



Ambassador's Activities

2014

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the Opening of VIEW: A Festival of Art History

7 February 2014

Chère Jaqueline Minor,

Chère Antoinette Lenormand,

Cher Martin Roth,

Cher Julien Chapuis,

Cher Professor Khalili,

Chère Victoria Siddall,

Ladies and gentlemen speakers from France, Italy, Germany, Austria and all over Europe,

Chers amis,

We're very pleased to be opening this festival. It wouldn't have been possible without the exceptional support of the Arts Council England, which rightly considered the event to be one of general interest.

Perhaps some of you came last year to our festival dedicated to philosophy; this year, we're very pleased to bring you together in the name of art history!

We care about these disciplines, and we're pleased that the *Institut français* has devoted a whole weekend to them, for everyone – both non-professionals and experts alike.

Celebrating art history in London, in a city where contemporary art heads the field, means paying tribute to the great artists and passionate researchers who deeply inform contemporary creation.

We open with a complex subject: that of art looted during the Second World War.

It's one which is in the news, with the discovery of the Gurlitt hoard in Germany and the active efforts made by Culture Minister Aurélie Filippetti. Even Hollywood is taking an interest in the subject: a historical film – “The Monuments Men” – is being released today, 7 February, and tells the story of the greatest treasure hunt in history, which the Allies initiated in order to return Nazi-confiscated works of art to the families who had been robbed.

Seventy years after World War Two, it's still an important subject today. How is this possible?

It concerns us all. Essentially it's a European issue, and can be dealt with only through close cooperation between our countries.

I thank the European Commission for its backing, along with the Italian, Goethe and Austrian institutes and the *Wallonie Bruxelles International* agency, for supporting us in a project close to our hearts.

And my special thanks go to Anne Webber for agreeing to share with us her vital work heading the Commission for Looted Art in Europe.

Before handing over to Jaqueline Minor, I want to thank all the journalists who will be chairing our debates, and the members of the “Call for Papers” jury: Caterina Cardona, Arturo Galansino and Neville Rowley.

Finally, I'd like to congratulate the three prizewinning students – Violaine Barthélémy and Grégoire Hallé from the Ecole du Louvre, and Kirsten Tambling from the Courtauld Institute of Art – who will be able to collect their prizes tomorrow morning. This wouldn't have been possible without the support of Thames & Hudson and the Réunion des Musées nationaux.

With more than 50 events this weekend, I'm sure you will make some wonderful discoveries!