



CULTURAL SERVICES  
FRENCH EMBASSY  
IN THE UNITED STATES

**Media Advisory**

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## **The French Embassy's *Night of Ideas* Featuring Keynote Speaker Patti Smith Goes Virtual for its 6<sup>th</sup> Edition**

*A 24-hour marathon of talks and performances with cultural figures streaming in live from around the world, this year's Night of Ideas includes a hefty U.S. segment and guests as diverse as astronaut **Thomas Pesquet**, San Francisco Mayor **London Breed**, **Sterling Ruby**, **Huma Bhabha**, **Jeanne Gang**, and **Barbara Cassin**, among others*

JANUARY 13, 2021- The Cultural Services of the French Embassy announces the U.S. [Night of Ideas](#) program for the global "La Nuit des idées" 2021, a series of intellectual marathons for the general public, coordinated worldwide by the Institut Français. On January 28th, the [Institut Français](#) is bringing its landmark nocturnal event into the digital sphere with a 24-hour philosophy marathon featuring leading thinkers from across the world, streaming in from more than 75 countries from Finland to South Africa and the Fiji Islands to Peru. The event will move progressively through time zones and travel westward, bringing viewers live content from countries where night is falling but inhabitants are still awake.

A segment devoted to North and South America will span 9 hours, **from 6 p.m. EST on January 28 to 3 a.m. EST on January 29, 2021**, with a major portion of that time devoted to content drawn from the United States and curated by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy. This content, recorded or subtitled in English, will bring viewers virtually to several major cities where the institution holds outposts: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., activating its sprawling cultural network of local American partners from SFMoMA to the Hirshhorn Museum and Columbia University. We are delighted to announce that American singer, author, and poet **Patti Smith** will be this year's keynote speaker and open the evening with a performance mixing music and poetry at 6pm EST.

This year's theme, "**Closing the Distance**" ("**Proches**," in French), directly addresses our shared sense of isolation and imagines new means of fostering community and togetherness. Chosen to evoke the new forms of solidarity that our economic and social crises are calling for; our changing relationship to space and mobility; this theme prompts audiences and participants to consider our relationship to today's challenging world and those around us in thoughtful, creative, and engaging ways.

Broadcast at the Cultural Services of the French Embassy's [Facebook](#) page as well as on [nightofideas.org](#) (*site launched on January 7, 2021*), this unprecedented virtual experience will allow audiences from every corner of the country (and the world) to interact with major thinkers and artists, and to participate in philosophical conversations about the most pressing issues of our time. Tackling subjects as varied as inclusive cities, democracy, our relationship to the universe, protest and resistance, solidarity, and universalism, the US program will creatively combine three different types of content:

- **Cityscapes**, wandering conversations in 10 U.S. cities with cultural luminaries such as astronaut Thomas Pesquet in Houston, award-winning journalist Patt Morrison in Los Angeles, Secretary of the Smithsonian Lonnie Bunch and Ambassador Philippe Étienne in Washington D.C., architect Jeanne Gang in Chicago, artist Brandan « BMike » Odums in New Orleans, and a walk along the Freedom Trail in Boston;
- **Conversation Capsules** with leading philosophers and thinkers including San Francisco Mayor London Breed, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Barbara Cassin, choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Melissa Chiu, Sterling Ruby, Huma Bhabha, feminist writer Mona Eltahawy, Mexican writer Yuri Herrera, Christia Mercer, Shanequa Gay, Robert Barsky, curator Lauren Tate Baeza, soprano Anne Azéma, visual artist Anne Plaisance, Stéphanie Boulard, Marie Morel;
- **Artistic performances** including a meditation on the beach in Miami, pianists Dan Tepfer and Thomas Enhco, Tucker Nichols, and more.

For the first time this year, the event will feature a special pre-recorded segment geared toward young audiences. French philosopher **Marie Robert** will explore philosophical topics around love and friendship with children and teachers from French-English dual language programs at Middle School (Maryland) et Lafayette Academy (New York), with a special participation from the Alliance Française in Seattle.

“This exceptional Night of Ideas will generate a collective moment for reflection and inspiration spanning cities, cultures, topics, and generations,” stated Gaëtan Bruel, Cultural Counselor of the French Embassy, “We are proud to participate in this celebration of ideas without borders, which will reinforce intellectual and human connections on a local and global level and foster meaningful interactions among diverse audiences. We are delighted to have Patti Smith as our prestigious opening guest, as we know she will perfectly set the tone for this incredibly special night!”

We are grateful for the support of our lead U.S. sponsors, The Judy and Peter Blum Kovler Foundation, and of our national partner, the National Endowment for the Humanities. We also want to thank our programming partners around the country: KQED, California Humanities, SFMoMa, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and Columbia University.

“As we begin a new year with renewed hope, I am delighted that this new NEH partnership with the Embassy of France in the United States will help Americans from large and small communities alike begin the process of ‘Proches,’ the French term for ‘Closing the Distance’,” said NEH Chairman Jon Parrish Peede. “Our participation in the Night of Ideas, an annual global event, will help restore our faith in what unites us here in the U.S., as well as what unites us with peoples of different cultures around the world.”

A special thanks to our historical partners, Brooklyn Public Library and San Francisco Public Library, which have supported the Night of Philosophy & Ideas since its inception. This year, the [Brooklyn Public Library](#) will broadcast 6 hours of live programming as part of Night of Ideas and feature guests such as Mona Eltahawy and Yuri Herrera, whose segments will also be included in the 24-hour global Night of Ideas feed. A second satellite virtual event will feature content exclusively produced in [San Francisco](#). Co-presented by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the U.S., the San Francisco Public

Library, KQED, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Villa San Francisco, the San Francisco stream strives to represent the breadth of the wider Bay Area's diverse thought and expression with guests such as San Francisco Mayor London Breed and artist Favianna Rodriguez.

The global Institut Français live stream is sponsored by YouBLive, AOC Media, Brut, France Médias Monde, TV5Monde, France Bleu, and France Culture.

### **About the Cultural Services of the French Embassy**

The Cultural Services of the French Embassy promotes the best of French arts, literature, cinema, digital innovation, language, and higher education across the US. Based in New York City, Washington D.C., and eight other cities across the country, the Cultural Services brings artists, authors, intellectuals, and innovators to cities nationwide. It also builds partnerships between French and American artists, institutions, and universities on both sides of the Atlantic. In New York, through its bookshop Albertine, it fosters French-American exchange around literature and the arts. [frenchculture.org](http://frenchculture.org)

### **Lead Sponsor**

#### **The Judy and Peter Blum Kovler Foundation**

The Foundation's work has included underwriting of such public spaces as Washington's Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Holocaust Museum, and in New York the new Statue of Liberty Museum. In connection to French culture and history, it has underwritten efforts at Notre Dame restoration, the Louvre Endowment, and to Holocaust studies including the 1988 Academy Award winning documentary, Hotel Terminus, the Life and Times of Klaus Barbie.

### **National Partners**

#### **National Endowment for the Humanities**

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. NEH also funds humanities councils around the country whose programs encourage support for the humanities and lifelong learning. [NEH.gov](http://NEH.gov)

#### **Carnegie Corporation of New York**

Carnegie Corporation of New York is one of America's oldest grantmaking foundations, established in 1911 by Andrew Carnegie to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding. In keeping with this mandate, the Corporation's work focuses on the issues that Andrew Carnegie considered of paramount importance: international peace, the advancement of education and knowledge, and the strength of our democracy. [carnegie.org](http://carnegie.org)

#### **FACE Foundation**

FACE Foundation is an American nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting French-American relations through innovative cultural and educational projects. In partnership with the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States, FACE Foundation promotes artistic, literary, and educational exchange and collaboration between creative professionals from both countries. With additional corporate, foundation, and individual support, FACE Foundation administers grant programs in the performing and visual arts, cinema, translation, and secondary and higher education, while providing financial sponsorship to French-American festivals and other cultural initiatives. FACE Foundation focuses on new and recent work of living artists and the promotion of bilingualism and the French language. [face-foundation.org](http://face-foundation.org)