you want to find out more about my work, you can visit my website: j-psergent.com and then I have my workshop which is located in Besançon. If ever you want to ask me any questions?

PART 4/4 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS - [Watch the video](#)

Public: It is more, a general reflection, I came to see the exhibition the day of the opening and then I had not too much understood your art; and there, somewhere today, after your explanations, a lot of things become clear and I can feel (in your work) an enormous vitality, a vitality of death, of overcoming death, of spirituality... Trying a little bit to communicate, in this low world where the questions are very material, very summary and where, you try to communicate in your own way, your spirituality and I feel a phenomenal energy through your life pathway and what will be interesting to know, is how can one get to this point? To express and feel this vital energy? And how to express one self?

J.P.S.: Yes, I do understand you, it's a very interesting question, I would have to tell you all my life of course. Thank you for your question, it raises a lot of questions in relation to the public, because, as you said earlier, I find that the French public does not enter and understand at all my work; it does not feel this energy at all. And that's why I make a lot of videos to explain where I come from. I was born in Morteau, not far from here, the Town where Christine, the Gallery director, was also born, and the nature is beautiful in this area of France (in the Jura mountains at the Swiss border). I also had the chance to train and raise horses for about ten years, American horses (Appaloosas & Quarter Horses). I had the chance to study Architecture in Strasbourg and then Art at the Art School in Besançon, so these are all leads. But, as I said before, nothing was as strong as my presence in Egypt where I had a kind of cosmic revelation in the temples where I entered a square cell, cubic where the light was coming from a square shaft of light through the ceiling, I always tried to avoid the tourists, as for to have this revelation (a personal experience). I digress, but Art need an initiation somewhere and therefore it is necessary to be able to get initiated, I really believe that honestly. It is like Gainsbourg (a famous French singer) saying that the song is a minor art and the painting a major art. And, I think like him, that Art is something major. And somehow I had the chance to be initiated, I made a cosmic experience (as it is called) that I continued afterwards in my shamanic trances in New York. And so to have made this experience, that is to say that as I spoke about it earlier within the Axis Mundi, one can do out of body trips and we enter somehow

into the Universe matrix. It happened to me like that, without fasting, without doing anything, it's what we can name a revelation... mystical. And having lived that, with so much strength, afterwards, the other things didn't interest me anymore... Painting, 'so what', it deeply pisses me off and when I go to a Museum, it doesn't speak to me anymore and it's very, very important to say so... To quote artists, I followed the path of Jackson Pollock (if you know its work?), who had the chance to meet the Navajo Indians who worked on the ground (with the 4 directions), that's where he found his energy. One have to find its energy somewhere, it's specially true nowadays, because our contemporary societies takes it away from us in a way, it forces us, that's a big dilemma. Afterwards, what also developed all my energy and my consciousness, is to live in New York, which is a totally multicultural environment, I was lucky to have friends who came from Japan, my wife was of Colombian origin, I had Mexican friends, Japanese, African friends; therefore we all bring with us, our cultural heritage in our backpack and inevitably it enriches us or it impoverishes us. Because there are people who refuse diversity, we saw what happened just two weeks ago with the French elections (the Far Right made more than 40%). Many people close in on themselves because they think they will be stronger, I think think exactly the opposite because it is my artistic practice that has shown me that, by A + B, we are stronger by immersing ourselves in different cultures, by reading different books, it is a question of enrichment. Do you have any other questions?

Public: It reminds me of life through death. That is to say, this energy through all the deaths, it is me who goes off into my digressions, these are questions that are working on me at the moment.

J.P.S.: To bounce back, it's true that death knocks us out every time and we have to be able to bounce back, and this vital energy I often talk about. Once I was in New York at a party and I saw a really beautiful woman at the other end of the room, this woman gave off an incredible spiritual energy and I go to talk to her about that energy. she said "You know, it takes two of us to be able to feel this energy!" So, it was a compliment she was giving me and it was a compliment I was giving her and in fact she was a Hindu yogi master. I'm not a Hindu but I'm lucky enough to have this energy, maybe because I'm an artist (it's a blessing and a curse). We don't know where it comes from, maybe it's birth, maybe it's karma, but I believe very strongly in these energies. We feel that there are people who are wise and where they come from? it doesn't matter where they were born. It is also said that they are old souls. I happened to meet my friend Marie-Madeleine Varet, who is a philosopher and with whom I write a lot of texts and we also film a lot of video interviews. She immediately fell in love with my work. She saw a work in a gallery, she called me the next day and since then, we became friends and we communicate a lot, yes, on philosophy, on Art, on life.

Audience: I was saying that in your presentations, there is a lot of talk about rituals, rituals that we have lost a little bit in our civilizations and it made me think of this period of this COVID pandemic where there were no more rituals for the dead, for all those who were buried in a hurry, me, I find that it is so important that rituals remain and how much it prevents, if they are not realized, not done, it prevents from making these passages and then to continue living; But there were something that was not done, for many families, who lost people during this Covid and we saw to what

extent these rituals, when they are not there, disturb the evolution of people, of families, etc.

J.P.S.: So, I'm going to respond to Christine of course. It's a shocking thing that this pitiful relationship to death because we become just products, disposable objects, like that; but how can we do that? We are, here, especially in France, a very secular society, very atheist and we see that a lot of churches are closing, the funeral rituals are disappearing in the churches and we don't know how to bury the dead anymore because to do a civil ritual, if we don't believe in the Afterlife, it doesn't make any sense, we might as well put it in the garbage somewhere. You have to be in agreement with what you believe, it's very complicated. Maybe the artists are there to open some paths but I don't have really any, I talk about what existed and I try to share it with the public. I went the other day to the funeral of the father of a friend and of course, this ceremony was under the Christian aegis, that is to say that we made the ritual that we know how to make here, in France and well, we can regret that these rituals disappear but if people don't believe in God any more, why to continue them? We have entered nowadays in a society that can be called post-cultural, post-religious and here we are, we have to manage... Maybe by ourselves, I don't know, I don't really have the solution.

Public: Jean-Pierre, I am a little surprised by this, you only put the ritual of death in relation to religion, there is also a ritual of death outside of religion, it can be done. I was also surprised in your presentation, when you put the concepts of past civilizations, versus the concepts of our civilization. I find that you have embellished past civilizations a lot and that you have blackened our current civilizations a lot. So, this is certainly your perception and I wanted to know, why you made this choice, which seems to me perhaps questionable? Because you have blackened ours a lot and embellished the past a lot!

J.P.S.: Firstly, an Artist does not have to justify himself but I will answer your question. Yes, an artist does not have 'morals' and does not have to justify his choices! I speak about what touches me, because I felt this great disappearance of these magnificent things! And of course our society is beautiful too! When one goes to New York, it's beautiful! But in spite of everything, for me, we lost a lot. But everyone feels things in their own way. You know that having lived ten years in New York, it's something that is really violent: there are artists who go there, they stay two months and then they leave, they quit. I've been there for ten years and it's the most competitive city in the world. I'm not talking about living here, in this village, where one can feel the same things; but having lived in big metropolises like that, we still wonder about how we function together? But you are absolutely right, I know, yes! but it is the bias and privilege of an artist to choose how and what he wants to talk about, yes!

Public: This life impulse, that you seem to embellish by the traditions, what does it become today? Does this life impulse still exist? Does it not materialise for you? In this world? Is it sublimated? Do you not see any positive points in our life drive, here, in this society?

J.P.S.: I'll answer you with a paraphrase; I was once walking in Merida in the

Yucatan, (I'm talking about something else here) and I thought the following thing: we don't walk the same way in Merida, therefore in Mexico, as in New York. That means everything, that is to say that our mind is confused by a thousand things. Every time I go shopping in a supermarket, I feel like crying, because communication doesn't exist anymore somehow and loneliness is everywhere. And that's what I'm denouncing. It's a bias, of course. But you know when you have touched something very strong, something very "spiritual" in quotation marks, it is difficult to go back to usual life. The two worlds coexist of course, of course! We are all confronted with life, death, suffering... Everything cohabits together but, having lived in other places, people in France have a bit of this spiritual 'energy' extinguished. Maybe because the French build themselves in a more intellectual way, more than in a corporal way; that's maybe where the difference is!

Audience: I do have a little bit of trouble asking you this question because I don't have any creative capacity and I, you see, I react. I liked it because I liked your talk, certainly it resonates with me. But the question I wanted to ask you, because I am touched by the quest for spirituality that animates you but I have difficulty sharing when you talk about energy, etc. On the other hand, I was touched and I agree a little bit with Mister who just speak, when you put so many oppositions, (we understand you) but you spoke about simplicity, you spoke about nature and there is a word that I did not heard and it is the question that I would like to ask you, it is the question of the meeting? And what about the encounter with other human beings? With the human, the the people you met and in all your presentation, we feel how much you are touched, how much you are attracted, how much you share, etc. But you did not transmit any exchange to us, you had some because you told us that you had friends almost all over the world but you did not transmit any exchange to us. I had a professional experience where I was only in the relational, including by the intermediary of the body and I have difficulty, in some way, to make the passage towards the energy, the cosmos. Even if I agree completely with the rituals, I totally agree with you, but for me, the rite has a meaning only if it is lived between humans. And if it is incarnated of course. So, that's a little bit it, but I'm asking you because I think you would have things to tell us, not as an anecdote, if you want, but at the level, precisely, of the so fundamental encounters that you could make?

J.P.S.: Obviously yes, but it was not the theme of this conference, but I will nevertheless tell you an anecdote to illustrate what you said. I was lucky enough to exhibit at the Plaza Hotel in New York and the St. Regis Hotel, which are five-star hotels, and I was lucky enough to exhibit there with friends who were of Native Americans Crow descent, of the Crow Tribe. The Crow women wore dresses and often on these dresses they would attach elk teeth and the older the woman, the more teeth there were on it. So there was the mother and her daughter and next to them were two men artists. And one of them wanted to exchange a silk-screen print with me; we agreed on a silk-screen; I'll tell you about the exchange. What a real exchange is like. I had chosen a small work that he had done, there was the chief of the tribe who was painting common things but he was a real artist who also drew Indians as we usually see them (for the tourists), with feathers, horses and all that... And however, he had made a personal and intimate work in which he told his life story, a small work this big (a collage) and I said to him, I'll exchange you with this! And so, the fair lasted three days and he said to me I'll wait for the end of the

exhibition... And on Sunday, the last day, I have seen... The path of the booths was like that: he was there, I was there, at the back with serigraphs that are shown here, the Series of 'Beauty is Energy' and so, suddenly, I have seen an American guy... Giant and fat, you could feel that he was drinking beer and all that... And the guy, he pointed his finger and bought the work I wanted. Then, the artist was stunned, he said to me taken aback: "- But you already knew it!" He thought I was a shaman and well, the American also knew that it was a Work of Art, that it was not something common, banal... He had transcribed and integrated his vital energy into that work. This was just an anecdote I wanted to share with you.

Public: Yes, that's how it went through!

J.P.S.: Well, that's how it happened, of course, but you can't tell all about your life in a few sentences...

Do you have any other questions? No? Thank you very much to all of you, thank you dear Christine for having organized this exhibition and this beautiful conference.

Christine Herrgott: Thank you all for coming, thank you Jean-Pierre for this interesting talk.

J.P.S.: You're welcome.

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jpsergentartist>

Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jsergent>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/jpsergentartist>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/jeanpierresergent>