G-20 Leaders Commit to International Economic Cooperation

The G-20 Summit met in Pittsburgh from September 24-25 to discuss the restructuring of the global economic system in light of the recent financial crisis. Building upon discussions previously held in Washington, D.C., and London, the heads of state and government met with the objective of fostering a sustainable and balanced growth in the international economy through a restructuring of the global financial architecture.

Prior to the Summit, French President Nicolas Sarkozy addressed the United Nations General Assembly on September 23, articulating the need for substantial changes in compensation packages, the elimination of tax havens, financial support to developing countries, the regulation of global derivatives and a focus on the threat of a "planetary ecological disaster."

A statement released from Pittsburgh on September 25 outlines the new Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth developed by G-20 members during the Summit. Leaders agree that banks need to hold more high quality capital and will be submitted to a strong regulatory system. "Where reckless behavior and a lack of responsibility led to crisis, we will not allow a return to banking as usual," the statement explains. The Summit recommended a shift in International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy towards the financial support of government intervention to repair the banking systems in developing countries as well as the reformulating of IMF quotas to encourage lending to underrepresented countries. World leaders committed themselves to increasing bank capital and avoiding adverse risk by discouraging multi-year guaranteed bonuses and tying existing bonuses to net revenue. The statement incorporates concerns voiced by President Sarkozy by committing to strengthening support to populations in the poorest countries and raising living standards. Emphasis is also placed on investment in clean sustainable energy sources. Overall, the newly established guidelines are expected to be phased in by the end of 2012.

Amid the revelation of the existence of a secret nuclear enrichment facility in Qom, President Sarkozy, along with President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Gordon Brown, also called on Iran to take concrete and meaningful actions to answer the concerns of the international community.

President Sarkozy characterized the outcome of the Summit as a "revolution." "What would have been considered as a provocation until only recently is now seriously looked at by the G-20," stressed the French president, referring to the Summit’s recommendations to reform IMF policy.

G-20 leaders have agreed to reconvene in Canada and Korea in 2010 to continue their commitment to financial responsibility and sustainable growth. In 2011, France will host the G-20 Summit.

French Embassy on YouTube

The French Embassy recently launched its first official YouTube channel, France in the U.S. Debuting only a month ago, the YouTube channel allows viewers to watch clips of recent events at the Embassy and learn more about Ambassador Pierre Vimont, his staff, and French culture. YouTube is just one of the many social networking sites that the French Embassy uses to communicate with Francophiles across the nation. One can also become a "fan" of the French Embassy in the US on Facebook, or follow on Twitter at FranceInTheUS. To check out the Embassy’s YouTube channel, please visit: youtube.com/user/franceInTheUS.

A Warm "Merci" From France to the U.S. Remembered Throughout the Years

Recognizing the hardships endured by the hardest hit European countries after WWII, compassionate American citizens organized a substantial humanitarian relief campaign in the aftermath. Known as the "Friendship Train," the effort comprised 700 boxcars filled with 16,000 tons of donated food, clothing, medication, and fuel sent to France. Originally the idea of Washington journalist Drew Pearson, the train journeyed from California to New York, bringing together Americans of all walks of life to collect over $40 million in supplies that would eventually be sent to France.

This gesture of amity was deeply appreciated by the French, who responded in kind. In February 1949, the "Merci Train" (also known as le Train de la Reconnaissance, or the "Gratitude Train") arrived in New York Harbor. Consisting of 49 boxcars — one for each of the 48 existing states and one to be shared between the citizens of Hawaii and Washington, D.C. — the train’s arrival was celebrated in all cities across America. They contained gifts, which included items such as toys, vases, family heirlooms, and WWI and WWII medals. The treasures of the “Merci Train” were cherished all over the United States, and today Nevada strives to properly recognize this era of international friendship in the state’s history. An exhibit at the Nevada State Museum showcases Nevada’s French boxcar and aims to increase access to the tokens of transatlantic affection, many of which are usually unavailable to the general public. According to the Nevada State Museum, "the gifts represent the best of humanity; the kindness that humans can give and share in the face of great suffering, [and] the deep connection possible across cultural and spatial boundaries.” Other states, such as New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Utah, have also displayed the remnants of their French boxcars in an effort to preserve these historical souvenirs.

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France in Bloom as Birth Rate Rises

An abundance of cherubic, chubby-cheeked newborns can now be found in France according to the newest report from the French national statistics agency INSEE, continuing the French trend of high fertility. In 2008, a total of 834,000 French babies were born: 801,000 babies in Metropolitan France and 33,000 in French overseas departments. These numbers represent a 1.2 percent increase in French fertility since 2007 and confirm France’s position as one of the most fertile nations in Europe. “This is an encouraging message...that proves the [French people’s] capacity to project themselves positively into the future, in spite of a context of crisis,” says French Secretary of State for the Family Nadine Morano.

France has been promoting pregnancy through family-friendly policies, such as labor laws that permit ample maternity and parental leave, as well as legislation to allow part-time work laws for mothers. Furthermore, the government assists working parents by subsidizing much of the childcare costs for toddlers and by providing family discounts for transportation, cultural events and shopping.

The rise in birthrates could also be a result of French women having children later in life. Birth rates in women in the 30-40 age group have risen considerably, with more than one in five babies being born to a woman over the age of 35 in the last year. Additional empirical data also reveals that French women live, on average, to be 84 — which may be anecdotal evidence supporting the theory that France’s family-friendly policies and extensive health care afford its citizens the opportunity to enjoy a joie de vivre extending into family life.

Parents and Students on Board with Internat d’Excellence

Windows of opportunity were opened to 128 students on August 30 when they were welcomed to their new school, the internat d’excellence, or Boarding School of Excellence, in Sourdun, France. Unlike some private schools where only a few spaces are saved for underprivileged students, all the candidates at Sourdun are high-achieving scholarship students. The school has already received 1.5 million euros in funding, and administrators hope that additional financial support will enable the school to reach its full capacity of approximately 500 students of middle- and high-school age. “It’s the dream of a golden age realized,” said Diane Delamarre, a French teacher at the school.

Indeed, enthusiasm for the program is running high not just among teachers, all 16 of whom are volunteers, but among students as well. “I’ve never seen such a big room,” said student Mohammed upon viewing his new residence hall for the first time. The students were also thrilled about the extracurricular opportunities that Sourdun offers them, including soccer, horseback riding, and gardening. Academically, the school emphasizes interdisciplinary studies and group work, and students may even have the chance to study at a boarding school abroad.

The school, which was originally proposed by President Nicolas Sarkozy during his 2007 campaign, was brought to fruition under the auspices of the Plan Espoir Banlieues, the Hope Plan for Disadvantaged Suburbs.

France Demonstrates International Solidarity to Combat Swine Flu

President Nicolas Sarkozy announced on September 17 that France will donate one-tenth of its H1N1 flu vaccine to underdeveloped countries around the world. H1N1, more commonly known as the swine flu, is a strain of influenza whose effects, including fever and aching, have ranged from mild to severe, according to the Center for Disease Control. Though the swine flu has remained only moderately virulent thus far, experts worry that the worldwide pandemic could cause serious disruptions in societies unable to combat the disease. To minimize the potentially dangerous health and societal effects of H1N1, France and eight other countries, including, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Australia, have pledged 10 percent of their vaccines to less-developed nations.

"International solidarity will be essential in reducing [the flu’s] health, economic and social impact, [...] especially in developing countries,” stated the French Presidency. Determined to shoulder its responsibilities in combatting pandemics, France has pledged nine million of its 94 million doses to developing countries as a gesture of support and solidarity to nations less able to procure the vaccine.
American Films Given Star Treatment in Deauville

Celebrities and the public alike flocked to the scenic seaside town in Normandy to revel in the 35th annual Deauville American Film Festival. Since its inception, filmmakers and stars have strutted Deauville’s boardwalks while the festival’s three theaters screen the best American independent, Hollywood, and documentary films of the year. With an impressive 50,000 people in attendance in 2008, the festival’s organizers hoped to attract even greater crowds with more than 100 films screening at the Deauville International Center, the Morry Club, and the Casino Barrière.

The town was flooded with stars as they celebrated their most recent films and accepted festival awards. Action hero Harrison Ford was this year’s guest of honor. Actress Robin Wright Penn also appeared to support her new film, The Private Lives of Pippa Lee, as did Meryl Streep, who shined in her starring role in Julie & Julia. These two films enjoyed their French premiere at the festival along with 15 other American motion pictures, including The Time Traveler’s Wife, 300 Days of Summer, and The Informant. Festival honors were awarded to Ms. Wright Penn, Andy Garcia, David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker, as well as posthumously to Robert Aldrich.

The festival opened with a concert by American singer Julia Migenes, renowned for her powerful presence on Broadway and in the feature film Carmen. Throughout the week, a jury of acclaimed filmmakers and actors had the difficult task of deciding which of 11 feature films in the competition should win the Grand Prize. The concluding ceremony presented that award to The Messenger directed by Oren Moverman, as well as the Cartier Newcomer Award, acknowledging the work of outstanding first-time filmmaker Lynn Shelton for her movie Humpday. The Deauville American Film Festival, however, was not all about competition. One theater featured “Uncle Sam’s Docs,” a series of new American documentaries, and another screened “The American Nights,” a collection of classic war films and comedies starring the honored filmmakers and actors.

French Cuisine Takes a Bite out of the Big Apple

French cooking brigade Omnivore sprung experimental cuisine on New York during this year’s third annual Crossing the Line Festival in September. The culinary group, a collective of French chefs committed to the creation of jeune cuisine (young cuisine), has made a name for itself in France through its annual cooking festival and culinary publication. Their “young cuisine” creations aim to eschew traditional heavy foods, focusing on simple yet inventive recipes with natural ingredients. One such recipe featured on Omnivore’s website, bass with a soy/chili sauce accompanied by paella-style Thai rice, gives the curious a taste of jeune cuisine.

Led by chef Luc Dubanchet, Omnivore was determined to make a name for avant-garde French cuisine on the American cultural scene through a series of original events at this year’s Crossing the Line Festival. The interdisciplinary cultural event organized by the French Institute Alliance Française (FIAF) aimed to unite French and American artistic experimentation in forms as diverse as dance, music, film, and culinary creations. Over the course of a weekend in Central Park, these kitchen revolutionaries explored a fresh perspective on cooking through a film featuring legendary French chef and Omnivore member Michel Bras, question and answer sessions, and at the final pièce de résistance, a series of “cooking duets.” Titled Shadows and Light, the duets featured an American and a French chef who paired off to create new dishes and demonstrate their inventive techniques to the soft accompaniment of music and lights. According to Bras, “cooking is the fulfillment of one-self, to share.” At Crossing the Line, sharing was the central goal and all of New York could taste the delicious results.

Music Awes Audiences at the OohLaLA Festival

This fall, the dynamic chords of modern French musicians brought a European flair to Los Angeles at its Henry Fonda Theater. From September 23 - 25, contemporary French artists entertained audiences at the OohLaLA Festival with diverse performances ranging from techno to folk music. “Many people were curious about what was going on in France,” stated Sylvain Tallet, the general director and program planner of the event. “Los Angeles is a city of all labels, and thus a good way for groups to find contacts and establish a real link with the United States.” Developed by French music industry veterans and sponsored by, among others, the Consulate General of France in Los Angeles and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the U.S., the festival promised performances for every musical taste.

On opening night, indie pop/rock lovers delighted in the sounds of French singer, songwriter Sebastien Tellier, and piano aficionado Gonzales, whose powerful voice lends itself to both hip-hop and ballads and who has been recognized for his work as an arranger and producer. Also showcasing their talent was folk duo Cocoon, consisting of a man and woman who serenade their audiences in English in a style reminiscent of American artist Elliott Smith.

The evening of September 24 began with a haunting performance by the young Soko, a French MySpace sensation with Polish roots, and Finnish-French duo The Do, a pair who shot to fame in France in 2008. Festival-goers danced well into the night to reinterpretations of 1980s classics such as “Flashdance […] What a Feeling” by Nouvelle Vague. The OohLaLA festival closed with a bang as an “Electronic French Party” celebrated the vibrant French techno scene.
France's CNRS Celebrates 70 Years of Scientific Excellence

A leader in science and innovation, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research, or CNRS) celebrates 70 years of discovery and contributions to society this October. CNRS is the largest research institution in Europe, boasting over 11,600 researchers and 14,400 engineers, lab technicians, and administrators who work together in an impressive 1,200 laboratories. With a budget of over three billion euros, CNRS comprises nine institutes that conduct research in every scientific field, from mathematics to anthropology to engineering.

The organization was created in October 1939 by French physicist and Nobel Prize laureate Jean Perrin. In the 1950s, director Frédéric Joliot-Curie reformed CNRS by encouraging the extension of its areas of expertise. New laboratories were built and its employees grew from just 2,000 after at the end of WWII to an impressive 7,000 by the end of the 1950s. Scientific research was elevated to a national priority under President Charles de Gaulle. During this time of growth, many national institutes were created under the auspices of CNRS in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, interdisciplinary programs in energy, the environment, and biotechnology were added to CNRS's broad repertoire. Today, many CNRS laboratories are joint research units that are managed in coordination with French universities and industry.

A Long History

As CNRS approaches its 70th birthday, it continues to excel in the field of research, energizing the world as it progresses into the 21st century. Many events are taking place during the month of October to celebrate its inception. Quoi de neuf dans le passé? (What's new in the past?) is an exhibit at the CNRS headquarters that will transport visitors back in time, with 40 unpublished original photographs and their commentaries. A symposium in Paris on October 19 explores the theme La recherche, une passion, des métiers: construire l'avenir (Research: a Passion, a Profession: Building the Future). Presentations of high-tech equipment and scientific experiments should raise eyebrows at the conference, and young people will have the opportunity to ask CNRS staff about their discoveries. The 70th edition of La Revue, a report from CNRS, will explore the way in which CNRS history fuses with hot, current scientific debates. The Denis Guthleben book Histoire du CNRS de 1939 à nos jours, released on October 7, allows readers to explore the rich history of CNRS and explains its role as a key player in international research and human adventures.

CNRS commemorates scientific success through other activities as well. From October 7-11, CNRS partners with the City of Paris and the Ministry of Research in the 2009 Festival international du film scientifique Parisience (International Paris Science Film Festival) where the public can attend screenings followed by discussions with scientists and the films' director or producer. Les mystères de l'univers (The Mysteries of the Universe), an exhibition located at the Trocadéro Gardens in Paris organized by CNRS, will display photos, scale models, videos, and experiments from October 21-November 1.

As a leader in scientific discovery in Europe, CNRS has made many contributions which benefit society at large. Recent discoveries from this summer include a team of CNRS researchers at Université Pierre et Marie Curie finding that during the first few days of cancer development, the immune system identifies cancer cells as those needing protection rather than abnormal cells requiring eradication. Another CNRS team at the Marseille School of Medicine discovered a simple and standardized protocol for therapeutic management for patients with infective endocarditis, a deadly heart infection. Additionally, a team of CNRS researchers at the Institut Fresnel in Marseille showed that they had devised an invisible cloak-like system that could protect buildings from the most destructive seismic waves that occur during earthquakes. Indeed, CNRS researchers' discoveries not only expand our horizons but can also save lives.

CNRS strives to embody a spirit of international cooperation. The center collaborates with 3,500 scientists abroad and shares 310 international programs for scientific cooperation with many countries around the world. CNRS publishes CNRS International Magazine, a free journal distributed worldwide that highlights the latest scientific news for English-language speakers.

CNRS has eight representative offices abroad, including an office in Washington, D.C. The CNRS Office for the USA and Canada, housed at the French Embassy, is an institutional moderator between the CNRS and federal agencies, universities, research organizations and associations in North America.

One of the main goals of the CNRS Office this year is the development of an Arctic observatory with the US National Science Foundation (NSF). Working in close collaboration with the Institut Polaire Paul Emile Victor (IPÉV, a CNRS partner), CNRS aspires to participate in this Arctic observatory to help study and combat climate change.

Another important function of the Office in D.C. is to facilitate the creation of new CNRS research units. Currently, there are six joint research laboratories (Unité Mixte Internationale) in the USA and Canada: in complex fluids: CNRS/UPenn/Rhodia; in nanotechnology: CNRS/Georgia Tech; in the humanities: CNRS/NYU; in environmental science: CNRS/University of Arizona; in molecular science: CNRS/University of California-Riverside; in mathematics: CNRS/University of British Columbia/Pacific Institute for Mathematical Science.

The Office also helps establish cooperative research programs between CNRS and its North American counterparts. For example, the NIH-CNRS "Research Career Transition Award," launched in 2008, is a five-year post-doctoral fellowship for exceptional young scientists. The Office publishes a weekly newsletter titled Le Fil de Marianne, aimed at young French scientists in North America and informs them of job opportunities in France and Europe.

Recently, the Office launched a series of conferences called Les Rendez-vous du CNRS, intended to promote CNRS researchers’ work and its applications to society. Past conferences have included themes as diverse as Polar deserts, astrophysics, and preserving biodiversity. Future themes may include Egyptology, evolution and collective memory. These free conferences are conducted in English and are open to the public.

If you would like more information about the Fil de Marianne or Les Rendez-vous du CNRS, please contact the CNRS Office. Tel: (202) 944-6238 or Email: cns(at)cnrs-usa(dot)org.
Americans Tune In to French Radio on the Go

Francophiles in five American cities can now easily keep up with the fast-paced world by tuning in to international news in French via their cell phones, thanks to a new service offered by Radio France Internationale (RFI) and AudioNow. A leader in French world news radio, RFI works with a team of journalists in Paris and 600 other correspondents worldwide to provide the latest in politics, culture, sports, and more. The French radio station broadcasts global news 24 hours a day in several languages (English, Arabic, Spanish, Hausa, Chinese, Persian, etc.) and offers listeners breaking stories in an hourly newsslash. Since August 1, it has collaborated with AudioNow, a leading American provider in mobile phone radio distribution, which allows phones to access live audio streaming without the hassle of downloading. Listeners in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, and New York City now enjoy RFI’s programming on their phones by calling the designated number for their city.

For more information on the service, please visit: www.rfi.fr.

France to Lead European Effort to Combat Infectious Disease

The words "high security" evoke many images. For some, it may be procedures relating to airports; for others, perhaps computer networking. But in light of global concerns over a possible virulent pandemic outbreak, the notion of high security takes on a different meaning for France’s National Institute for Health and Medical Research (Inserm). Charged with connecting Europe’s high-security laboratories to protect against infectious diseases for its citizens, Inserm has been entrusted with operating the European High-Security Laboratories Level-4 (EHSL4) project.

The project will be coordinated from the P4 Inserm-Jean Mérieux laboratory in Lyon, France, where scientists focus on the most dangerous pathogenic agents in the world. "They handle micro-organisms such as the Ebola, Marburg, Nipah, Hendra, Conga-Crimean hemorrhagic and Lassa viruses, which have very high mortality rates and for which no prophylactic methods such as vaccination or treatment are available," explains laboratory director Hervé Raoul. Although a total of six laboratories of this kind exist throughout Western Europe (in France, the U.K., Sweden, Italy and Germany), the size of their facilities is dependent on their field of research. "The number of laboratories and the geographical coverage within Europe need to be expanded in order to respond to the emergence of increasingly virulent and resistant micro-organisms," explains Raoul, underscoring the reasons for launching the EHSL4 project.

During a preparatory phase scheduled for 2010-2013, EHSL4 will be developed to address the emergence of highly pathogenic infectious agents. The effort aims to promote and coordinate basic and applied research activities, as well as to enable the development of capacities for diagnosis with centers of biological resources, which will be established and organized in conjunction with the Biobanking and Biomolecular Resources Research Infrastructure network. The expected results of these research activities aim to streamline the capability of responding, protecting and treating infectious diseases. An additional emphasis will be placed on training for researchers in the fields of security and biological safety, thereby creating a governing structure, "or rather a coordinating body," states Raoul, that will be capable of responding quickly and efficiently in the case of an outbreak.

For more information, please visit www.inserm.fr or www.cervi-lyon.inserm.fr.

Cirque du Soleil Founder Unites the Globe from Space

While most famously known as the founder of the Cirque du Soleil, Canadian Guy Laliberté is taking a ride into space to promote water conservation through his One Drop Foundation. Broadcasting on October 9 from the International Space Station, Laliberté will unite prominent figures such as Al Gore, U2, Shakira and French marine-environmentalist Maud Fontenoi for the event titled Moving Stars and Earth for Water.

The $35 million venture will make Laliberté one of few space tourists and the first to launch such an ambitious project. During a Web press conference in Moscow on September 2, Laliberté described the imminent launch as a "poetic social mission," highlighting the theme "the moon, the sun, and a drop of water." The central piece of his worldwide spectacle will be the reading of a story by French novelist Yann Martel, the author of The Life of Pi. The first segment will be performed in Montreal and continue in an uninterrupted series in 14 cities, including London, Marrakech and Tokyo, and across six continents. One Drop aims to use this event to promote its central goal, "Water for all, all for water."
French Mathematicians Add Up to Genius

What do you get when you add 1,000 mathematicians, nine research institutes, several national and international awards, and thousands of hours of research? The answer is the Fondation Sciences Mathématiques de Paris (Paris Mathematical Science Foundation, or FSMP), the largest organization of mathematicians in the world. Founded only three years ago in late 2006, the FSMP is a recognized “network of excellence” that strives to support fundamental and applied research, build international research partnerships, cultivate a wider interest in mathematics, and produce a higher caliber of mathematical study.

The foundation’s 1,000 scientists are dispersed among member institutions such as the National Center for Scientific Research and top research universities. Their areas of study range from pure to applied mathematics and everything in between — including computer science. Each year invitations are sent to 15 foreign post-doctoral researchers inviting them to study and benefit from the environment of excellence fostered by the foundation. The FSMP also provides funds for visiting mathematicians to lecture and plans to establish the Paris Graduate School for Mathematical Sciences, a program for foreign students, in the coming year.

An impressive amount of the FSMP’s researchers have been awarded international honors for their work in mathematics. In fact, France has the second-highest number of Fields Medals, the most prestigious mathematical award for scientists under the age of 40, in the world, behind the United States. In the past, researchers in the FSMP’s member institutions have also received the Abel Prize (a sort of Nobel Prize for mathematics), the Blaise Pascal Medal, the Clay Research Award, and countless others. The FSMP continues to champion a high level of ground-breaking research to give mathematics a French edge.

Marseille Your Way Around the 2013 European Cultural Capital

The world just became a little smaller. In celebration of Marseille’s recognition as the 2013 European Cultural Capital, French citizens are taking to the streets — literally — to extend visitors a warm welcome to their beloved city and culture. Each year, the European Union designates one city in the E.U. with the distinguished title, and both Marseille’s cultural institutions and inhabitants are mobilizing to “move” tourists through the city’s cultural heritage and distinctiveness.

A group of volunteers launched the Marseille Provence Greeters (MP Greeters), a program which offers customized tours of Marseille. Providing visitors the opportunity to discover hidden local hot spots or popular attractions, tour guides will tailor the visit to correspond to guests’ interests.

Blogs

THE GOLDEN TICKET TO INSIGHT ON FRENCH FILM

Just as he once revolutionized the French film review Les Cahiers du Cinéma, general director of La Cinémathèque Française Serge Toubiana is taking the study of French film into the cyber world through his blog, http://blog.cinematheque.fr. The Cinémathèque, a play on the French words for cinema and bibliothèque, is a unique institution, blending aspects of a museum with the capabilities of a research library to inspire a love of French cinema in people of all ages through its collections and programs. As a compliment to services provided by the Cinémathèque, the blog initiated in 2007 by Toubiana gathers entries on events and expositions staged by the cinema-centric cultural institution throughout the year. Toubiana also gives a taste of his expert insight into the current French film industry by posting personal reviews and commentaries. The blog not only makes the extensive knowledge housed by the Cinémathèque available online for French cinema aficionados, but also provides an insight into Toubiana’s personal experience of the world behind the silver screen.

News from France does not endorse the content, views, and opinions of authors expressed in the aforementioned Web site.

Marie-Agnès Gillot and Domenico Luciano ignite Houston with an October performance of The Firebird.

The Paris Mathematic Science Foundation is the largest organization of mathematicians.
European Heritage Is Accessible to All

For two days last month, the ancient doors of hallowed monuments were opened for the education of all in a tradition that encourages visitors to explore their country’s cultural heritage. The annual Europe-wide effort, called Journées européennes du patrimoine (European Heritage Days), now in its 26th year was organized in France around the theme un patrimoine accessible à tous (a heritage accessible to all). From the grand Elysée Palace, the home of the French President, to the smallest museum in Provence, much of France’s cultural heritage was on display free-of-charge for young and old. Former minister of culture and communication André Malraux described major works accessible to as many as possible” and “securing [ing] the largest audience for our cultural heritage.” The 2009 rendition of the event drew over 12 million visitors in France alone.

This year emphasized facilitating access to those with handicaps through adapted accessibility tools and providing unique events to inspire younger audiences. At the historic Maison de Victor Hugo, home of the legendary French author, bilingual videos and tours were provided in sign language for the hearing impaired. In the gilded walls of the Théâtre National de L’Opéra Comique (the National Opera Comedy Theatre), younger audiences were invited to sing their way through a guided tour of the opera house while discovering its rich history. Innovative events such as these were just the beginning, insuring that this year heritage was truly accessible to all.

For more information, please visit: www.journeesdu-patrimoine.culture.fr.

French Hip Hop Group “Breaks” Away from Competition

French hip hop dance group R.A.F. Crew breakdanced their way to a first place finish at Hip Hop International’s Eighth Annual World Hip Hop Dance Championship in Las Vegas last August. Not only was it the first time that a French troupe or “crew” brought home the gold, but it was also the first year that France participated in the competition.

R.A.F. Crew’s six members competed against over 1,700 other dancers from 28 nations to prove their talent in choreographing and performing the many variations of hip hop. An expert panel of street dancers and choreographers determined that R.A.F. Crew’s unique attitude and original dance moves earned them the title of world champions. What gave them the edge? “A lot of groups tried to imitate [crews who have won the championship in the past],” said Romuald Brizolier, one of R.A.F. Crew’s talented dancers. “We won because our choreography was truly original.”

Since the group’s creation in 2007, the members have combined their hip hop specialties in popping, krumping, new-styling, and breaking to develop their own dance style. This approach, along with their focus and determination, launched them to the forefront of the competition — and even earned them the recognition of French Minister of Culture Frédéric Mitterrand. Not about to take a break, R.A.F. Crew plans to perform in the Casino of Paris and continue to share their passion for hip hop with the world.

New World Champion Puts on “Air”

The crowd stretches as far as the eye can see and finally blends into the stadium, distinguishable only by the dancing of excited fans. A formidable, steady roarin emanates from the innumerable concert-goers as they impatiently wait for the night’s stars.

Finally, the much-anticipated moment: Frenchman Sylvain "Gunther Love" Quimene leaps onto the brightly lit stage in his gold spandex pants and square glasses, his acrobatic dancing channeling entertainment greats such as Freddy Mercury and Michael Jackson. Multi-colored lights flash as Sweatmaster’s "Animal" plays in the background, and one would think Sylvain Quimene is playing along — but instead, his fingers are wildly strumming the air, his hands clutching an imaginary guitar.

The daring "Gunther Love" Championships is performed in the second round of the Air Guitar World Championships in Oulu, Finland, amidst a screaming crowd of 5,000. The winner of the Championship is the contestant who performs the best with an imaginary guitar, and so far Sylvain Quimene seems to be doing pretty well — he bobs, sways, and ultimately rocks out. At one point, he throws the “guitar” in the air, looks at his watch, and catches it back in his hands without missing a beat. Demonstrating his musical versatility, he even plays the air drums near the end of his performance.

In all, 21 air guitarists from all over the globe appeared at the World Championships in Finland. The first round of competition consisted of a minute-long song chosen by the contestant while in the second round, the ten finalists had to perform to "Animal.”

Though he was up against some tough competition, such as the defending World Champion, American Craig Billmeier, Sylvain Quimene’s amazing August 21 performance snatched him the gold and the glory. Billmeier and another American, Andrew Litz, tied for second place.

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New World Champion Puts on “Air”

The crowd stretches as far as the eye can see and finally blends into the stadium, distinguishable only by the dancing of excited fans. A formidable, steady roaring emanates from the innumerable concert-goers as they impatiently wait for the night’s stars.

Finally, the much-anticipated moment: Frenchman Sylvain "Gunther Love” Quimene leaps onto the brightly lit stage in his gold spandex pants and square glasses, his acrobatic dancing channeling entertainment greats such as Freddy Mercury and Michael Jackson. Multi-colored lights flash as Sweatmaster’s "Animal” plays in the background, and one would think Sylvain Quimene is playing along — but instead, his fingers are wildly strumming the air, his hands clutching an imaginary guitar.

The daring "Gunther Love” Championships is performed in the second round of the Air Guitar World Championships in Oulu, Finland, amidst a screaming crowd of 5,000. The winner of the Championship is the contestant who performs the best with an imaginary guitar, and so far Sylvain Quimene seems to be doing pretty well — he bobs, sways, and ultimately rocks out. At one point, he throws the “guitar” in the air, looks at his watch, and catches it back in his hands without missing a beat. Demonstrating his musical versatility, he even plays the air drums near the end of his performance.

In all, 21 air guitarists from all over the globe appeared at the World Championships in Finland. The first round of competition consisted of a minute-long song chosen by the contestant while in the second round, the ten finalists had to perform to "Animal.”

Though he was up against some tough competition, such as the defending World Champion, American Craig Billmeier, Sylvain Quimene’s amazing August 21 performance snatched him the gold and the glory. Billmeier and another American, Andrew Litz, tied for second place.

For more information, please visit: www.journeesdu-patrimoine.culture.fr.
Looking Through the “Eyes” of Juliette Binoche

French actress Juliette Binoche, a well-recognized face on the silver screen, recently debuted a unique ensemble in New York City titled In-I & Jubilations that demonstrates her other “behind-the-scenes” talents.

Above left: Binoche creates an ink portrait for the installation titled In-Eyes. Above right: the actress performs In-I, a collaborative piece she created with choreographer Akram Khan.

French actor Juliette Binoche’s creative talent is hardly limited to the silver screen. Though it was her onscreen work in films like Les Amants du Pont Neuf, The English Patient, Chocolat, and Paris, je t’aime that shot her to fame, Binoche displayed her other talents in painting, dance, and poetry in New York City last month. Her artistic retrospective titled In-I & Jubilations provided a unique look at Binoche’s experience as an actor and her personal creative canon.

The first installment of the In-I & Jubilations series was an exhibition of Binoche’s portraits and poetry at the Cultural Services of the French Embassy starting September 10. A collection of 58 ink portraits depicts not only famous directors with whom she has worked, but also self-portraits of the actor in character. The In-Eyes art show featured 29 triptychs, a set comprising three pieces of individual artwork displayed together. Each was related to one of her movies, featuring an “in-character” portrait, a depiction of the movie’s director, and one of her poems about the experience.

A collaborative dance performance called In-I with Binoche and choreographer Akram Khan composed the second component of the retrospective. Although she has no professional dance training, Binoche wanted to explore a completely different realm of artistic expression. Performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music featured improvisational and choreographed elements that she and Khan developed together.

Several more events completed the month-long series, giving audiences the chance to meet Juliette Binoche herself. The Brooklyn Academy of Music hosted screenings of films displaying Binoche’s wide-ranging roles, and Binoche attended a book signing of her art book Portraits In-Eyes, a collection of her artwork and poetry.