

Cultural Daily

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Jeff Koons: Un cadeau empoisonné

Allon Schoener · Wednesday, February 7th, 2018

On January 21, *Libération*, the French leftist daily, published [an open letter](#) from two dozen French artists, art world luminaries, citizens and politicians including Dominique Perrault, architect of the French National Library, and Frédéric Mitterrand, former minister of culture, suggesting that the gift of Jeff Koons, *Bouquet of Tulips*, to the City of Paris be abandoned.



This is the Eiffel Tower as seen from the Trocadero terrace. On the right is the Palais de Tokyo, where Koons' sculpture is proposed to be installed on the exterior. (Photo from Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository.)

Koons, who thrives on controversy, said that the sculpture will serve as a symbol of optimism commemorating the tragic terrorist events of November 13, 2015. It is a gigantic statue of a raised arm and hand holding a multicolored bouquet of tulips (They look like his signature balloons.) intended to mimic New York's Statue of Liberty grasping a torch. A polychrome sculpture 34 feet tall, weighing 30 tons and resting on a base 27 x 32 feet, it is proposed to be located in front of the colonnade of the Palais de Tokyo located at the Trocadero in the 16th Arrondissement. The project had been initiated several years ago by Jane D. Hartley, then U.S. Ambassador to France and Monaco and Anne Hidalgo, then mayor of Paris. The sculpture is currently being fabricated in Germany as the resolution of its placement is pending.

Koons calls it a gift to the City of Paris; however, the financing of his gift is somewhat vague. There are the costs of production and installation for which funds had to be raised. Estimated to cost 3.5 million Euros at a minimum, fabrication is being financed by French benefactors. However, there will be costs that need to be absorbed by the City of Paris. Furthermore, it is not clear that the designated location can support the sculpture's weight.

There are two issues. First, the statue itself, and second its placement. With regard to the statue, it is very much in keeping with Koons sculptures which mimic automobiles, inflatable toys, household objects, classic historical sculpture and Michael Jackson. Unquestionably, his work has artistic merit. There is no argument about that. The open letter published in *Libération* states: "A brilliant and innovative creator in the 1980s, Jeff Koons has since become the emblem of industrial art which is spectacular and speculative."

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If he is an artist of recognized esteem, why the uproar? I believe that it is the inappropriateness of the location. Palais Chaillot, constructed for the *Exposition Internationale* in 1937, consists of the two pavilions surrounding an open plaza with an unobstructed view of the Eiffel Tower. The east wing is the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The west wing, Palais de Tokyo, is dedicated to modern and contemporary art. It is proposed that Koons' monumental sculpture will be positioned in front of the colonnade of that building. Unfortunately, Koons' sculpture is completely out of scale with the building and will destroy the harmony of the area surrounding the grand plaza.

Because Koons has powerful support – American embassy, mayor of Paris and major collectors – *Bouquet of Tulips* is not going to wither and disappear. I believe that it behooves the sensible opposition to propose an alternate site and campaign to install the statue in that location. My recommendation is the [Bassin de la Villette in the 19th Arrondissement](#).

In another era, it was a freight barge terminal. Recently, it has become a tourist mecca with swimming pools and the focus of a hip youth culture with bars and restaurants. Here, this gigantic polychrome sculpture will not seem out of place and would complement the rebirth of this neighborhood.



The Statue of Liberty as seen from RedIf that does not work out, I have another recommendation – [Red Hook in Brooklyn](#). The

Gowanus Basin, similar to the Bassin de la Villette, was once a barge freight terminal for Erie Canal commerce. It also served as a winter harbor and residence for Erie Canal barges and the families who operated them. Red Hook is now one of the hottest neighborhoods in New York. Its massive Ikea and cruise terminal would provide abundant complementary kitsch for a gigantic Koons sculpture.

Top image: Jeff Koons, proposal for 'Bouquet of Tulips,' © Jeff Koons. Courtesy Noirmontartproduction.

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