

Press Release – 16 January 2025



Launched in 2016, the Night of Ideas has become a worldwide project staged in 190 cities and 104 different countries. In London and Edinburgh, the French Institute convenes free debates and performances to challenge our understanding of the world.

This year's edition will be opened by **Hélène Duchêne**, French Ambassador to the UK, **Thomas Jolly**, Artistic Director of the 2024 Olympic Games ceremonies and **Alexander Zeldin**, writer and director for theatre and film, on **6 February**.

They will be joined by **30 leading experts**, including **former French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna**.

Crossing perspectives, guest speakers from both sides of the Channel will address burning issues **from war and geopolitics to the climate crisis, AI and disinformation** and share their visions for a brighter future.

The central theme of this year's edition, ***Taking Action***, invites us to reflect on the ability of governments, civil society and individuals to respond effectively to the world's geopolitical disorder. It also questions the growing polarisation within our societies and the frailty of social contracts in democratic heartlands.

In the run-up to the Night of Ideas in London, the ***Little Night*** invites students from British and French primary schools in the UK to reflect on how to ***Take Action*** in today's world through their own involvement in the school community. The French Institute in Edinburgh will host a discussion with Camilla Toulmin author of *Land, Investment and Migration*, on 4 February.

The Night of Ideas is organised by the French Institute in London, in collaboration with the French Embassy to the United Kingdom, and the Embassy's Higher Education, Research and Innovation Department, in partnership with the Maison française d'Oxford, University College London, the UCL European Institute, Imperial College London, King's College London and the London School of Economics and Political Science. It is supported by the French Institute in Paris, the French Institute's Trust and the Patrons' Circle.

Night of Ideas – 6 February 2025 at the French Institute in London  
Free entrance - Registration, programme & biographies on [www.nightofideas.co.uk](http://www.nightofideas.co.uk)

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## PROGRAMME

### Opening event 18.00-19.00 - Ciné Lumière

- **HE Hélène Duchêne**, French Ambassador to the UK, will launch the Night of Ideas 2025
- Opening address by **Thomas Jolly**, actor and stage director, Artistic Director of the 2024 Olympic Games ceremonies, & **Alexander Zeldin**, writer and director for theatre and film
- Followed by a conversation with Thomas Jolly and Alexander Zeldin, chaired by Anissia Morel, director of the Institut français du Royaume-Uni

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### Europe at war?

#### 19.20-20.10 - Ciné Lumière

The end of the Cold War brought peace between European nations that has endured for most of the past three decades, until now. With the latest conflict in Ukraine entering its third year, and 10 years since the Russian Federation invaded for the first time, the pressures on Europe are growing. What should Europe be thinking about with the Russian threat targeting Eastern Europe? How should European NATO members respond to growing pressure to bear more of the cost of their own defence? What are the changes that the Trump Administration will bring to Europe's understanding of its own security? Europe's era of peace appears to be ending; is it ready for war?

**Catherine Colonna** - Former French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs

**Anand Menon** - Director of UK in a Changing Europe

Chaired by **Marie Dumoulin** - Director of the Wider Europe programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations

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### Women fighting disinformation

#### 19.20-20.10 - La Médiathèque

Many women – be they journalists, activists or working in public institutions – are strongly committed to fighting disinformation and upholding facts. Yet they are less visible in the public sphere and face harassment from those spreading disinformation in their attempt to intimidate them and stop their work. This round table discussion, which brings together women at the forefront of this fight, will spotlight their actions and experiences, and provide an opportunity to consider our collective response to this online violence.

**Marie-Doha Besancenot** - NATO Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy

**Salomé Saqué** - Journalist and writer

**Nabeelah Shabbir** - Deputy Director of Research at the International Center for Journalists

Chaired by **Natalia Foresti** - Press Counsellor & Spokesperson at the French Embassy to the UK

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## **Portrait of the artist in the age of AI**

### **19.20-20.10 - Les Salons**

The Artificial Intelligence (AI) revolution is driving significant change in our societies. This discussion will focus on AI's impact on art creation, including the ability to generate original artworks, compose music, and even produce literature. The panel will address the potential risks posed by AI in the arts, such as creative dependence, intellectual property issues, questions of authenticity, and the new prospects for co-creation raised by AI.

**Gérard Assayag** - Research Director at IRCAM-Centre Pompidou

**Marion Carré** - Co-founder of Ask Mona, artist, entrepreneur and author

**Elaine Chew** - Pianist and Professor of Engineering at King's College London

Chaired by **Eva Jäger**, Arts Technologies curator at Serpentine

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## **Ukraine wartime artists: narratives and national identity**

### **20.30-21.20 - Ciné Lumière**

Almost three years after Russia invaded Ukraine, numerous works and sites of Ukrainian heritage have been destroyed, damaged or looted. Since the beginning of the conflict, culture has been a key strategic concern in a war that is aimed at eradicating Ukrainian identity. Could artists play a role in this war? How to combine an artistic approach with a political perspective? Can art influence how the war's narrative is constructed?

**Maria Kulikovska**, Artist, architect and actionist-performer

**Sergiy Lebedynskyy** - Photographer and curator

**Emeric Lhuisset** - Artist and researcher

Chaired by **Alexandra de Viveiros** - Owner and founder of Alexandra de Viveiros Gallery

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## **Facts in fact: science & policy-making**

**20.30-21.20 - La Médiathèque**

Research makes a significant impact on public policies by providing evidence-based insights that help shape decisions and drive reforms. Research also evaluates existing policies, identifying gaps or inefficiencies and suggesting improvements or alternative approaches. But how does scientific evidence translate into policy-making? Do scientists and policy-makers really understand each other? Ultimately, how can they mutually increase their chances of success and help each other to achieve positive outcomes for society?

**Julia Black** - President of the British Academy

**Thibaud Boncourt** - Professor of Political Science at Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 and Junior Fellow of the Institut Universitaire de France

**Alyssa Gilbert** - Director of Innovation at the Grantham Institute for Climate Change and the Environment and Director of Undaunted, Imperial College London's climate innovation hub

**Pierre-Paul Zalio** - Sociologist and President of Campus Condorcet

Chaired by **Aurélien Saussay** - Assistant Professorial Research Fellow, Grantham Research Institute at the [London School of Economics](#)

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## **Activism: by all means**

**21.40-22.30 - Ciné Lumière**

Activism often operates at the intersection of lawful action and civil disobedience, aiming to create social change through a combination of institutional and grassroots approaches. Legal action equips activists with tools to challenge and reform systems within established frameworks, while acts of civil disobedience are sometimes used to spotlight urgent issues that traditional channels may overlook. Balancing these approaches enables activists to raise awareness and advocate for justice while navigating the risks associated with each method.

**Juliette Brown** - Consultant psychiatrist and activist

**Graeme Hayes** - Professor of Political Sociology at Aston University

**Rosalie Mann** – Founding President of No More Plastic

Chaired by **Lisa Vanhala** - Professor of Political Science at UCL

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## **Direct democracy or disorderly conduct?**

**20.30-21.20 - Les Salons**

In an era of declining voter turnout and waning youth participation in politics, some countries have embraced citizens' assemblies as a way to revitalise participatory democracy. Notable examples include France's Citizens' Convention for Climate (2019-2020), where 150 citizens developed climate policy recommendations, and Ireland's Citizens' Assembly, which proposed transformative reforms to national abortion policy. Should States use citizens' assemblies to guide law reform in contentious areas like environmental policy, criminal justice and abortion? Let's argue the pros and cons with the UCL Debating Society.

**Proposition:**

1st Speaker: Rick Tan

2nd Speaker: Judah Purwanto

3rd Speaker: Stella Stenou

Summary: Rick Tan

**Opposition:**

1st Speaker: Rohan Campion

2nd Speaker: Maya Huang

3rd Speaker: Nav Dhaliwal

Summary: Rohan Campion

**Moderator:** Hope Arpa

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**Closing event with DJ duo Sunana**

**22.40- 23.30 - La Médiathèque**

Join DJ duo Sunana, recognised for their vibrant and unique style incorporating a colourful array of cultural influences. They are on a mission to spread positive vibes through their music, creating explosive sets and selections that instantly lift spirits!