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Jeff Koons, Marie-Monique Steckel at the Trophée des Arts Awards. The Plaza Hotel, NYC. October 28, 2016

While accepting the 2016 Trophée des Arts award at The Plaza hotel on Friday, October 28, the famed artist **Jeff Koons** noted "Growing up, I needed to have support and a place to learn about art ... where I made things out of popsicle sticks or I would draw - and that came from their programs." Koons of course, was referring to FIAF's programs. For him, art is a way to connect people in society and therefore needs to be accessible to everyone, which is one of the top priorities of **The French Institute Alliance Française (FIAF)**. He continues "When you are able to educate children through the arts, it connects them to all the humanities; it allows them to accept themselves as human beings; and once you accept yourself, you can go out into the world and you can accept other people. That really is what the journey of art is."

*"I always wanted to relate to the avant-garde." - American artist Jeff Koons at The Trophée des Arts 2016 Awards*



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“This year’s Trophée des Arts and Pilier d’Or recipients are pioneers and adventurers,” explained **FIAF President Marie-Monique Steckel**. “There is no doubt that each of them is a leader in beauty and exploration. Jeff Koons has reinvented contemporary art and created a conversation about new forms and ways to express artistic creation; Jean-Paul Agon has spent his career traveling the world for L’Oréal and exploring new expressions of beauty.”



As soon as he stood on the stage, Christie’s Adrien Meyer (Senior Vice President, International Director of Impressionist & Modern Art at Christie’s), showed a magnum of Cheval Blanc and asked, ‘Anyone interested at \$100?’ In the historic New York Plaza Hotel ballroom, hands rose in the air, so did the price.

**Christie’s Adrien Meyer**, auctioned off a magnum of Cheval Blanc (the wine ultimately went to the higher bidder – Larry Gaggosian). The bottle of wine set the atmosphere to raise record-breaking funds to support classes, programs and cultural exchange at **France’s premier cultural destination in New York City**, it was the Jeff Koons’ artworks in the live auction that created an unexpected artistic dialogue. One of the pieces was a Bernardaud vase (actually one of only two vases that Koons has made along with the Puppy) adapted from the Split Rocker sculpture he created in 2000 at the Palais des Papes in Avignon, France, originally made with 90,000 flowers. “Eventually, President Jacques Chirac made me a member of the Legion of Honor through the Split Rocker,” Koons recalled.

The first person who congratulated Koons for his Trophée des Arts award during the Gala was the other honoree of the evening, **L’Oréal Chairman and CEO Jean-Paul Agon**: “Congratulations, Jeff, because ‘You’re Worth it.’”

Like Koons, Agon emphasized the need for “creative cultural ties” and the importance of “cross-cultural dialogue and understanding,” two concepts that he has focused on as the leader of the number one beauty company in the world. Acknowledging “the stellar work,” Steckel and her team at FIAF have done to strengthen the cultural values shared by France and America, Agon added, “Beauty is multicultural, just like art is.”

Photo credit Amber De Vos ([www.adevosphoto.com](http://www.adevosphoto.com))

