

A Change Of Perspective



The Frac Île-de-France presents Ndayé Kouagou's 1st solo exhibition in France (in an institution). Ndayé Kouagou's different practices revolve around language, without establishing any hierarchy between them. From the tangible form of a painting to videos evoking the world of influencers, to the intimate and ephemeral nature of performances and workshops, his work gives equal consideration to transmission via objects, performances and educational formats. Engaging with the other is central to his need to create. A self-taught artist, his work is driven by a desire for dialogue and openness, a yearning to allow others to dream for themselves. In this sense, his work is like that of the social network influencers who seek to inspire us with energy and willpower, telling us to "Be yourself!"

Really?

No, not really, because Ndayé Kouagou's lyrics seem to lose us and guide us at the same time, leaving plenty of room for doubt.

I'm in favour of a Manichean vision of everything! A simple division of things, whether good or bad, yes or no. Something simple. For me it's more of a dream than anything else. I'm a doubting person, doubt never leaves me. For example, I'm not sure I want a simple division of things. I'm not sure of the good or bad of this Manichean division applied to everything. But despite everything I wish it from the bottom of my heart.[1]

It's hard to tell whether the artist's style is extremely deep or superficial, serious or ironic ? Asked about this elusive style of writing, the artist replies that his aim is to give the audience time. Not to give messages that will be quickly digested, but to sow seeds that will then inhabit the mind and grow. This leaves the interpretation open, offering a degree of freedom but also a sense of lightness. This play with Manichaeism and a binary view of the world permeates all Ndayé Kouagou's work. In his view, we all aspire to things that are simple and precise, but if we are faced with a binary choice, our brains get stuck. In one of his latest public performances, the artist encouraged the audience to divide themselves into two

camps: the extraordinary people had to go to one side, and the average and/or meagre people had to go to the other. A choice that is both impossible and ridiculous, highlighting the difficulty of defining oneself.

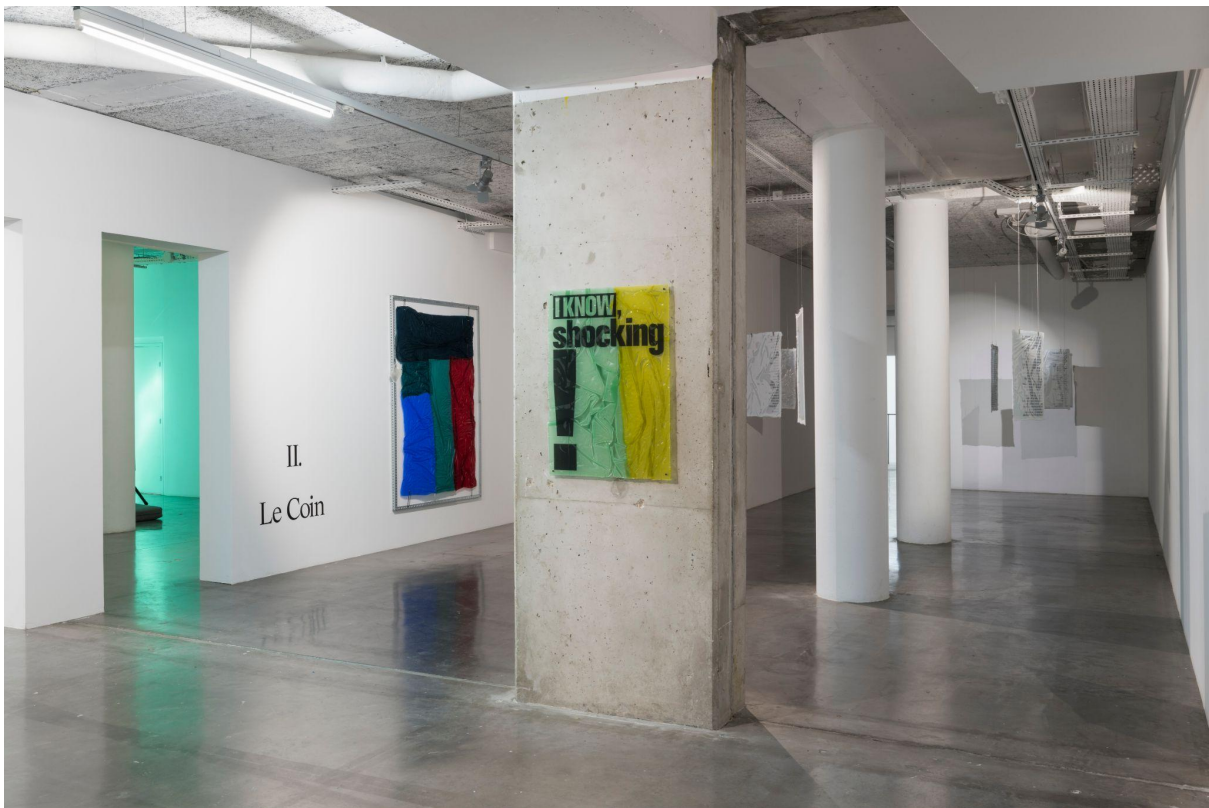


Every word spoken by the artist is imbued with a memory that is both personal and collective, and which is amplified and modified by the person who interprets the work.

Ndayé Kouagou films himself and not other people but the principle remains the same: a fictional character enabling a link of "self to self, self to other, self to group", to address all audiences, whatever their background. There is a search for accessibility in his work.



While the narrative conveyed by Ndayé Kouagou represents an alternative to binary media information (good/evil, them/us), particularly through his unwavering commitment to doubt, his work is nonetheless directly inspired by marketing and communication theories. "I work with text; I know the limits of text. Marketing has taught me how to make text attractive [...] It's the nature of our age, image is stronger than text. I'm not sickened, disgusted or nostalgic, it's a question of form"[2].



And in this, Ndayé Kouagou is resolutely pop. Like pop art, Kouagou appropriates the tools that create the dominant aesthetic of his time. By appropriating these technical tools (Tik-Tok, YouTube, Instagram, etc.), Ndayé Kouagou updates pop art, like other artists of his generation (Sara Sadik, for example). By using popular formats, Ndayé Kouagou draws on the codes of personal development to propose a new form of metaphysics of being that speaks directly to us, the public, encouraging us to take our place in the complexity of the world.

This ownership of content creation tools is offered to the public, with the installation of a space for conversation integrated into the exhibition. Defined by the Frac's new project, this space for free practice immediately appealed to the artist, who wanted to integrate it directly into his itinerary and make it a participatory work. The exhibition opens and closes with an area of activity for everyone, where a question-and-answer game will be played, reflecting the range of doubts generated by the constant pressure to evaluate.

[1] Ndayé Kouagou, extract from *Petit comme moi* (2023)

[2] Extract from an interview between the artist and the curator