

Dr. Virginija Vitkienė, General Commissioner. The Season of Lithuania in France 2024.
Concept Note. Contact: virginija.vitkiene@lithuanianculture.lt

THE SEASON OF LITHUANIA IN FRANCE 2024

WHEN: 12th September to 12th December 2024

WHERE: France

General Commissioner: Dr. Virginija Vitkienė (Lithuania), PHD in Art History and Criticism, curator of contemporary art exhibitions (2004-2022), artistic director of Kaunas Biennial (2009-2017), CEO of Kaunas 2022 – European Capital of Culture (2018-2022).

IMPLEMENTED BY:

- Lithuanian Culture Institute, operator of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania
- French Institute, operator of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture for the foreign cultural policy of France.

France and Lithuania have had centuries of cultural exchanges in the fields of architecture, science and technology, cuisine and arts. The influence of French thinkers was particularly strong in the political and socio-cultural life of Lithuania in the 19th and 20th centuries. The influence of French modern art on Lithuanian painters, sculptors and architects who studied in France is evident in Lithuanian art, urban planning and social life. The city of Kaunas, now considered an open-air museum of Modernism architecture, had served as the capital of Lithuania in the 1920s and 1930s and was developed under the influence of Parisian trends of the time thanks to architects and urban planners who had studied in France. In 1919 Lithuania had already in place a support program for students willing to study in France, and in 1936 Lithuanian Ministry of Education had made French the primary foreign language at Lithuanian schools. In the intellectual field of contemporary Lithuania, French philosophical thought and arts have had a great deal of influence.

From a French perspective, Lithuania is still to be discovered, although international professionals are more and more familiar with the rich and vibrant artistic scene of the country. In 2019, Lithuania was distinguished by a Lion d'Or at Venice Biennale, represented by artists Lina Lapelytė, Vaiva Grainytė et Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, for their opera performance "Sun and Sea (Marina)". In the visual arts, Deimantas Narkevičius is an international renown sculptor trained videast, represented by gb agency, and so is Žilvinas Kempinas, famous for his "texturized" installations.

Many are familiar with the great cinematographer Jonas Mekas, a figure of the underground cinema.

In the music scene, pianist Mūza Rubackytė, conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, soprano Aušrinė Stundytė (who performed in "Lady Macbeth de Mzensk" by Krzysztof Warlikowski) are amongst famous Lithuanian artists, alongside singer GiedRé, whose radio chronique in France Inter's show "C'est encore nous!" is called "La chanson de GiedRé"

And if you are a frequent user of start-up "Vinted" you must know: it is a Lithuanian platform! But it's still too few!

Therefore, we hope that the Lithuanian Season in France in September-December 2024 will become a brand-new beginning for the French - Lithuanian culture exchange. The Season will develop a programme for French audiences in collaboration among Lithuanian and French curators, cultural producers and programmers, thus creating the platforms for a long-term partnership for contributing together to our common intellectual and cultural space – Europe.

I. FOUNDING PRINCIPLES:

- An invitation to look at the current geopolitical and sociocultural environment in Europe from a Lithuanian perspective.
- The Lithuanian cultural programme will be based on a contemporary approach to art and history, present and future, implemented through long term collaboration among Lithuanian and French institutions and stakeholders.

The Season of Lithuania in France 2024 aims to be:

1. A platform for Lithuanian and French partners to reinforce and invigorate values relevant to Europe's present and future: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, human rights, and climate resilience.
2. A platform to increase visibility and awareness of contemporary Lithuanian culture with French audiences.
3. A platform to incite co-creation and co-construction between Lithuanian and French partners.
4. A collaborative platform for long lasting partnerships and collaborations between French and Lithuanian institutions and professionals.
5. An inclusive project, addressing various audiences, especially young people.

II. DISCIPLINARY FIELDS

- Visual Art / Contemporary Art
- Performing Arts (Theatre, Dance, Contemporary Circus, Puppetry)
- Classical Music
- Contemporary Music, Sound Art, and Jazz
- Community arts (residency and local/personal narrative-based approach)
- Literature / Publishing / Debate
- Heritage
- Architecture, Urban and Landscape Design
- Cinema, Film, Documentary, Screen
- Culture+ Education/Sports
- Culture+ Sciences (social sciences and humanities, biology, ecology, philosophy, etc)
- Gastronomy
- Audio, Digital Arts, VR, Video Games
- Culture+ Economics / Innovations / Technologies
- Design (product design, graphic design)
- Fashion

III. ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

The Season of Lithuania in France 2024 aims to become a platform for sharing ideas about the current state of humanity and to project towards a co-created future of Europe. Looking at the history of Lithuania, resilience emerges as a core theme. Indeed, resilience or the lack thereof, lies behind the most important moments of Lithuania's development. Resilience in the face of the empires of the 18th and 19th centuries has prevented the loss of the Lithuanian identity and preserved links with European values. Resilience was the driving force behind major geopolitical shifts, such as the peaceful Singing Revolution in Lithuania in the late 1980s, which gave one of the final blows to the Soviet Union in 1990. Empowered identities, global neighbourhoods, and unleashed imagination – the main themes of the season – are intertwined and rooted in resistance. Resistance to imperialist thinking, propaganda, corruption, and indifference is the reason why Lithuania still exists.

At the time of a geopolitical crisis and vulnerability in Europe provoked by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war in Ukraine, more than ever Europe's identity depends on unity through diversity and reinforcement of its core democratic principles. Created by the efforts of millions of people in dozens of countries culture defines European thought and values that are steeped in human dignity, freedom, respect for others, and democracy.

The Season of Lithuania in France 2024 will become a platform for shared values, creativity and hope for the future. It will focus on personal, national, state, European, and global voices of resilience. In the face of growing inequalities, threats to democracy, repression and the planetary crisis caused by human-driven climate change, resilience is an imperative need for Europe and a defining characteristic of our future.

The programme of The Season of Lithuania in France 2024 will invite us to recognise, understand, and appreciate the benefits of resilience through the following themes:

- I. **Global Neighbourhoods**
- II. **Empowered Identities**
- III. **Unleashed Imagination**

Global Neighbourhoods

In the Anthropocene, no action is without repercussions. Everyone and everything depend on each other. The realities of the global neighbourhood invite us to think about the common future of Europe and the world in terms of sustainability and coexistence, prosperity, security, mutual support, enjoying each other's talents, friendship and celebrating each other's achievements.

Accepting that a Lithuanian-French neighbourhood functions without an actual physical or political border opens up the possibility to reflect on mutual cultural influences in the past and the potential of co-creation in the future. **Neighbourhood beyond borders** is a proposal to move away from the usual regional definitions (East-West, centre-periphery) and the stereotypes that characterise them. Lithuania and France have the multi-ethnic past and present, from which emerges the ability to communicate, to adapt, and to coexist.

Thus, the theme of neighbourhoods invites to a polyphonic dialogue: **migration and movement without borders and boundaries**. Mobility fosters creativity and resilience, conversely, the same time global migration, caused by climate change, unequal opportunities, political instabilities, and violence is creating new challenges. The influx of refugees encourages us to search for new principles of coexistence, to give voice to the vulnerable and largely invisible groups and their identities, as well as to foster empathy.

Global neighbourhood highlights the **(post)colonial** discourse, which enables to think about contemporary issues and how the experience of colonialism has influenced and will continue to influence the cultures of our countries in the future. A geopolitical perspective allows to consider the scenarios for the future of Europe and European values such as democracy, freedom of thought, speech, and expression, as well as equality which need to be defended.

The theme of neighbourhoods links not only states and people, but also people and nature, culture and nature. **The climate crisis** forces us to think about the common future of Europe and the world in terms of sustainability and survival. Global Neighbourhoods open up a space for discussion on the interaction between nature and anthropocentric culture, nature's inability to resist technologies that create both good and bad scenarios for the future ecology. It proposes to construct nature as a guarantee of the survival of human culture, as a source of the human civilization's extraordinary resilience and opens up space for the imagination of the existence of future generations.

Empowered Identities

We would like the voices of the less visible and audible, including women, people of different origins, LGBTQ+ people, refugees, especially the victims of the current war in Ukraine, migrants, and people with disabilities among many others to be heard. We hope that the cultural programme will strengthen the ability **to imagine diversity**.

The theme of empowered identities invites reflections on gender in contemporary Europe: the ever-evolving conceptualisations of gender, gender diversity and fluidity, the different gendered hierarchies, the **role of gender** in art, academia, politics, leadership and childcare. It proposes to deconstruct and rethink femininities and masculinities, maternities and paternities, and to question as well as potentially reimagine the current **gender regimes** in Lithuania and in France.

Empowered identities will open larger opportunities for cultural representation. From the Lithuanian perspective, this could open a reflection on the historical and current experiences of individuals and populations as well as that of other ethnic groups who suffered from genocide and mass crime and atrocities in History. The creative exploration of these experiences creates **opportunities for openness**, mutual trust, an honest appraisal of the present, and hope for a fairer future.

The theme of empowered identities also seeks to make the **Ukrainian voices heard** in the programme, encouraging common projects of artists and institutions from Lithuania, France, Ukraine and other countries. The current political context in Europe, will be explored through cultural productions, debates, and diplomatic discussions. This theme will also open up a discussion on the challenges facing Europe and its future.

Unleashed Imagination

This theme encourages us to think about utopias, dystopias, **scenarios, and fictions of the future**, using humanity's most powerful tool - the ability to create visions, to empower dreams and to spark imagination. It is an invitation to imagine and create together the future of the place where we live (Lithuania, France, Europe, the world). It is an invitation to imagine the twenty-second century and to propose future scenarios.

Preferably, this would be a horizontal line of the programme, woven into all of the season's themes, inviting us to **re-imagine the human being**, to create hybrid ecologies of the future, linking human communities, nature, and ingenuity (science and art), artificial intelligence, in ways that have not been imagined so far, and to imagine the impact of these connections on identities and coexistence.

The invitation is to imagine what the world and Lithuania would look like under different power regimes, imbued with the logic of vulnerability as the main source of resilience and resistance to hegemonic, totalitarian structures.