

JEFF KOONS  
*Bouquet of Tulips*

Donation to the City of Paris, as a testimony of the support of the American people to the Parisians and the French people, in homage to the victims of the terror attacks committed in Paris and elsewhere in France in 2015-2016.

Installation planned on the place de Tokyo, in front of the entrances of the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris and the Palais de Tokyo, on the avenue du Président Wilson, in Paris.

Today, facing the multiple media impacts raised by this gesture of generosity, and the spread of incorrect information that misrepresents it, it seems to us necessary to re-establish its original concept and the precise factual chronology of its development.

We take here the initiative to express ourselves in our sole name, as being in the heart of this project since the beginning and working for it as volunteers. We act as coordinators between the Fonds pour Paris which connects with the City of Paris, the artist, whom we represent in this project<sup>1</sup>. We have also been in charge of the fundraising, in collaboration with the Fonds pour Paris, and have temporarily financed the production of the work that is now under completion.

Shortly after the attacks of November 2015, being deeply touched by the huge number of messages from American citizens expressing their support and friendship to the Parisians and the French people, Jane Hartley<sup>2</sup> proposed to Jeff Koons to create an artwork that would be offered to the City of Paris in homage to the victims of the attacks. In great love with France and very moved by the tragic events, the artist immediately accepted and imagined **a new work, a monumental unique piece, created specifically to embody this gesture of generosity: *Bouquet of Tulips***.

The work is not imagined as a memorial but as a message of hope to deliver to the present and future generations: **“Created as a symbol of remembrance, optimism and healing, Bouquet of Tulips symbolizes the act of offering, represented by the outstretched hand holding the brightly coloured flowers.”**<sup>3</sup> The artist rather wished to express the painful context of the attacks into a symbolic work, both in its iconography and in its aesthetic appearance. A dozen has symbolized plenitude since the Antiquity. Unlike the tradition, the *Bouquet of Tulips* consists of 11 flowers only; the missing 12<sup>th</sup> one evokes here the absence, the victims lost in the attacks. The appearance of the work sticks to this reality with a very “true” aspect, unlike the shiny and reflective surfaces of some famous Koons' creations. The skin of the hand, with its texture and all its details, seems real. The “tulips” are balloon tulips with vivid colors, carrying a philosophical and psychological meaning in the physicality of their membrane.

The delicacy of the execution that gives the work its realism hides the solidity and technical nature of the whole, whether talking about the materials of which it is made, bronze, aluminium and stainless steel, or about its impressive internal trellis structure, that secures its technical qualities (weight distribution, wind resistance...).

The choice of the place de Tokyo site resulted from a long reflection, run from Spring through Fall 2016. The installation place of a monumental and durable artwork must be relevant to the

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<sup>1</sup> We do not represent Jeff Koons anymore as gallerists, as we closed our gallery in March 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Ambassador of the United States of America in France and in Monaco from May 2014 until January 2017.

<sup>3</sup> sic. the artist.

symbolism of the work. The *Statue of Liberty* was installed at the entrance of New York harbor, next to Ellis Island, that represented the gate to the New World for the XIX<sup>th</sup> century immigrants. Like so, **the installation location** for *Bouquet of Tulips* in Paris had to be **at once significant**, carrying cultural and human values, and not official or political ones, **exclusive**, as regards the homage it embodies, **and open**, considering all the numerous artworks already installed in Paris public space.

In June 2016, in addition to the place de Tokyo, the Mairie de Paris proposed to Jeff Koons several other possible locations. The artist came to see them all in July 2016, except those that had been immediately excluded because they entered into the perspective of Paris emblematic monuments.

Among the places visited then, the esplanade Habib Bourguiba over the Seine in the 7<sup>th</sup>, the place Leonard Bernstein at the entrance of Bercy park in the 12<sup>th</sup>, the gardens of the Champs-Élysées next to the Petit Palais in the 8<sup>th</sup>, all offered a very beautiful location to the sculpture but none would give it a symbolic resonance.

When focusing our research on the relevance of the location, the **place de Tokyo** is a proposition that we made personally and which was included by the Mayor in her proposal to the artist as it **embodies the whole symbolism of the project**.

In front of the entrances of two art institutions, it is first of all a cultural place by nature, defending human values of freedom, those that were precisely targeted during the attacks. The place integrates also a double municipal and national dimension as it marks simultaneously the entrances of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Palais de Tokyo, an institution moreover emblematic of culture for the youth, that was targeted in the Bataclan. Yet, according to Jane Hartley's wishes, who received many new testimonies after the attacks of 2016, particularly after the one of Nice, the homage had been extended to the whole French people in July 2016.

Above all, the place de Tokyo is at the heart of a French-American hill filled with symbols of generosity: uphill the avenue de New York, extended by the avenue du Président Kennedy which leads to the île aux cygnes, where is located the replica of the *Statue of Liberty*, between the Place de l'Alma, where is installed the *Flame of Liberty* given by the Americans in 1989<sup>4</sup>, and the Place d'Iéna, whose center is occupied by the equestrian statue of George Washington, given by the women of the United States in 1900<sup>5</sup>, this semi-circle place opens on the avenue du Président Wilson, former President of the United States, a great ally of France during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The geographical proximity with the sites of the attacks was not retained as criteria of selection for the installation location as the work is not a memorial but a symbol of hope and optimism focused on the future, and mainly pays a tribute to all the victims of the attacks of Paris and in France in 2015-2016, without a unique reference to one of these tragic events.

The Mayor of Paris, sensitive to the significant relevance of the place de Tokyo, had given her approval to install *Bouquet of Tulips* there. The artist then redefined the final dimensions of the sculpture to **respectfully comply its proportions with the classical surrounding architecture**, and has imagined a travertine pedestal, in a stone similar to the columns of the peristyle.

As this site is not "registered" but simply "listed" on the inventory of the Historical Monuments, the direction of the Architectes des Bâtiments de France was consulted by the services of the City of Paris and has given an oral approval for this implantation. The written formalization of

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<sup>4</sup> As recalls the commemorative plaque installed on it, it is « the exact replica of the flame of the *Statue of Liberty*, offered to the French people by donors worldwide as a symbol of the French-American friendship ». Its gift came as a thank-you for the restoration made 3 years earlier by two French companies on the *Statue of Liberty*, at the occasion of its centenary.

<sup>5</sup> As precised on his pedestal, this statue was offered in 1900 « by the women of the United States of America in memory of the friendship and the fraternal help given by France and its fathers during the fight for independence ».

this authorization is to occur when filing the final license. Studies were conducted by the Direction de la Voirie<sup>6</sup> and confirmed the feasibility of the installation. The directors of the two concerned institutions, Fabrice Hergott for the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Jean de Loisy for the Palais de Tokyo, were also consulted and had expressed their enthusiasm.

Following these preliminary reflections and studies, the donation of *Bouquet of Tulips* and its project of installation on the place de Tokyo were publicly announced during a press conference in Paris on November 21, 2016, at the residency of the Ambassador of the United States, Jane Hartley, in presence of Anne Hidalgo and Jeff Koons.

As for many other gifts of monumental works, such as the *Statue of Liberty* in New York and the *Chicago Picasso*, the artist offers his creation ; the production and the installation are financed by subscription. For *Bouquet of Tulips*, Koons offers his idea and the models, and oversees the production and completion of the work, without counting his time, energy and studio expenses.

A fundraising was thus launched for *Bouquet of Tulips* in 2016. A particular attention was paid regarding the quality of the targeted contacts in order to respect the purely philanthropic dimension of this gesture. The campaign was successfully closed during Summer 2017 and **today the donations cover the entirety of the costs**: the production and the installation by financial contributions, the reinforcement works of the place by industrial patronage.

The **bouquet of French-American donors** encompasses companies and individuals that wish at once to defend human values of freedom and citizenship, and to maintain a strong and lasting friendship between the American and French people. None of these donors undertakes a commercial activity in the art market. Their identity will be unveiled during the announcement of the final calendar, after all the authorizations have been signed.

Wishing to inscribe this gesture in a spirit of absolute generosity, Jeff Koons has proposed since the beginning **to offer all the income of his copyrights on the work to the families of the victims of the attacks**. A nice way for the artist to underline the generous essence of this gesture.

May these clarifications allow today everyone to form his own opinion based on factual truths and not on simple clichés. The debate shall be expressed serenely and avoid unjustified controversies, raised without a detailed knowledge of this project. Conceived as a gesture of friendship and union, the *Bouquet of Tulips* of Jeff Koons cannot become a symbol of discord!

Jérôme and Emmanuelle de Noirmont

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<sup>6</sup> Direction de la Voirie et des Déplacements, Service du Patrimoine de Voirie.