

The Cultural Services of the French Embassy and California Humanities present *Empowering Culture in Our Cities*, a documentary on the inclusive, art-centric cities of Oakland and Saint-Denis

San Francisco, June 18, 2020 – The Cultural Services of the French Embassy is proud to announce the release of *Empowering Culture in Our Cities*, a 14-minute documentary in French and English (with subtitles in both languages) produced by **California Humanities** and directed by Camille Servan-Schreiber, now available on oaklandsaintdenis.org. This short film is the first production of the cross-cultural *Oakland/Saint-Denis Cooperation Project*, which investigates how French and American cultural leaders can build more creative, inclusive cities by investing in the arts and artists, using Oakland and Saint-Denis as case studies.

In recent years, artists in Saint-Denis and Oakland experienced displacement from Paris and San Francisco, respectively, due to waves of gentrification and an increased cost of living. In San Francisco, the 1990s tech boom caused rent prices to soar, pushing many creatives to the now-gentrified Oakland, while in Saint-Denis, a working-class enclave on Paris' outskirts, gentrification is just beginning: the city has traditionally drawn immigrant populations and is currently home to 136 different nationalities. The city is now starting to attract French citizens of all stripes, especially artists.

Interspersed with testimonials and insights from artists and professionals—including **Shannon Jackson**, Associate Vice Chancellor, Arts and Design at the University of California, Berkeley; **Roberto Bedoya**, Cultural Affairs Manager of the City of Oakland; and **Gaëtan Bruel**, Cultural Counselor of the French Embassy in the U.S., the film offers a rich visual panorama of the cultural and urban landscapes of each city through sound bites and footage. The group of researchers visits local squares, churches, cafés, diverse neighborhoods, and cultural centers, such as the **Destiny Arts Center** in Oakland, and **6b**, a massive, industrial artist's space in Saint-Denis, founded by architect **Julien Beller**, who purchased the building to provide low-cost housing and studio space to artists, and which has since become a fixture of the Grand Paris landscape.

Exploring themes of displacement, gentrification, storytelling, and belonging, the film's subjects echo a central credo: artists are the true architects of our cities, so we must empower and support them by putting culture at the center of urban development; reinventing real estate and economic models to better serve them; and developing a sense of belonging between artists and local communities.

"We must re-engage artists and cultural institutions in urban development to imagine and build more inclusive and creative cities. Our project is to cooperate in the way we build our cities," says **Juliette Donadieu**, Cultural Attaché for San Francisco at the French Embassy in the United States.

Simón Adinia Hanukai, artistic Director of Kaimera Productions who led a workshop on "Community Engagement Through Storytelling" points out that "both Oakland and Saint-Denis are incredibly diverse cities with populations from all over the world that are experiencing gentrification. Reflecting on these cities together takes us out of our bubble and makes us realize this is a global issue."

Patrick Braouezec, President of Plaine Commune in Saint-Denis, thinks that "we must begin with the specificities of each culture that makes up this city in order to find common ground and ensure we come together. When a city undergoes transformation, culture, art, and creation should not only be part of the



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change, but the guiding principle." This principle was at the center of his symposium on “The Arts and Urban Planning” during the American delegation visit to France.

The strong conviction that urban landscapes should be built collectively, with artistic communities at the center, was further developed by **Shannon Jackson**, Associate Vice Chancellor of Arts and Design at the University of California, Berkeley. She noted that “a theme that came about both in the Bay Area conversations and in the conversations in France was how focused we all were on real estate and on creating structures that allow artists and collaborating communities to own the properties in which they live and work.”

Empowering Culture in Our Cities is the first production to come out of this transdisciplinary cooperation project. A collective publication is slated to be released in the fall of 2020 and will be accompanied by artistic productions in public spaces in both cities and a series of public conversations with artists, real estate developers, and policymakers to further develop a strong model of cultural urbanization.

"More than ever, we must look for common ground and foster opportunities to come together. Here we have a laboratory of sorts, where questions have been asked and answers are emerging. Perhaps this will encourage other cities to carry out similar projects and enjoy positive results." states **Gaëtan Bruel**, Cultural Counselor of the French Embassy in the US.

Julie Fry, President & CEO of California Humanities, adds: “We are thrilled to partner on this project and produce this documentary. Not only does it amplify the stories of the people who are part of the rich fabric of these incredible communities and value the resources that have been here in Oakland and in Saint-Denis all along, it also highlights the crucial role that artists and cultural organizations play in shaping a better future for our cities, on both sides of the Atlantic. We have a lot to learn from each other.”

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The Cultural Services of the French Embassy promotes the best of French arts, literature, cinema, digital innovation, language, and higher education across the US. Based in New York City, Washington D.C., and eight other cities across the country, the Cultural Services brings artists, authors, intellectuals, and innovators to cities nationwide. It also builds partnerships between French and American artists, institutions and universities on both sides of the Atlantic. In New York, through its bookshop Albertine, it fosters French-American exchange around literature and the arts. www.frenchculture.org

California Humanities, a nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities, promotes the humanities – focused on ideas, conversation and learning – as relevant, meaningful ways to understand the human condition and connect us to each other in order to help strengthen California. California Humanities has provided grants and programs across the state since 1975. To learn more visit www.calhum.org, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Oakland/Saint-Denis is a cooperation project of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States, in co-production with the French American Cultural Society, the Institut Français and California Humanities. The project is developed in collaboration with the agency Legendes Urbaines.

Partner institutions include the following:

In France: Pierre-Emmanuel Becherand, General Manager/Grand Paris Express, Julien Beller, Founder and Director/Le 6b, Juliette Bompont, Director/Mains d'Oeuvres, Didier Coirint, Cultural Affairs Manager/City of Saint-Denis, Louise Fourquet, CEO/Baluchon, Simón Adinia Hanukai, Artistic Director/Kaimera Productions, Ben Lamyne, Artist, Julia Lopez, Artist & Founder/Maison Jaune, Emilie



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Moreau/APUR - Atelier parisien d'urbanisme, Valentine Roy/Territoire Culture et Création, Plaine Commune.

In California: Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Manager/City of Oakland, Benjamin Burke, Founder/Shade Tree, Sarah Crowell, Artistic Director/ Destiny Arts Center, Moy Eng, CEO/Community Arts Stabilization Trust, Lori Fogarty, Director/Oakland Museum of California, Ben Frost, Music Director/Youth Radio Media, William Gilchrist, Director/ Planning and Building Department/ City of Oakland, Shannon Jackson, Vice Chancellor Arts + Design/UC Berkeley, Kelley Kahn, Policy Director, Art and Economic Development/City of Oakland, David Keenan/Safer DIY Spaces, Robert Ogilvie, Director/Spur Oakland, Kelly McKinley, Deputy Director/Oakland Museum of California, Matthew Passmore, Artist & Founder/Morelab and Steven Raspa, Associate Director/Burning Man Project.

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