

INTERVIEW JEAN-PIERRE SERGENT WITH KARINE BERTRAND, "ABOUT JPS'S EROTIC WORKS" BESANÇON WORKSHOP | OCTOBER 28 2022

**Jean-Pierre Sergent & Karine Bertrand (sexologist in Besançon),
exchange about the erotic works of JPS. Filmed at the Besançon
artist's studio. Cameras: Lionel Georges and Christine Chatelet.**

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Karine Bertrand: Hello Jean-Pierre.

Jean-Pierre Sergent: Hello Karine.

KB: I am delighted to be here and thank you for your invitation.

JPS: You're more than welcome!

KB: So, we're going to share this little moment together, so you invited me for my skills as a sexologist?

JPS: Yes, but not only that, I think you really appreciate my work... And so it was an idea to have a little exchange like that, a little informal, to discuss a little bit about my work and about life in general.

KB: So I'm delighted to be able to talk about your work and to give you my opinion as a sexologist, but also on the intimate (personal) view, your work really appealed to me; as you know, I really like your work. I was very touched by this work the first time I saw it. I am even more delighted to exchange with you. So, why was I touched by this work?

JPS: Yes, why that?

KB: For what reasons I was touched, my dear Jean-Pierre, it was already this play game of light; for me, there was a play of light in which I was invited completely into a dynamic, into the living. So already, there is a first glance, for me, who is not an Art specialist. And I speak from what I am. There was a dynamic of the living, something which invited us into some play of lights. That was the first invitation and then, when I got to the second level of reading (as we had talked about). Your work is made up of several layers of reading and at the second reading that I was able to make by looking at it a little more closely, I saw all the erotic suggestions, which obviously challenged me a lot. And then this third reading: there can be many! This third reading, which comes to invite us in the erotic suggestions but also at a given moment, pornographic... And I think that we will develop it. That's what touched me in your work. All this set of suggestions, invitations. Ultimately, one can very well pass by and not see anything at all! And depending on the person, the moment. And the viewer, must also stop right in front of your work to discover it fully. I think it is very important in order to discover your work! People can pass by; but in fact, if one don't sit down, and stare at the work, one don't see, where you invite us, in a phantasmagorical introspection at the end. I would say it like that.

JPS: Yes, you are talking in particular about my current exhibition at the

Besançon Fine Arts Museum?

KB: Yes, I am indeed talking about this exhibition and then after, about your invitation and my visit to your studio where I was able to take pleasure again in seeing this great magnificent wall that is exhibited behind us.

JPS: Well yes, there are many things that I try to develop in my work because of course, I am looking for the multiplicity of things and the successiveness and chain of events (karma); we will talk about it a little more in detail later. But as an artist, I have to spread informations. That is to say that I gather informations; I am a bit of a gleaner of informations that I diffuse, throughout my art, to the public. And as you said very rightly, most people don't get it because this artistic process, is maybe a bit too complicated or too simple? We don't really know why people don't get into the work? It's really questioning, especially nowadays; where I think that, as I often say: we have entered a post-cultural era, that is to say that we no longer have access to a deep culture. Somehow, we have access to a somewhat superficial culture. But my work is very deep because it speaks, of course, about sexuality, death, continuity, the collective unconscious... All these things, which we will be able to develop a little later.

KB: It's true that in order to bounce back, Jean-Pierre, it's quite surprising, because it's also very societal, this way of looking at Art where we must already see immediately something. Except if they are already famous painters like Picasso or others... where we will wonder about them because it is good to wonder about them. But for the time being, it's as if we had to be invited immediately, that's interesting too...

JPS: But what people don't really understand deeply, is that Art requires an initiation. It's a little difficult to say, because an initiation requires a certain culture, it takes a certain time... So, here it is...

KB: And you know what it makes me bounce back to? It makes me bounce back to the question of the erotic preliminary?

JPS: Yes, eventually.

KB: Because foreplay, in the end, is also an initiation. We don't go there right away, we invite and we take the time to look at each other, to taste, to discover, to invite ourselves into something that will invite us into deeper intimate desire. And basically, does your artwork, it comes to me like this: but basically, isn't your artwork foreplay? It's a great compliment for me to tell you that.

JPS: Yes, but one can say a preliminary Art; But at the end, it has nevertheless an existential and metaphysical deepness. Art must touch the deep and intimate energy of the human being.

KB: But isn't sex exactly that? Ultimately, Jean-Pierre?

JPS: Of course! But it all depends also on the culture in which one have been raised and educated!

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JPS: We are now approaching this second part and as you have noted very well and people also see it in an obvious way, I reuse a lot of pornographic images in my work. And this is what our society diffuses the most since about 50% of

people are viewing pornographic images on the Internet. So this plethora of pornographic images are somehow nourishing our collective unconscious... It's obviously a business on the other hand and above all. But what do these images give off? And, can we find in these images, somewhere, a trace of sacredness, as one could say. Because what interests me is the sacred in sexuality. It is not sexuality as a monstration, it is the other dimension... It is not the intelligent dimension but the cosmic dimension. Henri Michaux said in his book "A Barbarian in Asia" that the Indians made love to their women as if they were communicating with God. And I deeply think that in sexuality, we forget, of course today, our cosmic communication. And all my work is really based on that. So I start from porn, I use a lot of genitals, images of orgasms too, to talk about this elsewhere. In bondage as well, the body is bound but it can enter another dimension. It is the force of the brain and the imagination. We have the same nervous impulses in pain that we have in the pleasure; they are exactly the same impulses; it is our free will to switch the pain in pleasure... And it is what interests me, it is this mutation, this transformation, this metamorphosis of the pain in pleasure or of the pleasure in pain or conversely and maybe the transcendence of the body also to pass beyond the body, that is it.

KB: Yes, I hear the question of the sacred, of the sublimation of pleasure and of a very transversal jouissance. I hear the question of pleasure-pain. So there, the sexologist will say: always if it is framed, desired and played. Because sex must always be played. But in the meantime, I hear well indeed.

JPS: But Art is a game!

KB: Indeed and in the end, we are always a little in limit games, of invitation; and it is true that, after the transcendence in the climax, it is for me a gift that one can make through the desire and the sexual pleasure. It is a real fundamental question. And what about in your work...? Because, what also appealed to me, for sure, when you talk about pornography there is this paradoxical side to it, I think?

JPS: Absolutely, yes, you are right!

KB: Because pornography is what is visible! That's what makes pornography, otherwise it's eroticism: eroticism is suggestion and pornography is what we see! We see the organs and it is there where it is interesting, the different readings, it is that you propose us the 'not seen' in the 'seen', that is to say a paradox between, if I go to look for your images, I will see that there is pornography but otherwise, if I do not go to look for it, I do not see it!

JPS: Yes, it's obvious.

KB: Yes, but it's all this multi-layered reading at the bottom because it's true that porn, it is by definition, what we can see.

JPS: Yes, it's what we see. But I forgot, earlier, to talk about rituals, because that's what interests me, as we are living in a totally de-ritualized society; there are no more rituals except for the soccer World Cup or the Tour de France. There are no more rituals, somewhere, that connect us to Nature with a capital N; we redefine it a little differently today but it is all this reconnection that I want to integrate and provoke through my work, with the patterns etc... And you are right, yes, yes.

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JPS: Would you like to talk about the different levels of reading?

KB: Yes, the different levels of reading... What did you mean by the dance, to enter the erotic dance?

JPS: Yes, my work is an invitation: that's it! To enter into the dance, of course, the artist's true role is to play a game with the spectator, of course, because nobody really paint for oneself alone; it's not interesting. And then... you have to find partners who want to dance the same dance as you and with you. It's not that easy, of course.

KB: It's not so obvious, because for you, you paint? Because painting can be also sublimatory in itself, that is to say therapeutic, introspective, expulsive and one can keep, in the end, one's creation to oneself?

JPS: Yes? but no!

KB: Are you inviting us for a dance? Are you looking for a dancer?

JPS: It's the whole public that I am inviting, it's a shared and fusional dance, of course. No, I'm not looking for a dancer. I always remember going to see a beautiful exhibition of artist Yves Klein at Pompidou Center, with his big blue monochromes and when you are in front of his works, your brain changes its vibration. And that's exactly what I'm trying to do: that the body changes its vibration, changes its energy. Because nowadays, most people have totally lost their cosmic energies and connections; we spoke about it earlier. My Art, is, perhaps, a real invitation to enter, yes, in the true cosmic dance (Life-Sex-Death). In something else, in other cultures, because we are of course the full amount, of all that preceded us. And there are so many cultures are disappearing before our eyes nowadays. So, I have a little bit this will to say that at that time period, for example in precolombian times, there were the Mayas who communicated with their Gods by making self-sacrifices... We do no longer sacrifice anything for the World today, to regenerate the World. We are fiercely selfish and destructive. And we are somehow 'vaccinated' towards Life. We no longer enter into Life, in any ways. Antonin Artaud said a very beautiful sentence: "You are outside of Life!" And I think that my work invites us to enter back to Life again.

KB: Yes, by the way, it makes me bounce back to the painting I offered myself for my Christmas last year, it's one of your silkscreen works that I'm very happy to have with at home. And there are all these different levels of readings, and the first one that caught my eye was the: Pachamama!

JPS: Oh yes, Mother Earth!

KB: It is Mother Earth, there is something of this kind of energy, that invites us also in eroticism etc. But first there was this invitation to Mother Earth.

JPS: Yes, yes, it is a fusional, maternal dance, yes, you are right. It is the Regressus ad Uterum: the re-entry into the womb, of course. It is the place of creation. Artists often invite people into their place of creation.

KB: And it's amazing, because when friends come over, they have a glance... and every one... obviously, I don't say anything; and they all have totally

different interpretations. So, it's quite funny because it also allows you to see how everyone is formatted, basically, in their questioning.

JPS: But one can only understand what one already knows, and that's where the problem stay for ages! People don't understand my work, because they don't really know what I'm talking about. Of course, we all have our reading grids, we all had an artistic education, we know all that and therefore, we do only with what we have, we can't go into the unknown. It is very, very difficult to go into the unknown... For example, if you read the Upanishads today, you will not understand anything at all; but if you read the Upanishads when are sixty years old, well, you may find it fabulous! So It is therefore a whole level of awareness and knowledge that must be acquired and Art is somewhere there, to awaken the level of consciousness.

KB: Yes, I think that we can talk about Art which could awaken the levels of consciousness but I also think that, as you said earlier, it needs also a time of discovering it. That is to say that people do not take the time to observe, because there are numerous things to be seen, which are also readable and which one interprets, each one in its way and that there will be various levels of readings. So it's accessible, somehow, but my feeling is just that, deep down, we no longer take the time to look curiously and with interest? That's a real question!

JPS: No, we don't really take the time anymore, that's true, yes!

KB: To take the time... I was yesterday morning at the Besançon Museum and I saw your work again. As you can see, people don't stop or they don't stop very often. They don't stop but not necessarily only in front of your work and I was surprised to see how people visit a Museum... like a supermarket. So not all, obviously, I don't want to generalize; but it says something about a society too, it says something about an era! You have to take the time to be touched and overwhelmed. We are consuming, we are consume non stop!

JPS: Yes, one should read Krishnamurti, he talks about attention. The only time we are fully present to the World, is when we are attentive. And it's the same thing for knowing "God", in quotes, or the cosmic forces or even Art, yes. You have to pay attention to things and people don't pay attention anymore, as they are, as you said, they are in linear time; but I am in the multiplicity of all times, so it is very difficult. And in order to access that, you must have lived, at some point, some deep spiritual experiences; you have to fall on your head and get up again and say: well, that does exists and this, that doesn't exist anymore, why? Why did we destroy the whole World? Why have we destroyed so many indigenous cultures? And is our culture, our selfish way of living, worth more than any other cultures that have been destroyed? Of course, we have to ask ourselves this question. That's it.

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JPS: So, let's have a little extra-bonus dear Karine...

KB: Yes, with pleasure.

JPS: I worked, not during all this Summer, because it was too hot to work and

screen printing uses a lot of water; so I worked only on films during Summer and printed in the fall this new batch of a series titled: "Karma-Kali, Erotic Dreams & Paradoxes". We talked earlier about paradox! we are right in the subject of our interview and so I printed probably more than 200 (232) and all of them are unique prints. I really worked a lot! And just finished the job a couple of days ago and took pictures of all the prints. I had chosen five silkscreens to present you. In this one, you can see exactly what we talked about, which is eroticism. It's a woman dressed all in lingerie with fishnet stockings, garter belt and bustier: it's the 'hidden-unveiled' that we talked about earlier... As well as the pattern that I drew by hand on the film, like this and... yes?

KS: Well, it makes me think of the Orient, you know those windows where...

JPS: Exactly, the moucharabiehs, yes.

KB: Yes, where you are hidden and revealed, in the background, right? The suggestion is that behind this window you see parts of body. For me, it is a very oriental representation of the feminine behind this window which is often very charged very intricate an entanglement were we often see, as there, snatches of the eroticised body.

JPS: Yes, that is to say, necessarily and to thruly enter sexual orgasm, it is necessary to avoid all the cultural structures, since our cultures do not teach us to have orgasms. The revealed religion (or religions) (which is anti orgasmic by essence) has repressed the female orgasm (throughout its history). As we can unfortunately witness with what is happening right now in Iran: women are not allowed to show their hair in order not to 'excite' men's desires. Or they can only excite them at home. The body is something very political, the female body in particular has always been very repressed by many cultures (almost all of them!) throughout the World and throughout human history.

KS: So, us, as sex therapists, we make a difference between orgasm and pleasure...

JPS: Maybe so, but that's not the point to discuss right now!

KS: In any case, it is the true question of enjoying one's body freely.

JPS: In its fullness!

KS: And to be able to express oneself and experience it.

JPS: Yes, it's like excising women, these are terrible and inhuman practices...

And so, there is here the geometrical structure that eventually prevents the body from dissolve itself, from ejaculating somehow, from reaching its plenitude (confinement versus liberation and fragmentation); we can see and interpreted that way too.

KS: That's amazingly interesting!

JPS: You had a bit of a crush on that silkscreen and I thought that this image of bondage was almost virginal in a way. What interests me is to find ecstasy into this woman's face. Since we all know very well, more or less, the photo of the statue of Saint Teresa of Avila who is in ecstasy. She falls into ecstasy by communicating with God. But one can also communicate with one's own body and enter into ecstasy. Truly, the ecstasy is perfect, it's good, it's subtle, it's amazing!

KS: I really love it a lot because it is very obvious with its strong and vivid colors... Bang! It's challenging us and finally, there are absolutely no suggestions and we are directly immersed in it!

JPS: It's true!

KB: That is to say that, perhaps, compared to the work which is behind us (the big mural installation), it is a work which comes to catch us! We directly go to the point! With the colors and by the readability. So there is no suggestion or invitation, or...

JPS: Yes, it is direct!

KB: We are taken somewhere and we are perhaps also a little bonded; in any case, it is an invitation, that's what I can feel...

JPS: Absolutely yes, it creates indeed a direct link, precisely, with the spectator, since it challenges...

KS: Right away!

JPS: For good or bad, because for example, there are people working at the Museum of Fine Arts in Besançon who criticized my work by saying that it was pornographic! So, afterwards, as we said before, everyone has their own culture, everyone has their own open-mindedness, more or less... But yes!

KS: It is surprising in regard of this society which is rather very open and even a bit too much, on the dynamics of pornography...

JPS: Absolutely!

KB: So that's what you were challenged on, at the Museum?

JPS: But we do live in a society where there are hardly any works showing sexual penetration in any Museum in France for example. (except the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary, which is a metaphor for the transublimated sexual act). And that, when you think about it, is as if we had been amputated of the body and its creative functions and of our two arms. It is the man or the woman always lowered, incomplete, asexualized and subjected to moral and aesthetic dictates. You spoke a little about it during your conference yesterday: the female pubis has practically never been shown complete, in Western art, well, from Greece onwards, very little.

KB: Yes, very little, yes!

JPS: Very few in fact, and so, other cultures showed it because it was the first place of life and joy!

KB: So I'm discovering your work as we go along!

JPS: Yes, that's the rules of the game!

KS: Because it's an important moment, so I let myself get caught up by emotions and I would say, that the pattern makes sense in its relationship to ritual, it's the question about the ritual that I am seeing here. What did you put in it? What is your message, your messages?

JPS: No, but I don't really have any messages, anyhow we have been talking about rhythm earlier.

KB: Yes, the ritual and the rhythm, yes.

JPS: It's true that when I draw this, I find a rhythm, a scansion. For exemple, it's an image that I found, most of the images are images that I have recovered. Which were created by artists thousand years ago, or ten thousand years ago,

or three thousand years ago, or two hundred years ago, or I really don't know when? And the patterns they created appeal to me and so I redesign and reuse them. But I don't really know the state of mind in which these artists were neither the true spiritual meaning of these drawings. But during the transformation and reinterpretation that I do (by hand drawing the drawing of an artist who made it!); I can reenter again in its energy and in something spiritual. Here, you can also see flowers like that. It probably from Mexico but I don't remember. And you can also find this in some of the Middle Ages manuscripts where people enter in their prayer to speak to God. So, making Art is a way to talk, not really to an entity but to something that transcends us. A stillness... a state of non-thinking; a zen state like.

KB: Yes, the state of floating, of suspension in the ritual.

JPS: Yes, that's it, a zen state, of awakening. It's almost a satori state, if you will... There, that's the Stag (or an Elk?). That's one the last images I printed. I had this image for a very long time and I didn't like it very much (I thought it was too simple), it's a prehistoric drawing that I picked up, I don't remember in which culture? I didn't like it and so, before printing this image, I drew some arrows on the film. They are arrows of energy. That is to say that the animal releases its energy towards the outside. It is not towards the inside. It is Life Forces that comes out and radiates by essence!

KS: Yes, the life force of the Stag, yes, right! The power beyond, basically and that's what's interesting... It's the idea of the beyond, we go beyond our own body!

JPS: Yes but we are present into the body; the body is present, it is not abandoned, dead already!

KB: Absolutely, but when I say in the beyond, it means it doesn't stop at our carnal envelope? The energy?

JPS: That's up for discussion; it's really a metaphysical problem. But here, the Deer is alive! Because the energy of the dead, it is difficult to speak about it. I don't really know, I don't know, but whatever! And here, it's a very erotic serigraphy too, I thought it was very appropriate! You talked about dance, rhythm and scansion and well, it's really the rhythm of an erotic dance and ejaculation...

KB: We are way beyond eroticism in this print?

JPS: Why?

KB: There, sex is suggested very obviously!

JPS: Yes, but it is erotic because it is not pornographic: it is ART!

KB: Yes, definitely!

JPS: But well, that's for sure!

KB: In any case it's interesting, beyond the erotic graphics, it's also the idea (the sexologist is talking) of two women who play and climaxing together on a potential penetration, even a penetration de facto.

JPS: And of an ejaculation also!

KB: And an ejaculation, yes!

JPS: It's a game, as we said earlier! Art is a game!

KB: Yes, that's right, it's a game, yes! It's really interesting because you also

play about the question of the genres, in the question of the games of meeting: man-man, woman-woman, you would be more into woman-woman?

JPS: No, I almost never paint images of men, except for shamans in ecstasy and ithyphallic. Because I am a man, I know it, it does not interest me more than that. I prefer the strange, the foreign and the elsewhere... Besides my whole life is based on that. I can't say that I have traveled a lot... But I like the ELSEWHERE! Thank you very much dear Karine.

KB: Thanks to you!

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KB: And now, let's talk about the patterns?

JPS: Yes, we use that word in English!

KB: Well, to each his own, but on the question of the repetitive pattern, when I naively asked you, I admit it, what was the pattern or the repetitive pattern; and in repetitive, you see, right away, it makes me think of dance.

JPS: Yes, dance or sexuality...

KB: Sexual dance and the repetition of something or not always... But yes, on the question of the repetitive pattern, on this erotic dance, on this suggestive dance? Which is, at the end, a ritual and an erotic and suggestive dance of the bodies.

JPS: Yes, you have to think about voodoo dances, trance dances and ecstatic dance dances, of course, because what interests me is also to talk about trance. We haven't talked about it yet. But this binary repetition, we can also feel it with the aborigines of Australia when they play their didgeridoos. And so, they enter in trance by chanting some repetitive words and then with this sound and this rhythm, like that, which make them enter in trance and precisely, enter in another geographical dimension of the cosmos and dreams (Dreamtime Stories). And I had the chance to experience some shamanic trances in New York. We always did it under the shamanic drum beat repetition, to enter into these trances. And that is exactly what I want to talk about. I want to talk about that rhythm, the rhythm of the body. The body is so important in my work, it is an essential subject of course... Because without the body, there is absolutely nothing.

KB: Indeed that is the question of repetition but also of corporality and emotionality that I find very interesting into your work. Deeply, your art speak to me through my guts. And that really interests me. Today, we intellectualize things so much; your art is obvious. And we have this possibility to listen better, deep down: an emotion, a sensation, coming from the belly, something that takes you deep down... And the shamanic dance, it's that! There is no reflection! There is no methodology of dance steps. We are on pure sex, pure emotion, elsewhere and beyond... And indeed, sex is also this invitation.

JPS: Yes, we are elsewhere and beyond but we are inside!

KB: We are indeed inside of course!

JPS: Yes, that is the humongous paradox of course! I would like to talk about this paradox: we are inside.

KB: But there is some paradox!

JPS: Yes, but it is our body that can generate these images of cosmic travels, of course, and of course sexuality is very rhythmical; inevitably, without rhythm in sexuality, sexuality does not exist, period, and then it is silence and death!

KS: Indeed, on the question of dance and erotic encounter, we need this rhythm. If we do not speak the same body language, we may have difficulties to connect ourselves in an intimate moment in any case.

JPS: Talking about dance, I was long ago, at a party in New York and there was a Brazilian friend who was dancing the samba. There was a live samba band playing there and it was a really fascinating moment! And it's true that it also brings us into the Joy. I would also like to talk about the joy. This scansion of the repetitive beats like that; and the meetings man-woman, woman-woman or man-man, make us enter in a common and fusional space. It is a sharing and exchange moment... And the Art is also a sharing, obviously. It is very important, yes!

KS: Yes, and it is true that on the question of the presence of the bodies in your work, I just wanted to repeat that the bodies: they are sublimated, fantasized, desired, suggested... In short, we are constantly invited like that, in discovering your artwork, if only we take the time for it. So, I am really inviting the listeners to go to the Museum of Fine Arts of Besançon and to sit on the stairs! And to take this precious time, to have a glance at what happens in your huge mural paintings. Because this invitation of mosaic and colors and dynamics of life, if we don't stop there, if we don't look deeply at it, we are losing the meaning (it doesn't mean that it's not nice by itself this mosaic of life!); but if we don't look profoundly at it, we missed more than three quarters of your work; and that's a shame.

JPS: One could say ninety-nine percent of my work!

KB: Well, yes, indeed I didn't dare say it!

JPS: Yes, yes, but it's true. Karine, thank you very much for this beautiful interview, thank you to the friends who are behind the cameras: Lionel and Christine. It was really a great pleasure to exchange with you, thank you all and see you soon, goodbye.