



2014

Ambassador's Activities

Distributor: French Embassy in the UK
- Press and Communications Services -
58 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7JT London
E-Mail: press@ambafrance-uk.org
Web: www.ambafrance-uk.org

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

at the inauguration evening
for the Listed Reading Room in La Médiathèque
at the *Institut français*

London, 15 May 2014

Mr Mayor,

Monsieur le Conseiller Culturel,

donors, trustees, guests, partners, friends,

Welcome to the *Institut Français*: thank you for accepting our invitation to this fabulous inauguration evening

For more than a century, the cultural centre here at 17 Queensberry Place has been uniting the French and British communities around artistic creativity, and promoting cultural and language exchanges.

Above all, it's a place steeped in history: among other things, it was the headquarters of the Free French Air Force during the war. This year, as we commemorate the 70th anniversary of D-Day and welcome Her Majesty The Queen on a state visit to France from 5 to 7 June, I want to pay tribute to the memory of those airmen.

This building is also a jewel of Art Deco, listed by the Royal Borough de Kensington and Chelsea, formerly the *Institut's* ballroom in the 1940s, and then a library, until it was modernized and became La Médiathèque in 1995. It's ever busier, with membership up 13% over the last three years; today it has 3,000 members and 120,000 visitors, not to mention the many events organized here.

However, major restoration work has had to be undertaken here, reconciling modernization with respect for heritage. Significant projects have been completed at the *Institut* in recent years, to renovate the cinema in 2009 and the entrance hall in 2010. Today, with the

restoration of the Reading Room, which you'll be discovering exclusively this evening, a new step has been taken, and it's already been praised by the Minister of Culture, Mme Aurélie Filippetti, who did us the honour of paying a visit before the work was even completed.

Other ambitious projects will follow : the modernization of the Children's Library and the creation of a "Tech Hub" dedicated to creativity for students, researchers and art enthusiasts.

My thanks go to the Trust of the Friends of the French Institute and its chairman Marc Mourre, who supported us a year and a half ago for fundraising never before witnessed at the *Institut*.

My thanks go to all the donors – individuals, businesses and foundations – who have made this renovation possible, and to all those already committing themselves to the next two phases of work. This evening is dedicated to you.

My thanks go to the team at the *Institut*, especially Laurent Burin des Roziers, who was behind the project and has left us to join the Interior Minister's office.

I welcome François Croquette, who succeeds him as head of the *Institut*, and whom I urge to continue this work to heighten French culture's impact even further in London, but also throughout the rest of the UK.

I want to end by thanking our sponsors, Perrier Jouët for the champagne, M. Nicolas Motelay – who is here – for the St Chinian Villa Quat'z'Art, the Maison du Chocolat, and Fendi and Guerlain, who will be generously offering gifts to all guests.

Cher Marc, I hand over to you./.