

Interview

“THINKING ART”: AN INTERVIEW WITH KOYO KOUOH, CURATOR OF “(DE)PLACEMENTS”, AT THE SOCIÉTÉ GÉNÉRALE

From 2 April until 30 October 2015, the Société Générale in La Défense is hosting a new exhibition entitled “(De)placements”, uniting a selection of works from the group's collection, the latter of which has existed for 20 years. The director of the company's sponsorship called on Cameroonian Koyo Kouoh to be the curator. Founder and artistic director of RAW Material Company, an art centre situated in Dakar, she also curated the exhibition “Body Talk” at the Wiels centre of contemporary art in Brussels this year.

Could you tell us a bit about your career and your most important projects?

I'm not a supporter of hierarchies. I started working as a curator and as an artistic promoter because I was interested in art as a thought process. An artist project has a lot to offer, whatever its size. Therefore, I don't think about hierarchy; I treat every project equally seriously. Whether I'm invited to organise an exhibition or whether I do it on my own initiative, I have far too much respect for art and artists to not be able to take something like that seriously, especially as I myself learn a lot from each project. Art is the only thing that has so much to offer. I consider all of these artists as if they were my children, and a mother can never tell you which one she prefers out of her children.

You've worked in Senegal, the United Kingdom, Germany, and in France. You've definitely worked with a large number of artists. Would you say that all artists have something in common?

Yes, there's always this pressure, this urgent need to produce art. Whether they are favoured or not, cultivated or not, in war or in peace, this necessity is common to all artists with whom I have worked. I talked earlier about a thought process because I am convinced that there is a way to think art, not to think about art. I've noticed this trait in every artist I've met. This proves that it is a fundamental activity to life, which never stops and is always renewing itself. It's reassuring.

Have you renewed yourself through all of these projects?

I hope so. Human beings fall into routines very quickly; we develop automatism. It's comfortable and, in one sense, this gives our work a certain profundity. But I try to limit these habits when I start a new project. I ask each artist who I work with to explain everything to me as if explaining it to a six-year-old child. Thus I try each time to discover their works and their aims as a child would. I don't act as if I know everything already.

How would you define the outlook that you have developed through this continuous renewal?

My work is mainly inspired by the paradox of desire and the impossibility of living together. It's a general theme, but it's what interests me. There are many ways in which we can tackle it: colonisation, racism, sexism, etc. I want to deal with this human reality that is at once social, associative, and asocial. I don't know whether a six-year-old child would understand this.

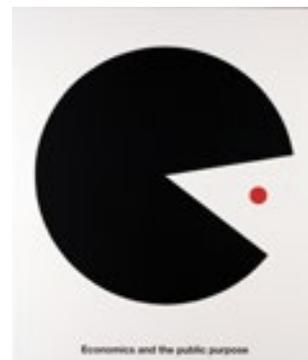
Have you followed this course for the Société Générale exhibition?

Yes, in one sense. When Aurélie Deplus gave me carte blanche, I was very surprised that the sponsorship management of a French bank asked me to be the curator for its exhibition. I must admit that I found this very progressive. It's not always obvious because people involved in the art world always want to defend their turf and their privileges. Even so, I hesitated a little and did some Internet research about what they do before accepting. I really liked the opportunity that this collection offered to work on genealogies and the influences of artists.

The other interesting aspect for me was to be able to direct an exhibition on the environment and the activity of the enterprise, a bank, which organises cash flow. The exhibition space also interested me, being at once a space in which to work and to live. We spend the most of our time there. I wanted to directly deal with the way in which we move in this space, especially towards the works. There are people who are interested in art in every company. How do we lead them to develop this interest? I also wanted to work on the relationship between the observer and the object.

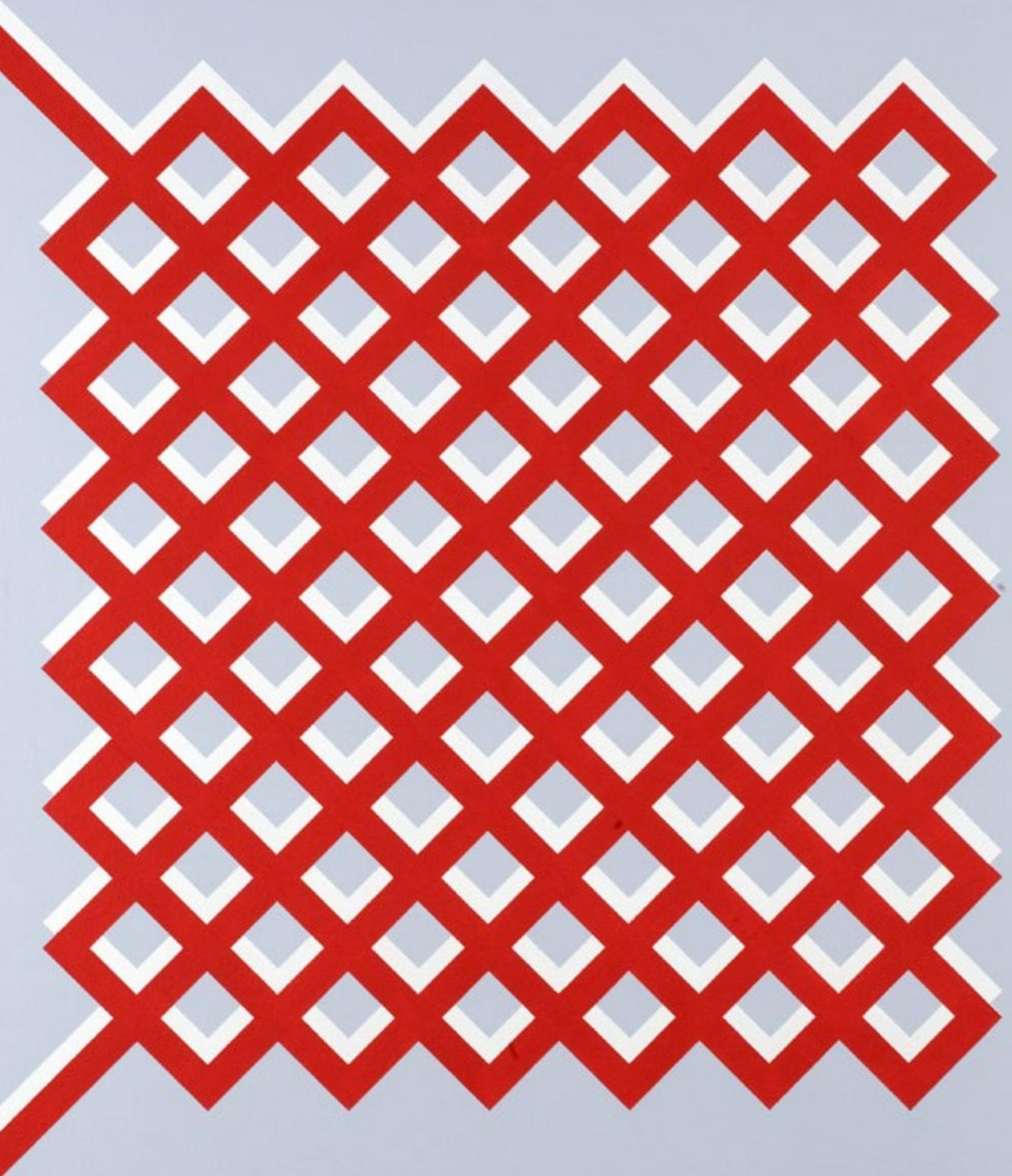
Now that the hanging is done, what is your perception of the relationship that the employees have with the works?

It's too early to say. The hanging will remain for six months. There is good communication, and a vernissage with employees and the press has been organised, as well as a programme for children. I hope that all of this will incite people to pay attention to the things that they're not used to. I hope above all that the works will catch people's attention. ■



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