

Robert Saint-Esteben

It was totally unreasonable to ask me to prepare this introduction to the second edition of the Jean-François Prat Prize.

Was it not Jean-François who would enjoy gently teasing me about my office's eclectic decor, too tinged with regionalism for his liking, and so unlike the trends in contemporary art about which he was so passionate? Moreover, how can I write about Jean-François after the so aptly and brilliantly chosen words of Jean-Denis Bredin in the first edition? In court, it is a well-known fact that no one can appear after such a Lawyer without suffering great damage...

At the same time, it is impossible not to attempt to express, even very awkwardly, what Jean-François represented for someone who has spent, right from the very first day, his entire career as *avocat* working alongside him in this same firm which owes him so much.

For the associate that I was first of all, then partner for decades, he was always a model, even if his modesty led him to claim, against all the evidence, that he needed others, as he considered himself a very average lawyer.

He was not only a model as a lawyer, with dazzling analytical intelligence, but he was also a model as a man. There was his loyalty first of all to the firm whose development and continuity were a concern for him above all else. He would even sacrifice his *ego* by, for example, systematically giving priority to the youngest partner when faced with conflicts of interest.

This is because Jean-François was fundamentally good, even if he did his best to hide it behind a mask of more or less gruff severity, an unconvincing game which in fact fooled no one.

Highly professional, good, passionately fond of the arts, he was the *honnête homme* of our era without the fawning spirit of that of centuries ago.

As for the arts enthusiast, I am thinking paradoxically here of the music lover who steadfastly tried, more or less successfully, to communicate to me his passion for opera, especially Italian opera, which clearly touched his deepest roots.

What friendly battles we would have together on these subjects! I remember his harsh reaction when I expressed my satisfaction that cinema – even if it was also one of his passions – had appropriated certain works of opera, that being for him a sacrilege defying all common sense. But also what immense joy he gave me when, in my early days just after joining the firm, after an arbitration hearing he took me off on a frantic race through the streets of Vienna to see, standing at the back of the stalls of the Opera House, a production of *La Clemenza di Tito*. I then listened with admiration to his critical analysis, which was as brilliant as his demonstration before the arbitrators just a few hours earlier.

This is because with Jean-François, art was never very far from pleading in court.

Jean-François, we had promised not to leave each other...

Why, just once, did you not keep your word, in that dark month of March?

Robert Saint-Esteben, a partner at Bredin Prat, is the head of the firm's competition practice. Consistently ranked first among European competition lawyers in international guides, he has established a substantial experience in commercial litigation and arbitration too.

Mr. Saint-Esteben holds degrees from the University of Paris law school; the Ecole nationale des impôts and the Centre universitaire d'études des communautés européennes, CEE.