

# NIGHT OF IDEAS SAN FRANCISCO 2019



## **THE FIRST EDITION OF NIGHT OF IDEAS IN SAN FRANCISCO AT A GLANCE**

*A seven-hour marathon of debate, performances, readings and music featuring top thinkers from San Francisco and beyond as we envision the city of the future. This night was part of a series of events happening around the globe, all reflecting on how to “Face the Future” while promoting public debate and the promotion of ideas between countries, cultures, subjects and generations.*

**6,000 PEOPLE**

**12,000 EVENTBRITE REGISTRATIONS**

**3,200 FACEBOOK PARTICIPANTS**

**140 SPEAKERS**

**71 ARTISTS**

**30 PANELS AND KEYNOTES**

**27 CURATING PARTNERS**

**7 HOURS**

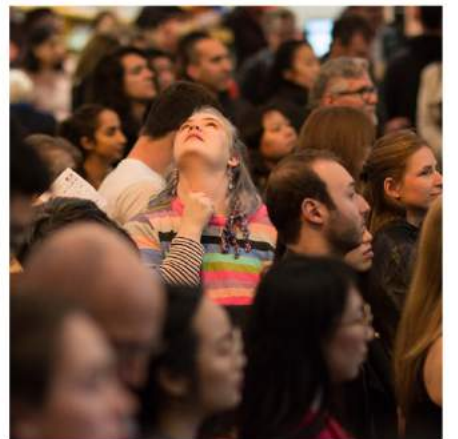
**5 CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

**220 NIGHTS OF IDEAS WORLDWIDE**

**90 COUNTRIES**

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## **Special Broadcast: Bottom Up Governance**

**Host: Michael Krasny**



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"I guess we'll just have to do it ourselves." That's a growing sentiment in many communities where individuals are tired of waiting for government to act. In this hour, live from the Night of Ideas festival in San Francisco, we'll talk about new models for communities to offer affordable housing, healthier food and more efficient and equitable use of tax dollars. Some of these ideas call for reclaiming the urban commons and come out of the "sharing cities" movement. We'll hear about some real-world examples of participatory governance in the Bay Area.

### **Guests:**

**Shari Davis**, co-executive director, Participatory Budgeting Project

**Noni Session**, executive director, East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative

**Doria Robinson**, executive director, Urban Tilth

**Gordon Douglas**, assistant professor of urban and regional planning, San Jose State University; author "The Help-Yourself-City: Legitimacy and Inequality in DIY Urbanism."

*Live broadcasting on site, February 2, 2019.*

*Repeat broadcast on February 18, 2019 at 10:00 AM.*

*Promotion broadcast two weeks prior to the event.*

## **Late-Night Philosophy Festival Expands to Five U.S. Cities**

**By Jennifer Schuessler**



The novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the musician Laurie Anderson, the photographer JR and a puppet representing Noam Chomsky will be among the luminaries present as the American version of the worldwide Night of Ideas festival expands beyond New York to four additional cities.

The free philosophy event, held in dozens of cities around the world, first came to New York in 2015, under the auspices of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy. In 2019, it will be held at the Brooklyn Public Library on Feb. 2, as well as at venues in Los Angeles (Feb. 1), San Francisco (Feb. 2), Washington (Jan. 31) and Houston (Jan. 26).

Brooklyn, where events will run from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., is the only place where philosophy, like the subway, runs all night. The sunset-to-sunrise lineup features some 50 speakers and performers, including Todd May, the philosophy consultant for the television show “The Good Place.”

There will also be a performance of “Manufacturing Mischief,” a puppet show featuring the miniature Chomsky, and a stealth appearance by Souffleurs Commandos Poétiques, a strike force of 13 artists who will circulate through the crowd, whispering poetry into visitors’ ears.

Highlights of the event in Los Angeles, at the Museum of Natural History, include a talk by the climate scientist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Robert Lempert and a vegan fashion show, to coincide with the opening of Vegan Fashion Week. In Houston, where the event will be held at Rice University, guests can see performances by both Ms. Anderson and “Climate Elvis,” otherwise known as NASA oceanographer Josh Willis.

Depending on the venue, shots of Socrates, Kant and Nietzsche will be supplemented with chasers of yoga, tai chi, meditation, music, dance and virtual reality experiences.

Bénédicte de Montlaur, the cultural counselor of the French Embassy in the United States, said the goal was “to offer a profusion of lenses with which to face and investigate some of the most pressing issues of our time.”



## San Francisco Joins Global Marathon “Night of Ideas” Event

By Martha Sessums



© Elizabeth Leitzell

It will be a free seven-hour marathon of philosophical debate including cultural, science, climate and technology explorations alongside art, literature and poetry demonstrations and discussions. The mayor of San Francisco will kick it off, and KQED radio will broadcast the conversations. Famous French and San Francisco-based artists and thinkers will join and drive the discussions.

It all happens February 2 starting at 7 p.m. ending at 2 a.m. at the San Francisco Public Library. Good thing music, dancing and yoga (*oui*, yoga) will be interspersed to add energy.

This is San Francisco’s first time participating in the Night of Ideas positioned as part of the **After Tomorrow 2019 season**. The evening marathon began five years ago in Paris as *La Nuit des Idées* and has grown to more than 70 countries on five continents in 120 cities. Other participating U.S. cities are Los Angeles, New York City, Washington, D.C. and Houston. The events will be held on the evenings between January 26 and February 2 and focus on the “Facing Our Time” theme but each participating city can make it relate to local needs. All events are co-produced by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, the Institut Français, Paris, and local partners.

“Thanks to this global initiative launched in Paris in 2015, thousands of people gather and celebrate ideas in more than 100 cities in the world,” said Emmanuel Lebrun-Damiens, Consul General of France in San Francisco. “As time accelerates and innovation constantly disrupts our lives, there is no better place than San Francisco to discuss our 2019 theme: The City of the Future.”

The inspiration for San Francisco's theme is driven by a reflection of the city itself. As Matthias Carette, Press and Communications Attaché at the French Consulate in San Francisco said, "In San Francisco the tech industry, businesses and the varied culture all mix together so it's important that they work together to give a voice to civil society."

From the city's mayor, London N. Breed: "San Francisco is a creative city that draws inspiration from the people in our neighbourhoods as well as cultures all over the world. I invite all of San Francisco and the Bay Area to participate in the Night of Ideas and to share your thoughts and dreams about the future of our great city."

According to Carette, 5,000 people signed up to attend the event in the first six days, and the only promotion was on social media. Currently there are more than 8,500 that have signed up on Eventbrite.

Breed launches the celebration along with the co-presenters of Night of Ideas which includes the French Consulate in San Francisco, the San Francisco Public Library and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). Also in attendance will be Gérard Araud, French Ambassador to the United States. Local radio station KQED is the media partner.

Holly Kernan, KQED Chief Content Officer said, "My first thought was how quintessentially French to hold a night-long conversation about philosophy and ideas – I love it. It's completely in line with the mission of what KQED does every day: host thoughtful conversation and debate about issues that matter to our future and our democracy. It's fun, it's creative, it's perfect for San Francisco. And, what better than a smart art party!"

The smart art party really takes off at 8 p.m. with a variety of poets, thinkers, urbanists and students who will explore themes such as "poetic city," "transit city" and "teen city." Starting at 9 p.m. and continuing until 2 a.m., an open mic stage will allow the public to share thoughts and ideas for the future of cities. SFMOMA, the Institute for the Future and Civic Common Center will drive panel discussions around the "equitable city," "media city" and "welcoming city."

Want to listen to the conversation but can't attend? Michael Krasny will host a live remote two-hour special broadcast of KQED's Forum at the event from 8 – 10 p.m. and will moderate some of the discussions.

The discussions will continue with a wide variety of influencers in San Francisco and beyond. Michelin-starred restaurateur Dominique Crenn, the National Park Service, Litquake, James C. Hormel from the LGBTQIA Center and Dominic Alba, Director of the Parisian Urbanism Agency will curate discussions and present keynotes.

Lebrun-Damiens' favourite topic will be the "green city" topic. "I am convinced that urban green spaces are one of the most effective solutions to many issues of our time, such as noise pollution, social isolation or global warming. Parks are the glue that keep our communities together and break social barriers. I really want to attend this panel to understand how parks are such catalysts of social change."

French artist JR, who spent two months in early 2018 photographing and interviewing nearly 1,200 people in 22 locations across the San Francisco, will hold a discussion about how an entire city can be represented through art. His SFMOMA exhibit “The Chronicles of San Francisco” will open April 25 and claims to draw inspiration from Diego Rivera’s murals that are found throughout the city.

Other late-night discussions will include John Law, founder of Burning Man, and Nicola Delon, designer of the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The Institute for the Future will provide an experience of the power of civic imagination with the audience.

Throughout the evening food, beverages and wine will be served to keep up everyone’s energy and engagement. The power of the evening’s discussions will probably provide lots of energy while that promised yoga may be needed as a relaxer.



## **Why You Should Go to San Francisco This Winter**

**By Lyndsey Matthews**

Attend San Francisco's first Night of Ideas. This annual night of talks, performances, and philosophical debates has been hosted in cities around the world—from Paris to New York to Los Angeles—since 2015. On February 2, 2019, the inaugural San Francisco edition of Night of Ideas will take place from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. at the San Francisco Main Library. Hosted by the French Consulate, San Francisco Public Library, and SFMOMA, the event includes keynotes talks and panels from the likes of Mayor London Breed, the French photographer and street artist JR, and Dominique Crenn, the chef/owner of Atelier Crenn, during the seven-hour marathon event. 100 Larkin Street, free, [nightofideassf.com](http://nightofideassf.com)

## **A marathon for the mind: San Francisco to host Night of Ideas**

**By John McMurtrie**



© Brice Robert

It's 2 a.m. on a Sunday. You could be in bed, reasonably enough, or exiting your local watering hole, possibly grumbling about then-Gov. Jerry Brown's veto of a bill that would have kept bars open until 4 a.m.

Or you could be heading home after taking part in a heady seven-hour marathon of readings, debates, music and performances.

This year, San Francisco is hosting its first-ever Night of Ideas, a free festival — focused on “the city of the future” — that the French government has organized for the past five years in more than 100 cities around the world.

The evening is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 2, at the San Francisco Main Library, and run until 2 a.m. A gathering of prominent artists, thinkers and assorted cultural figures, the public event is being co-presented by the French Consulate in San Francisco, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the San Francisco Public Library.

The festival, which began in Paris as *La Nuit des idées*, grew to four cities in the United States this year, including San Francisco. Houston hosted an event on Jan. 26, and others are taking place in Washington, D.C. (Thursday, Jan. 31), and Los Angeles (Friday, Feb. 1). New York, being the city that never sleeps, is set to host its Night of Ideas at the Brooklyn Public Library from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. on Saturday.



© Camille Pajot, JR-art.net

Among the many people who will participate in the San Francisco edition of Night of Ideas is the celebrated French artist JR. He'll discuss his forthcoming SFMOMA video mural exhibition, "The Chronicles of San Francisco," for which he spent two months in the city in 2018, interviewing and filming roughly 1,200 people.

"I am always willing to participate in events that gather people physically together and where we can debate under a same roof," JR said about the festival. "This is exactly what we need in today's world where virtual and dematerialized technologies are taking up space over real and true relationships."

Leave it to the French to conceive such an event. This is, after all, the famously culture-proud nation that introduced the Lumières, the influential 18th century intellectual movement centered on ideas of humanism, and the 20th century cafe society of Paris' Left Bank that nurtured such minds as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, James Baldwin and Ernest Hemingway. More recently, Bernard Pivot's "Apostrophes," a live, prime-time literary talk show, drew millions of TV viewers every Friday night, from 1975 to 1990.





© Jasmina Tomic

As a measure of the importance that the French government places on Night of Ideas, no less a figure than the French ambassador to the United States, Gérard Araud, will attend the event in San Francisco.

“What makes this night so special will be the mix of intellectual exchanges, with a great lineup of speakers, and a fantastic artistic program curated by Burning Man and 836M gallery,” said Emmanuel Lebrun-Damiens, consul general of France in San Francisco. “Everything is done to ensure that everyone feels at ease to speak out and express their own ideas. This is also why we organize this event at night, when social and psychological barriers tend to disappear. We want this free forum to be as inclusive as possible.”

Lebrun-Damiens added that “San Francisco, which has always been ahead of its time, is the best place in the world to talk about the future of cities. Look how it is today both a hotbed for technologies that disrupt the way we live together, and a laboratory for solutions to fix the challenges many cities face.”

Michael Lambert, acting city librarian, said the San Francisco Main Library seemed like a natural fit to host Night of Ideas.

“The library is about sharing ideas, learning and offering San Francisco rich experiences that connect our communities,” he said. “Everyone is welcome in the library — what better place to discuss the future of our city?”

Besides, he added, “Hasn’t everyone always wanted to spend the night in a library? This is your chance.”

Those who'll take part in programs at the library include Chronicle columnist and "Cool Gray City of Love" author Gary Kamiya and Tenderloin Housing Clinic Executive Director Randy Shaw. They'll talk about what kind of city San Francisco should be in 2030.

A Litquake panel, "Fiction City," will feature authors Charlie Jane Anders and Meg Elison, and City Lights is organizing a "Poetic City" event.



© Carlos Avila Gonzalez, The Chronicle

Dominique Crenn, the French chef whose San Francisco restaurant Atelier Crenn recently earned three Michelin stars, will discuss "Food in the City" with KQED's Rachael Myrow.

For the night owls, from midnight to 2 a.m., Steven Raspa, associate director of community events of Burning Man, will participate in a "Flexible City" panel with French architect Nicola Delon of the firm Encore heureux. Their topic of discussion: temporary architecture and cities, like Burning Man's Black Rock City, and the need to broaden urban planning's scope to include citizens and artists.

"We're living in such an anti-intellectual, anti-idea time, which makes Night of Ideas that much more thrilling," said Allison Arieff, editorial director at SPUR, the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association. Arieff will moderate a panel on transit in the city. "The theme of City of the Future often defaults to technology and the smart city, but this event takes a much richer view of urbanism, which I love. A city is art, science, people, food, smells and sounds — I like that the organizers have put this together with that wonderful complexity in mind."

Of course, this wouldn't be a French event if there weren't food and drink, including wine, offered throughout the night. And for those who'll need to exercise their bodies, and not simply their minds, there will be DJ sets and dancing, and yoga classes. All good ideas.



## **Night of Ideas in SF to include queer panels**

**By Heather Cassell**

San Francisco transgender activist Aria Sa'id is among those who will participate in the global Night of Ideas event this weekend.

San Francisco's main library will host more than 30 topics exploring the City of the Future — including two queer panels — "Queer City" and "Heritage City" — on multiple floors over the course of the seven-hour marathon starting at 7 p.m. February 2 and ending at 2 a.m. February 3.

The international event, "Nuit des Idées," that facilitates "philosophical debate, talks, performances, and music" was launched in San Francisco's sister city Paris in 2015. This is the first time the city is participating.

Thousands of people are anticipated to participate in this year's global conversation focused on "Facing Our Time: The City of the Future."

The event is hosted on five continents in more than 100 cities around the world.

"I am very pleased to see the first edition of La Nuit des Idées in San Francisco," Emmanuel Lebrun-Damiens, a gay man who is consul general of the French Consulate in San Francisco, said in a January 8 joint news release. "As time accelerates and innovation constantly disrupts our lives, there is no better place than San Francisco to discuss this 2019 theme: 'The City of the Future.'"

Mayor London Breed has invited San Franciscans to participate in the conversation.

"San Francisco is a creative city that draws inspiration from the people in our neighborhoods as well as cultures all over the world," said Breed, who will be participating on a panel. "I'm excited by the line-up of innovative, international thinkers coming together at the main library and I invite all of San Francisco and the Bay Area to participate in the Night of Ideas and to share your thoughts and dreams about the future of our great city."

Sa'id, a 29-year-old straight black transgender woman, is excited to discuss her work and vision of a world where transgender people of color are empowered, she told the Bay Area Reporter.

"Many transgender people I know aren't from San Francisco. We all came here with one-way tickets and with dreams of something better than the realities we were living with and the places that we were from," said Sa'id, an LGBT policy adviser at the San Francisco Human Rights Commission.

She believes that the migration experience of transgender women of color and the journey to search for a place to be socially accepted and find economic opportunities can be translated, whether it's someone coming from the southern U.S. or refugees immigrating to European or more accepting countries.

"I think there are significant challenges to either population, both in San Francisco as well as Paris as a social justice issue," said Sa'id, a founder of two organizations, the Kween Culture Initiative and the Compton's Transgender Cultural District.

She will join well-known thought leaders, including artist JR; Dominique Crenn, chef-owner of the Michelin three-star restaurant Atelier Crenn; Gérard Araud, French ambassador to the United States; John Law, founder of Burning Man; architect Nicola Delon, designer of the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale; Dominique Alba, director of the Paris Urbanism Agency; Michael Krasny, host of "Forum" on KQED; and Allison Arieff, editorial director of SPUR.

The Night of Ideas is produced in partnership by the French Consulate in San Francisco, the San Francisco Public Library, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The event is free and open to the public. Reservations are required and can be made at <https://goo.gl/rK6e37>.

For more information, visit <http://www.nightofideassf.com>.

*KPFA, February 1, 2019*

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## **Ideas and Ideals**

**Hosted by Larry Bensky**

**Guests:**

**Dina Talafi, SFMOMA**

**Emmanuel Lebrun Damiens, General Consul of  
France**



***<https://archives.kpfa.org/data/20190201-Fri1200.mp3>***

## On a fait la première Nuit des Idées de San Francisco

By Hélène Labriet and Joanna Valdant



Pour sa première édition de la Nuit des Idées, la ville de San Francisco a mis les petits plats dans les grands. Une affiche prometteuse autour de “La ville du futur”, un lieu hors du commun, un staff au point... Succès garanti. L’événement s’est tenu, samedi 2 février, dans la Public Library, rue Larkin, où près de 12.000 personnes étaient attendues pour partager et changer le monde de demain. French Morning faisait partie de ces rêveurs qui sont restés éveillés le temps d’une soirée.

### 7:05pm : Ouverture des portes et lancement de la Nuit des Idées

Si London Breed, maire de San Francisco, brille par son absence, la foule n’en perd pas pour autant son enthousiasme. Michael Lambert, directeur des bibliothèques de la ville, accueille tout le monde par un *“Bienvenue à la bibliothèque municipale de San Francisco”*, en français dans le texte, proclame le 2 février “Jour officiel de la Nuit des Idées” et remet le décret à Emmanuel Lebrun-Damiens, consul de France à San Francisco.

Celui-ci est bientôt rejoint sur scène par Mary Wardell Ghirarduzzi, présidente de la commission de la SF Library, Neal Benezra, directeur du SFMOMA, Holly Kernan, rédactrice en chef de KQED, et Mina Kim, de KQED. Tour à tour, ils expliquent l’importance de cet événement dans un contexte politique et démocratiquement difficile. Emmanuel Lebrun Damiens souligne qu’*“à l’heure de la montée des populismes et des réponses simplistes apportées à des questions complexes, les avis d’experts sur les grands sujets d’aujourd’hui sont essentiels.”*

### 8:17pm : Quel genre de ville devrait être San Francisco en 2030 ?



Première conférence, mais aussi fermeture officielle des portes pour raison de sécurité. Tant pis pour les retardataires. Pour nous, ce sera le talk sur l'immobilier à San Francisco en 2030. Randy Shaw, de la Tenderloin Housing Clinic, et Gary Kamiya, auteur, s'accordent à dire que la crise immobilière ne pourra prendre fin dans la Bay Area que grâce à une aide fédérale visant la classe moyenne, mais aussi un soutien de la part des companies de la tech qui devraient fournir des logements à leurs employés, et de meilleurs transports en commun.

#### **8:25pm: Resilient city avec KQED: on repassera**

La queue fait plus d'un étage: tout le monde veut écouter Michael Krasny faire son émission Forum en direct depuis le sous-sol de la bibliothèque. L'enregistrement durera deux heures, on repassera plus tard.

#### **8:29pm : Teen City, de la poésie et des idées pour la ville de demain**

Direction le Mix, un espace dédié aux ados au deuxième étage pour entendre les jeunes de Youth Speaks slammer et déclamer leurs poèmes sur la ville. Le ton est rageur ou plein d'espoir, mais toujours juste. Puis les gagnants du concours Start'Up Lycée organisé par le Lycée Français de San Francisco présentent leurs projets pour améliorer la ville de demain: on y parle sécurité, recyclage et désastres naturels, avec différentes inventions pensées par des lycéens pour répondre à ces challenges du quotidien. Pas de paroles dans le vent, ils nous montrent des solutions concrètes, qu'ils sont prêts à produire demain s'ils le peuvent. Inspirés et inspirants!

#### **9pm : Queer City**

C'était l'une des conférences les plus attendues de la soirée et il faut dire qu'elle en valait la peine. Au micro, Aria Sa'id, femme transsexuelle noire, partage son quotidien de "marginale" dans la ville de San Francisco. Parfois rejetée, isolée, réduite à la rue, elle ne pourrait rêver d'une autre ville où vivre car San Francisco, c'est aussi la ville de l'acceptation et de la protection pour ceux qui sont différents.

#### **9:20pm: Jaron Lanier joue du khaen et prône un "capitalisme honnête"**

Des dreadlocks blondes jusqu'aux fesses, une drôle de flûte à la main, Jaron Lanier fascine et interpelle son auditoire: figure bien connue de la Silicon Valley, à la fois musicien et informaticien, il est considéré comme le père de la réalité virtuelle. Lancé dans un long monologue sur les dérives de la technologie, il proclame que "Google et Facebook contrôlent le cerveau de tout le monde", et que le niveau de "bullshit" ne fait qu'augmenter. Il prône l'arrêt du partage gratuit d'informations sur Internet: "*Vous payez bien pour Netflix, pourquoi pas pour votre moteur de recherche ou vos réseaux sociaux? Vos données seront bien plus en sécurité*". Il marque un point, on va y réfléchir.

#### **9:50 pm: Film City et la programmation éclectique des cinémas de la Bay Area**

On a joué des coudes pour parvenir jusqu'au deuxième étage. C'est la fin de "Bionic City", on y parle de l'avenir des voitures autonomes, et on ne peut en capter que quelques bribes, coincé dans le rayon Q-T des mangas. Pour Film City, pas de quartier, on fonce pour obtenir une place, et entendre parler d'un cinéma qu'on ne connaît pas forcément, comme les films

du Chinois Jian Zhangke, ou le cinéma expérimental de Nathaniel Dorsky. Le programme de la Cinematheque de San Francisco est particulièrement intrigant. On va peut-être laisser Netflix de côté et mieux découvrir ce que les salles obscures de San Francisco ont à offrir.

### **10pm : Working City, 23 étages et quelque 3.600 pas dans la bibliothèque**

La fatigue commence à se faire sentir. Le monde n'aide certainement pas. Malgré l'énergie des speakers, on ne retiendra qu'une chose: *"le travail dans la Bay Area, ça ne se réduit pas qu'à un seul job et ça, malgré le nombre de milliardaires au m2."*

### **10:50pm : JR, à des années-lumières**

La foule est tellement compacte que les agents de sécurité bloquent les déplacements. Pas moyen de s'approcher de la scène, on se rabat sur les mezzanines, mais l'acoustique ne permet pas d'entendre ce que dit l'artiste. Certains se découragent, et préfèrent partir. Tant mieux, on saisit alors quelques bribes sur la prochaine expo de JR au SFMOMA: "Les Chroniques de San Francisco" est une grande fresque murale, qui rassemble des centaines de San Franciscains pris en photo pendant le mois que l'artiste a passé dans la ville en 2018. Un dernier selfie avec la foule, et JR repart dans l'anonymat de la nuit.

### **11:47pm: Dominique Crenn, "Food is politics!"**

La chef triplement étoilée, tout juste décorée de l'Ordre du Mérite, n'est pas venue pour servir la soupe: *"L'humanité est en danger", "Qui vote ici? Il est temps de dégager ce mec de la Maison blanche!"* En conversation avec Rachael Myrow de KQED, elle aborde tour à tour la nécessité de promouvoir des habitudes alimentaires plus respectueuses de l'environnement et son horreur absolue des OGM. *"Ça prendra du temps, mais on peut chacun faire un effort: ça commence par apporter votre mug quand vous achetez votre café"*. Une suggestion de plus à mettre dans notre boîte à idées.

### **12:23pm: On discute, on peint, on danse**

Et nous, on rentre. La fresque de du collectif 836M est presque terminée devant la bibliothèque. Les couche-tôt se félicitent d'être venus, les passionnés prolongent les discussions et on finira la nuit en musique.

## Gauging the future, savoring doughnuts

By Beth Spotswood



© Matthias Carette

What would happen if thousands of San Franciscans showed up at the library on a rain-soaked Saturday night and brainstormed about the future of the city until the wee hours of the morning? The French Consulate in San Francisco, SFMOMA and the San Francisco Public Library joined forces to find out. The result was, in a word, crowded.

Night of Ideas, which took place at the Main Library on Feb. 2, was part of a global movement organized by the French government in which citizens in more than 100 cities gather to debate, discuss and philosophize on the metropolises of the future. Saturday night's capacity event in San Francisco ran until 2 a.m. and included breakout panels led by local thinkers and artists, dance, music, poetry, open-mike spoken word, and \$4 doughnuts.

The evening was broken into one-hour segments and required guests to use a program and map to select their itinerary. Each hour featured a variety of hosted breakout sessions in different sections of the library, while the atrium stage (located under the big Library Cards sign) showcased headliners.

Six thousand people attended throughout the night. Many of them were audibly French, and all of them seemed to be gathered in the library's atrium, seated or standing or leaning over the railings three stories high. I went looking for breathing room.

I found it at the 8 p.m. Litquake-hosted discussion titled “Fiction City.” It took place in the library’s Deaf Services Center. The panel featured authors Meg Elison and Charlie Jane Anders. Together, they pondered whether San Francisco is a utopian or dystopian city (it’s both, apparently) and whether futuristic fantasy writing has the power to change us and our environments. The crowd, eclectic in every way a crowd can be eclectic, nodded in approval at all of the science fiction references that flew over my head. I sneaked out in search of another session.

Upstairs near the braille center, modern dancers dressed all in white performed among the crowds. Later, acrobats would dangle over the atrium. People from the rainy line outside continued to file in well after the free event had begun. Still dripping from the storm, they roamed past live music and breakout panels, past the empanadas table and the silent disco. Despite the storm and the lines, everyone was in a very good mood — even the man trying to maneuver a cello case through thousands of people.

In the echoey atrium discussion on what San Francisco should look like in 2030, Tenderloin Housing Clinic Executive Director Randy Shaw spoke of the need for more housing. Behind the makeshift stage, a man dressed in platform boots and a suit covered in comic book quotes (POW!) prepared his slideshow on Burning Man.

Once they began, each session was standing room only. Guests crowded the back of the Koret Auditorium for a talk on “Resilient City” with KQED’s Michael Krasny and environmental experts, and they sat on the carpeted floor against the Chinese Center’s bookcases for “Media City,” with The Chronicle’s Kevin Fagan, along with Lydia Chavez of Mission Local and Corine Lesnes from Le Monde.

“Sharing City,” “Queer City” and “Equitable City” took place elsewhere. A man led yoga near the computer lab and drama therapy students working with the Neighborly Project offered guests four different “modalities of therapy.”

The non-binary restrooms, still in full public library mode, were covered in signs announcing a 10-minute limit for using the toilet.

Few endured the entire seven-hour affair — I sure didn’t. But it was fun to be surrounded by enthusiastic people crowded in the library on a dark and stormy night. One group of women, with perhaps one of the best ideas of the evening, sipped beer and ate Girl Scout cookies at a bank of research desks.

It remains to be seen whether this collective jam session will result in real and positive change for the San Francisco of the future. But its intentions were pure, its panels packed and its doughnuts delicious. The city’s artists and thinkers had united thousands in an egalitarian night of discourse. I walked outside and into the storm, back into the city that we’re all trying to save.



## **At Night of Ideas, poets lament the past**

**By Annie Berman**



Artists from RAWdance company perform at the SF main library on February 2nd. Photo by Annie Berman

It's Saturday night and the San Francisco Public Library feels like the hottest place to be. "I've never seen the library this crowded — ever," I overhear as I squeeze my way through the crowded atrium to a talk called "Poetic City."

The seven-hour event is called "Night of Ideas." Organized through a partnership between the library, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the French Consulate, the event is advertised as "A free and festive night to exchange ideas in the heart of the city!" The inaugural event was held in Paris in 2016.

I wind through the stacks, past a long line of people waiting to buy doughnuts — glazed and sprinkled, a little too close to the books. In the elevator, a volunteer in a turquoise shirt asks which floor we're headed to. "I don't know," says a girl, clearly overwhelmed. She's holding a shiny program that lists dozens of options for talks, performances and attractions. "Where *should* we go?"

The volunteer smiles. “Well, floor three is where the bar is,” he says.

I get off on the second floor to hear nine poets answer the question: “What is the poetic city?” Instead of offering a definition, the poets mostly mourn for a city that no longer exists. In their readings, they dance around themes of gentrification, the inequality wrought by the tech boom, and San Francisco as it used to be, before shops selling \$5 pour-over coffees replaced affordable homes.

“I refuse. I resist. I remember. I reclaim,” said poet Flavia Mora.

Tiny Grey Garcia calls herself a “poverty scholar,” having lived on the streets. “Can I get a witness,” she says in a voice that doesn’t need a mic, “who’s barely making it but somehow still does?” She calls the event “hipster” and says everyone’s complacent in the “gentriFUKcation” that’s taken over her city.

“If you have a trust fund, see me after, and I’m not even joking,” Garcia says.

“What was so broken here that you needed to fix it?” asked trans poet Ash Philips, whose shirt is decorated with flamingos, and who makes the audience laugh when they say, “Can you at least take your airpods out when you speak to us?”

At the end of the panel, poet Thea Matthews takes the mic one last time. She asks listeners to raise their hands if they’ve moved to San Francisco within the last five years.

Many do.

“Thanks for your honesty,” she says. “The truth is, you’re the gentrifier. And you need to look within yourself and ask yourself what you’re doing for the community, for the people you displaced.”

She paused. “It’s amazing how people just see through us.”

The audience listens.

I walk away to stretch my legs and let the poetry sink in.

Between bookshelves, a modern-dance troupe is wearing all-white outfits. Onlookers waiting in line to buy beer watch, entranced.

I am struck by the intellectualism and artistry of the evening. A French woman asks me if I have seen her friend. I have not. Will she answer a few questions for this story? Yes, but she would prefer to be anonymous. “I like the randomness of this event,” she says. “That it is about everything.”

It gets late, and I go to other panels — one called “Equitable City,” about the radical idea of making things free; and one about preserving LGBTQ+ spaces and bringing the historical past into the present.

At “Equitable City,” John Law, the co-founder of Burning Man, says he thinks it’s too late for San Francisco — the damage of gentrification has been done, he says. “Maybe it’s not too late for Oakland.”

Marina Gorbis, the panel moderator, disagrees. She thinks tonight’s event is proof that people care enough about their city to do something to make it truly equitable.

“This is actually doing something,” she says, looking around in awe at the hundreds of people gathered on a Saturday night to talk about the future. “So keep doing it.”

## **Night Of Ideas 2019: San Francisco Explores Art, Identity, Love, and Politics**

**By Joshua Ram**



© Matthias Carrette - Courtesy of the French Consulate in San Francisco

As the sound of rainfall faded, the voices of fellow readers began to rise. A crowd gathered at San Francisco's Public Library not to curl up with a book, but to see the "Night of Ideas." Hosted jointly last week by the SF Public Library, SF MOMA, and the French Consulate, the event was branded as "a free and festive night to exchange ideas" in the heart of downtown San Francisco, and lasted until 2am. A similar event took place in France the past two years.

The night began with members of the French Consulate exulting the values of democracy, free speech, and human rights, establishing the running theme of a celebration and renewal of Enlightenment principles. French and American speakers throughout the night referred to the festival of ideas as a "call to action." While there certainly weren't any MAGA hats to be found, open dialogue, disagreement, and the free flow of all ideas was encouraged.

The crowd was so engaged in discussion that chef Dominique Crenn took to lambasting her audience for talking over her musings on the unifying power of food and the evils of the Trump administration. Food and booze (albeit not free-this is San Francisco) aided ongoing discussions.



Of note, we spoke with tech workers from out of state: this category of San Franciscan was encouraged as the evening progressed to examine how they could vitalize the city, rather than feeling siloed into a scapegoated role during a painful period of change and growth. Young French and American attendees participated in Teen City, which focused on young people's reflections on current events and social justice. Speakers gave moving poetry readings about dealing with grief, growing up, and how empathy could translate into broader political movements.

Teens lamented the issue of homelessness in San Francisco, and encouraged listeners—"you are members of the one percent"—to think about spending more money on charity. A speaker at the Equitable City panel echoed the sentiment, saying that just as "sexism is a man's problem, poverty is a rich people's problem."

The arts were a consistent theme throughout the evening. One speaker suggested that urban planners focus on the importance of the arts when building cities, because without the arts societies would be "at risk of losing their soul."

For the Arts City panel, Maria Jenson, of SOMArts, Dena Beard, of The Lab, and Susan Mernit, of The Crucible, spoke. All of them spoke about the importance of supporting artists financially in cities like San Francisco, and the importance of showing to federal lawmakers the importance of the arts and culture to a city's economy and vitality. Speakers encouraged audience members to support artists by showing up to museums and art shows, and to spread the word to friends and loved ones about art that inspires them.

The message was to avoid listening passively, but to take action: vote, speak out, and push yourself to expand the boundaries of artistic expression. A society that didn't foster the arts would be lost. JR, a photographer from France, spoke about how he grew up impoverished and with a keen eye for street art. He spoke of his art as a way to bring people together, and to humanize all sides of a social or political fight. JR encouraged his audience to introduce themselves to one another, and explained that for him, art is not about the art piece itself, but about how it is able to connect people in the real world. He emphasized how art could bring people together towards honest dialogue, even the midst of fierce social and political conflict.

Along with the importance of the arts, San Francisco's iconic history as a refuge for the LGBTQ community was also discussed extensively. One novelist who identified as queer celebrated the fact that we live in a world where there is a "generation of queers whose parents still like them," lamenting the tragedy of young people who are disowned by their parents for being who they are.

Amidst discussions about gender identity, the empowerment of women, and dystopian San Francisco novels, one audience member asked for a hint of blind optimism from our panelists. They didn't oblige, but author Meg Elison exulted that while San Francisco doesn't

always succeed in its “promise to change the world,” finding a safe space to be yourself in San Francisco was “essential to my existence.”

Listening to speakers during the Queer City panel was particularly powerful. Aria Sa’id, a trans rights activist who works in San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood, lamented the economic as well as social hardships of being transgender and African-American in San Francisco. Sa’id emphasized that while San Francisco is thought of as a gay mecca and a sanctuary for so many marginalized groups, learning how to be your authentic self, seeking acceptance, and “facing economic consequences for being yourself” remain essential issues for the trans community.

Sa’id hopes for increased economic empowerment for San Francisco’s trans community and emphasized the life and death nature of trans rights: the trans community is disproportionately homeless, and the life expectancy for transgender women of color is in the 30s. Another speaker spoke poignantly about LGBTQ artists living through the 1980s AIDS crisis in San Francisco. Two gay lovers were diagnosed with AIDS, and they promised whoever survived longer would use art to memorialize the other. One artist made all of his work in black and white during the crisis; only years later when some people were able to survive AIDS did he start making art in color.

The final speaker concluded, “find your lovers and make some art!”

## **SF Library & Consulat General Of France Present 'Night Of Ideas'**

**By Michelle Griego**



© Matthias Carette

A unique event was happening at the San Francisco Library called 'Night of Ideas.' The library's chief of Community Programs and Partnerships Michelle Jeffers and Emmanuel Lebrun-Damiens, Consulat General de France shared details on this 'intellectual pajama party' with Bay Area Focus host Michelle Griego.

## ***Observed: A banner month for art, dance and ideas***

**By George McCalman**



**Independent curator & conjurer Ashara Ekundayo, at the San Francisco Public Library.  
Photo: George McCalman / Special to The Chronicle**

**Night of Ideas San Francisco Public Library, Feb. 2**

“‘Omi’ means water. It is natural, necessary, essential. I am inviting us to take a breath.”

— *Ashara Ekundayo, independent curator & conjurer*

“I used to live here and I’m coming back for all of my (stuff).”

— *Tanea Lunsford Lynx, storyteller*

“I wanted folks to feel that you could insist on play without compromising my investment in the survival(s) of black folks.”

— *Ra Malika Imhotep, storyteller*

*Follow George McCalman on Instagram and Twitter at @mccalman.co*



## **Night of Ideas SF: How to Make Our Future Cities More Like Black Rock City**

**By Steven Raspa**



© Matthias Carette

On February 2, Burning Man participated in Night of Ideas at the San Francisco Public Library after we were asked to share lessons from Black Rock City with other more permanent cities and cities of the future.

The French Consulate organizes the annual Night of Ideas, which took place across 70 countries and 120 cities in 2019 and aims to foster a free and democratic exchange of ideas.

This was the first time in San Francisco, where it was a seven-hour marathon session of panels and keynote presentations dedicated to the subject “Future Cities”. It was organized in association with SF MOMA, the SF Public Library and national public radio station, KQED.

It was also a night filled with performances, music, art and readings, and the French Consulate asked Burning Man to help with this creative component and bring local artists and performers into the discourse.

Burning Man is increasingly being asked to speak at urban planning forums like this, and it’s extremely gratifying. Over the last three years alone, I have had the opportunity to address thousands of mayors, urban planners, architects, and nightlife and art advocates across Europe in Amsterdam, Berlin, Stockholm, Moscow and Nantes.

Subjects have included: urban prototyping, how BRC functions safely as a 24-hour-a-day city, and conditions that lead to civic engagement and innovation. It turns out we have far more in common with cities than we do with events.

**Social Space, Green Space and Expressive Surface Area**

At Night of Ideas SF, I spoke about Black Rock City's urban plan and the importance of social spaces, "expressive surface areas" and being in relationship to nature. I argued for embedding culture throughout cities instead of displacing it in concentric rings that otherwise move experimentation and creativity farther and farther outside city centers.

The "concentric ring" approach is often intentionally used as an urban planning tactic or viewed as a fait accompli. However, if you do that, city centers eventually "calcify" and stagnate from the inside-out. At best, cities that employ this tactic become museums to their former cultural relevance; at worst, they become expensive places to live and tourist traps without any authentic soul or cultural vitality. Boring!

It's extremely important that in our rush to meet housing demands and tax revenue goals we don't displace art, culture and entertainment venues. In fact, it's imperative cities take measures to EMBED art spaces, maker spaces, hacker spaces, and community centers THROUGHOUT cities.

A final point I made, which I learned from Black Rock City, is the importance of planning for "permanent flexible space". That's kind of an oxymoron, but important for forward-thinking urban planners to think about. In BRC we hold space for the unexpected with open camping for unregistered Theme Camps and walk-up art projects that the Artery places on the fly. This encourages cultural vitality and flexibility.

Two examples of how cities can do that are Art Pads (a permanent location for art that changes every year or so), and Parklets (temporary parks, often placed in former parking spots). Both these flexible spaces have been prototyped by Burners in San Francisco and cities around the world, and they can add more social and expressive space and interactions to permanent cities.

Dogpatch Arts Plaza in SF is the most recent location to incorporate a Temporary Art Pad. I supported the creation of this latest art pad on behalf of Burning Man, providing encouragement and advice on how to make the plaza layout as flexible as possible for future use. Locals chose the first artwork, which was a sculpture by artists Laura Kimpton and Jeff Schomberg.

Burning Man also helped establish the first Temporary Art Pads in San Francisco over a decade ago, one next to the Ferry Building on The Embarcadero and the other at Patricia's Green in Hayes Valley. Net result: more art, often by artists from the area, and social interactions centered around creativity. In the case of the Dogpatch Arts Plaza, we also included social space and green space — combining the best of parklets and Temporary Art Pads.

I'm hoping this concept is replicated and other developers will embrace the form to encourage creative expression, social interaction among neighbors, and green space.

### **New Measurements of Success**

Cities can also look at their infrastructure as an expressive delivery device — like the signs, lamplight spires and public transportation systems (i.e., mutant vehicles and art bikes) in

BRC. Projects like the Bay Lights Project by artist Leo Villarreal have shown the world that bridges and other urban infrastructure in cities can also be expressive delivery devices.

These are three practical and tangible examples of how to increase social, expressive and green “surface area” in cities. However, they are still pretty cosmetic. I think of them as the minimum that cities could do.

To make cities more like BRC, city administrators and developers also need to adopt different measures of success: measures that perhaps look and feel a lot more in tune with our community’s 10 guiding principles and a little less focused on units, tax base and profitability of urban development projects alone.

We need more humanist values of success, and we have to make a place for the joyful, the fun, the strange and unexpected in cities of the future. We have to hold permanent space for the ephemeral and unexpected! This isn’t just about urban planning. It’s about making a place for imagination to thrive in cities of the future.

### **From BRC to Refugee Camps**

I also had the great pleasure of sharing the stage with Mike Zuckerman, who co-founded the first freespace in San Francisco with Ilana Lipsett and a team of Burners, creating another urban prototype that has been copied in cities around the world. He also has been bringing his own lessons from our temporary city to refugee camps in Elpidia in Greece and Nakivale in Uganda.

I have to say that Mike is a hero of mine. I’m humbled and inspired by members of our community that take what they learn in Black Rock City and passionately put it to good use in the world.

Mike does that in spades. His most recent project in Uganda involved permanently liberating a piece of land within a refugee camp to create a playa-inspired town square complete with cultural center, amphitheater school and free market place for residents to share their music, art and traditions with one another.

That project has had profound impact on the citizens of that temporary refugee city — although that “temporary” camp is now almost 30 years old! Mike and a team of international volunteers, Ugandan Nationals and refugees from across Africa have increased social interaction, cultural exchange and provided a forum for human relationships and ideas to be shared.

The success of this project has proven the importance of such spaces, and it may have even laid the foundation for a permanent city to evolve around this forum for social and cultural engagement.

The crowd at Night of Ideas in San Francisco was hushed when Mike spoke — and with good reason. He’s taken what he loves about Black Rock City and he’s applying that passion to some seriously challenging issues — as many Burners are doing every day somewhere in the world.

You may be doing it in ways you aren't even fully aware of, but we are all part of this evolution. We are entering a new chapter as a community in terms of bringing "Home" back to our year-round cities and to other temporary cities in need.

### *Return to Neighborliness*

I've also been impressed by the work of Douglas Farr and his new book, *Sustainable Nation: Urban Design Patterns For The Future*, which applies the 10 Principles and lessons the author learned from Black Rock City to problems affecting cities.

I was honored to share a few examples from his book, but what I really love about Douglas is that he is arguing for a return to neighborliness — the kind of neighborliness that used to be more common when we lived in actual NEIGHBORhoods. It's also the kind that you still find in abundance in Black Rock City and the many temporary towns and cities created via Burning Man's 90 Official Regional Events around the world.

As we find ourselves in conversation with mayors, urban planners, architects, and even economic development agencies, you can expect us to be advocating for the importance of engaging citizens in creating the cities that they want to live in.

That's where you come in. Form or join local neighborhood association and planning commissions. Run for local supervisor and mayor. Give feedback on new developments and challenge developers to include social spaces, art spaces, community gathering spaces, and green public spaces in their plans.

You know the kinds of things you love about BRC. Be that bridge and build the city you want to live in!

# Night of Ideas co-presenters

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