

Interview Bernard Pineau Art Humanities and Linguistics

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Bernard, your work seems to construct a visual language in which disparate spiritual lineages, Christian, Taoist, Hindu, and shamanic, do not simply coexist but enter into a living dialogue. How do you conceive of painting as the site where these traditions converge, and what do you feel is revealed in this space of syncretic encounter?

They may seem disparate to those who believe that religions are human creations. But for those who, like me, believe that all religions are divine creations, they are not disparate. They have the same source and the same resources. To understand is to connect, and so the links become fundamental. Thus, Jesus never denied the Torah; the link is not broken. Buddha never denied the Vedas; the link is not broken. Finally, for me, Hinduism is monotheistic because the Vedas teach us that “there is only one supreme being: Krishna.” In my imagination, God is multiform and his creation is fractal.

Therefore, I seek comforting commonalities and illustrate them with my paintings. I have always illustrated my ideas with diagrams or drawings accompanied by a brief summary. This method suits me well for learning, understanding, and communicating. I have a more synthetic than analytical mind. Writing a text several pages long tire me. To conclude on this point, our consciences speak to us symbolically and visually. I seek to communicate with the visitors’ consciences. My paintings are therefore sometimes dreamlike and symbolic illustrations.

For example, I created four paintings to illustrate the four fundamental spiritual values. These four values are common to both the Torah and the Vedas. To be precise, the Vedas mention a fifth, non-violence, which can be considered underlying. Then I linked the four main stages of existence to these four fundamental values to obtain: childhood and justice, youth and love, family and truth, old age and peace.

I hope to show that spirituality nourishes our daily lives. These are not far-fetched concepts, but concepts applicable in everyday life. It is knowledge that complements our religious practices. It is our common humanity.

You have described each painting as a repository of beneficial energy, suggesting that the act of painting is simultaneously

aesthetic and metaphysical. Could you share how intention, ritual, or meditative practice shapes your creative process, and how you imagine viewers might absorb or be transformed by the energy of your canvases?

When someone talks to me about balance, I become a Taoist. For a long time, I used yin and yang in a static way, ignoring the middle ground. Things were either yin or yang; my world was binary. Thus, binary computing seemed to prove me right. But now I’ve admitted that quantum computing is truly Taoist.

It was the regular practice of meditation that made me understand a more dynamic Tao. I understood that all our thoughts, words, and actions are polarized. Thus, I speak of a Yin attitude or a Yang attitude.

I then realized, after five years of artistic practice, that my approach was essentially Yang. Starting with an idea, a word, or a reading, I sought to make it visible and perhaps more understandable, thus a Yang attitude. I needed to find a Yin attitude to balance my approach within the movement.

Thus, the preliminary studies on paper were born. For them, through drawings or preparatory sketches, it’s about instantaneity, immediacy. A total letting go. No rework or retouching, just occasional marker strokes. These oil works on paper are all framed identically under Plexiglas. Years later, I added paintings on glass and carved wood.

Throughout your oeuvre, a dynamic interplay of opposites such as light and shadow, silence and music, stillness and movement recall the Taoist rhythm of Yin and Yang. In what ways does this duality guide your compositions, and how have your years of spiritual exploration, from Catholic ritual to ashrams in India, deepened your sense of balance within the painted surface?

You understand that I was a child neglected by my parents and ignored by adults, without having suffered as a result. I always had the feeling of coming from elsewhere and being parachuted in. As soon as I discovered the principles of reincarnation, it comforted me. For me, reincarnation is obvious. In my childhood, therefore, as far back as I can remember, I used to pray. My imagination was populated by beings I loved and whom I called by their first

names. I have always felt a respectful familiarity with the sacred. I liked to take refuge in churches, alone and in silence, just as I did at night by the ocean.

My paintings are always outdoors, and I think this is linked to my childhood where I only had a straw mattress to sleep on in a corner. The outdoors is my home.

Some paintings illustrate reincarnation, and many of the faces are multifaceted. For we carry the memory of all our past lives. I would like to point out here that I call a life, the totality of our existences. It's a way of reconciling the Vedas and the Gospels.

My personality and my childhood made me cherish discipline and shun all obedience. Discipline is internal and virtuous; obedience is external and dangerous. Wars, genocides, slavery, etc., are consequences of obedience.

When I felt the deep need to create a series on the Gospels, I thought of the Catholic Christian Way of the Cross. Unfortunately, at least seven stations are not mentioned in the Gospels. I therefore focused on the important and symbolic stages. In particular, the three Annunciations, which are, in my humble opinion, the true divine creation of a new religion: Christianity. I would like to reiterate that I respect all religions, dogmas, and beliefs. I am expressing a personal and artistic vision here.

Your paintings often stage figures that are at once mythological and intimate, saintly and quotidian, as if inhabiting a theater of allegory and personal memory. How do you approach figuration as both symbolic grammar and personal testimony, and what role does storytelling play in this double register of your art?

Life, and all creation in general, begins with an imbalance. This has become my deep conviction. Cold and heat generate storms. Hunger and prey lead to the suppression of one life to prolong the other. Lack of love makes us beggars of love. Unsatisfied spiritual hunger drives us to undertake a continual quest... Every imbalance produces movement. And life is movement. Cycles, rhythms, periods, stages are movements.

That said, I questioned the imbalance at the origin of my artistic activity. Indeed, I could have been content with constant and silent spiritual study. My imbalance stems from the very human need to share. And I realized that neither my loved ones, nor my friends, nor my neighbors shared my spiritual and artistic appetite. We are in perpetual change, and those around us often have an image of us that is too fixed and stable. In the Gospels, a quote from Jesus set me in motion. "No one can be a prophet in their own country, or even in their own family." My artistic approach was born from accepting incomprehension or indifference. We live in a wonderful time because we can share and commune with strangers from the other side of the world.

Recently, I created a series of asymmetrical diptychs that I called "The Steps," which also illustrate this aspect of imbalance and movement.

Regarding the bright colors, it can indeed be seen as a hymn to life. I should point out here that I only use oil paint. It's a question of the element, fire, not water. Fire, the primordial element, which radiates and contributes to beneficial energy. I like colors to sing.

Having grown up in Royan, a city rebuilt from repeated destruction, and having journeyed through the Himalayas in search of sages,

you have lived amidst cycles of ruin and renewal. How does this life experience manifest in your visual practice, and might the exuberance of your palette be read as an affirmation of resilience, of life's capacity to constantly regenerate itself?

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Animals recur throughout your paintings, cats, monkeys, birds, scorpions, sometimes as companions, sometimes as allegorical witnesses. Do you view them as metaphors, messengers, or autonomous presences, and how do they shape the ecology of your painted worlds?

A wise man told me that my childhood was marked by loneliness, humiliation, and fear. A stray cat secretly adopted, and the neighbors' dogs for nighttime escapades, showed me unconditional love. I have always seen great love and humanity in the eyes of the pets I encountered. These relationships with animals and the deep sense of the power and presence of the elements have built for me a living world inhabited by a superior intelligence. Only intelligence can create intelligence. Without any adult teaching or role models, I was born a believer.

My spiritual studies have enriched my relationship with animals: Most of the symbols of astrological and alchemical signs are animals. Ganesh, the man with the elephant's head, speaks to me.

I am pained to see the rapid disappearance of many species. I dream of a world where an important place would be given to the wild world. Man has a place, but not all of it. In some works, I tried to show that it is our egos, and therefore appropriation, that are the main source of our problems. We should teach this and how to control egos and anger. Show how pride makes us stupid.

Your use of saturated color and bold contour evokes both the sacred intensity of stained glass and the immediacy of contemporary graphic languages. How do you navigate the tension between

tradition and modernity, and do you see your work as intentionally collapsing the boundaries between high art and the vernacular?.

I don't like classifications, boundaries, or comparisons. I don't know if what I do can be considered contemporary art. I express a singularity of form and content. A singularity born from this permanent awareness of the presence of a superior intelligence. As already mentioned, to understand is to connect. I seek connections, commonalities, similarities. It's a timeless quest. I like to talk about "noûs."

For 50 years, I have nourished myself with the images of many master painters. I often call them by their first names, a respectful familiarity that I need. When I have to decide whether a painting is finished or not, I often ask the opinion of Pablo or Maurice, Henri or Shaïm, Nicolas or Francis, etc. Without having the audacity or pride to compare myself to them, I hope there is a certain continuity with my shared work. In any case, they are always present.

The ocean seems to permeate your life and your work, whether in childhood meditations by the shore or in the tidal rhythms implicit in your paintings. How do you conceive of water as both theme and form, and do you regard the ocean as a metaphor for the unconscious, the infinite, or the divine abyss?.

Thank you for this wonderful question

I like to remind you that water was born from fire and that there is fire in water. Science teaches us that water is the second element in order of appearance after the Big Bang.

Nothing can stop water; we can only slow it down. It purifies, it dissolves, it permeates.

We are made of at least 80% water. Why don't we dissolve when we bathe? This question remained unanswered for me for a long time. I now understand that water has multiple states and multiple properties, more or less known.

Yes, I see the ocean as a manifestation and a divine presence. It fascinates and reassures me; it is alive and always present within me. In my youth, I was submerged by a huge wave. I could have died. A shaman taught me that it was a symbolic ordeal. The ocean will never be a threat to me.

Many of your paintings carry aphoristic titles such as Aimer c'est connaître, Donner c'est recevoir, Prendre c'est perdre, that function like spiritual axioms. What role does language play in your practice, and do you see titles as parallel texts that frame interpretation, or as distillations of essence that emerge only after the act of painting is complete?

I wanted to demonstrate that laws and equations can, and must, also be expressed outside of mathematical language. Mathematical equations are simply relationships. "Connecting mass, energy, and the speed of light" is no stranger than connecting "planets, metals, and character traits." I repeat here again that I have great respect for science and the scientific approach. It seems to me that mathematical language applies to the physical world, the limited world. The WORD applies to all dimensions.

I therefore created and formulated twelve spiritual equations illustrated by twelve asymmetrical diptychs. I distinguish between spiritual equations and spiritual laws. I might do a series on spiritual laws.

Generally speaking, I allow myself to develop hypotheses or beliefs on various subjects such as memories, immediacy, consciousness, time, healing, etc.

Though you have been recognized internationally in Florence, New York, Dubai, and beyond, your artistic pilgrimage seems inward as much as outward. How do you reconcile the external demands of visibility, prizes, and recognition with the inward necessity of spiritual authenticity, and what counsel might you offer to younger artists striving to unite the sacred with the contemporary in their own practices?.

Of course, I thank the many juries who support and encourage me. I express my deepest gratitude to them. But, as I speak, I am actually recognized only by a small number of amateurs, experts, and professionals. Even though, on my website BPineau.com, the number of visitors is growing rapidly.

External demands have no impact on my spiritual and artistic approach. However, I would like my works to endure and spread throughout the world like messengers, like Tibetan prayer flags. Having more buyers would allow me to participate in the many international exhibitions offered to me.

For young people, I would make one observation: Our contemporary societies are dominated by engineers, businessmen, and managers. They are useful and a source of progress and comfort, but we have given them too much power. They have built us a society of lies, materialistic and without reference points. A society that risks becoming unlivable in the near future with AI, robots, quantum computing, autocrats, etc. We urgently need artists, sages, thinkers, creators, charismatic leaders, poets, dreamers, architects, monks, etc. We need humanity, respect for life, joy, and fulfillment. We have taken enough from nature and can be content with what we have already taken.

From time to time, young aspiring artists ask me for lessons. I always ask them why they want to paint and what they have to share.

Short Biography

Born in 1951 in Royan, by the ocean, the author grew up in complete freedom, nourishing a thirst for spirituality from an early age. Passionate about wisdom and religions, he explored these themes through his readings, while developing a deep love for painting. Although his engineering studies and professional obligations kept him away from the brush, the call of art remained. At 58, he decided to devote himself to it fully and opened his first studio in 2014 in Aigrefeuille. Other creative spaces followed in Mortagne-sur-Gironde and then in Vallières in 2021. His works, numbered chronologically, bear witness to an inner journey, each painting being a fragment of reflection and beneficial energy. Through painting, he shapes a vibrant language between spirituality and artistic expression, offering everyone an open door to emotion and contemplation.

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