

Actualité en France

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France on the lookout for European diversity

The European Cultural Season, a large-scale pioneering event organised by France and starting on 1 July, provides an exceptional opportunity to discover the creative diversity of the 27 Member States. It is also emblematic of the French Presidency of the European Union, which will begin on the same date.



A programme of several hundred events throughout Europe covering all artistic disciplines - 27 books, 27 shows, 27 concerts, 27 exhibitions and 27 history lessons, themed overviews of the cinema, photography, theatre, design and contemporary art and music - bringing together some of today's top creative artists, is certainly ambitious in scope. Created with a throng of partners, but first and foremost by the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs, the European Cultural Season will run from 1 July to 31 December and will be the first act of the French Presidency of the European Union.

Putting culture at the heart of the European process is "unconquered territory", as it has never previously been the main concern of the European Union. This pioneering experiment has mobilised a wide range of people and led to a profusion of projects. The first angle, nicely represented by the "museum route" organised across the whole of France, focuses on heritage, highlighting the common European cultural heritage that has grown up over the centuries.

The second area of focus is creativity, which is conceived of in terms of connections. "Tandem projects" bring artists of several nationalities together around a particular work or theme. Examples include the Franco-German hip-hop choreography *Il était une fois*, the Franco-Slovenian show *Course à l'amour*, the show being planned by French actress Juliette Binoche and choreographer Akram Khan and the jazz concert adapting the work of Maurice Duruflé for the National Choir of Latvia.

The European Cultural Season is designed to reach both seasoned and new audiences, for example through the exhibition "27 Graphic Artists for Europe", which will be set up in Paris airports,



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or the 14 July dances, where this year people will be dancing to the sounds of music from all the Member States and a waltz created for the occasion by the accordionist Marc Perrone. A partnership has also been established with the French Ministry of Education in order to raise awareness among young European citizens; thousands of apprentices from all the countries of the European Union will be taking a course at the Cité de l'architecture.

As a result of the desire to involve all of France's regions in the Presidency, events will be held in towns across France and will form part of the various festivals, from Rennes to Arles, Reims to Marseille, and Orléans to Avignon, not to mention Paris. The European Cultural Season is also designed to pay tribute to the institutions, towns, cultural centres and embassies which have joined forces to ensure that events can travel to every country. The Comédie Française itself will be touring the ten new Member States in Central and Eastern Europe with two plays, one by Molière and the other Italian, whilst the ballet from the Opéra de Paris will be presenting a work by Pina Bausch.

Other highlights are scheduled, such as a tour of France by 27 European film directors, an exhibition in Bordeaux on new forms of housing favouring sustainable development, the publication of a book, *Les Arpenteurs de l'Europe*, and the publication on the Internet of a huge interactive fresco showing over 300 videos of 50 years of European cultural history. Yann Kersalé will light up the Grand-Place in Brussels, a "Spanish Night" will enliven the Petit Palais in Paris and the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid, and in a beautiful closing flourish, "Dans la nuit, des images" at the Grand Palais will project almost 150 digital works simultaneously.

Nonetheless, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, the ambassador responsible for the cultural side of the French Presidency of the European Union, highlighting the universality of culture, was keen to emphasise that this project "aims to unite Europeans, but not separate them from the rest of the world!" The season was in fact launched at the foot of the monumental work of American sculptor Richard Serra...

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Full programme available on the website: ue2008.fr