

GUY SAVOY'S INDUCTION INTO THE
ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS – MAY 20 2026

SPEECH BY GUY SAVOY IN HONOR OF
MICHEL DAVID-WEILL
(EXTRAIT)

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Academy of Fine Arts, dear friends,

First and foremost, both to honor the tradition of this august institution and to express my deepest feelings, I wish to convey my gratitude, my emotion, and a heartfelt thank you. Thank you to all of you, whom I am now privileged to address as “Dear Colleagues” ; thank you for dedicating your discernment to the service of French gastronomy and for deemed it worthy of a place in your academy, and then... thank you also for choosing yours truly as its first representative ! It is an immense honor.

Admiring it as a neighbor, yet still admiring it from afar, the noble building of the Institut de France, I sometimes found myself dreaming that perhaps, one day, I would cross the threshold of this Academy of Fine Arts. An Academy that Mr. Michel David-Weill, whose seat I have the honor of succeeding, described in a way I will take the liberty of repeating word for word, for, even before admiring the man, I already love his words.

I quote him: “This blend of a certain grandeur and a certain modesty is what makes this institution so valuable, where one finds, without distinction, eminent professors, artisans, and artists, all sharing a commitment to advancing research and excellence in every sphere of life.” To these, I would of course add business leaders and committed patrons, such as Michel David-Weill or our colleague Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière.

So here I am, a craftsman—and perhaps an artist by virtue of my election—leading in my wake all the craftsmen who contribute to gastronomy, the landscapes of France, the arts of the table, sommelier expertise, courtesy, the art of hospitality—in short, the French art of living, the art of living well à la

française.

But let us turn to a talented man, as generous as he is discreet, whose politeness and refinement - worthy of the 18th century, a period he particularly cherished - are praised by all : Michel David-Weill

It was with some trepidation that I contemplated deliver the eulogy for the head of Lazard Bank, for the world of banking is quite removed from that of cooking... and I am not very familiar with takeovers, even when they are friendly!

I was also impressed when I learned that this great banker had been dubbed, following Business Week, “the last emperor of Wall Street,” and when I discovered that before him, his father and grandfather had also held seats in the free members’ section of this academy.

But I read, here and there, that Michel David-Weill, in addition to being “the last emperor of Wall Street”, a world-renowned collector, a patron of the arts, and a philanthropist of legendary generosity, is also an original, cheerful, iconoclastic, with a completely free spirit, a sense of humor often tinged with self-deprecation, and also of exquisite courtesy. I also came across this quote: “I consider my work to be a service; I am at my clients’ disposal.”

So today, it is I who am at your service, Mr.David-Weill; and as I might have said had I welcomed you at 11 Quai de Conti: “I am happy and honored to make your acquaintance.”

Michel David-Weill, you have assembled an extraordinary collection of works of art and have been deeply committed to patronage. These two major commitments of your life led to your election to the Académie des Beaux-Arts on June 16, 1982, to succeed Bernard Gavoty.

It was your exceptional career as a banker that allowed you to put your passion for art into action; therefore, I will begin by discussing it.

You are the heir to a line of extraordinary men who, having left Lorraine in the mid-19th century to try their luck in the United States, succeeded in less than a century in establishing in New York, London, and Paris a unique, legendary institution that advises the powerful and governments.

Lazard Bank is, therefore, a family business. There is an ethic at Lazard that has been scrupulously upheld from father to son, and to grandson, of course. “One must maintain a guiding principle and never lose sight of common sense,” you say, “and not forget courage and good humor, as well as availability.”

And to illustrate this way of being, you give an unexpected example, which I quote with a wink: “Humility is one of the banker’s main qualities; in this respect, he is somewhat like a maître d’hôtel: he serves the courses and isn’t allowed to drop them in the middle of the meal saying he’s leaving!”

So, just as a maître d’hôtel must learn his trade before serving in the finest establishments, your father, Pierre David-Weill, explained to you when you graduated from Sciences Po that you had to learn the banker before practicing it.

Throughout the pages of your life, art and beauty have been ever-present; they have been your philosophy, your lifestyle...your way of life !

You view art and beauty as a whole, and France as their privileged home

“If I am so sensitive to French taste,” you write, “it is because it has revealed a true desire for beauty and grace, balance, the absence of excess, and respect for what is depicted. There is a French splendor.”

Just as you have a personal need for art and beauty, you are also convinced that beauty is necessary for everyone.

Moreover, since the primary role of a museum is to make the beauty created over the centuries accessible and understandable so that everyone can enjoy it, you decided to follow the family tradition of your father and grandfathers ; in turn, you have made a significant contribution to this mission of museums.

Following in the family tradition, you have been a great patron of the Louvre, so that beauty may be learned, shared, and offered to as many people as possible. Beyond the Louvre, the list of museums that have benefited from your generosity is long: the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Guimet, the Cluny, the Morgan Library, the National Gallery, and the Metropolitan.

You have also been very generous to philanthropic causes because, as you say, “the privileges that money brings entail duties.” Hospitals, clinics, retirement homes, scholarships, and public housing projects have been supported across generations. In fact, an avenue at the Cité Universitaire bears your grandfather’s name; the drawing prize Pierre David-Weill was established by your father in 1971 and perpetuated by you in 2019 when you increased its endowment at the request of Laurent Petitgirard.

Together with Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière, you helped establish a support fund

for Ukrainian artists, and you served on the board of directors of the Claude Pompidou Foundation for the elderly and young people with disabilities. But anonymity in generosity is also a hallmark of the family, and many donations remain unknown to the public.

Generosity and art are precious fuels for happiness. And you have a taste for happiness. What interests you is life and beauty in all its forms.

“I’m not jaded at all, you proclaim, I’m still dazzled by what I see, landscapes, people, works.”

This taste for happiness shines through one very page of your life. “L’esprit en fête” is, in fact, the title of one of your books, and “I have lived in joy” is its opening line. You speak of this or that work of art, this or that painting, this or that book with such relish, your friends say.

You are a connoisseur of art, just as a connoisseur savors fine wines, fine food, fine restaurants (and you are absolutely right!), and fine hotels, as your loved ones can attest. You are a member of the Club des Cent, whose focus on local products, terroirs, and seasons—and where people say of you: “In the hit parade of generosity, Michel David-Weill wins the golden chef’s hat!”

“Gourmandise” is a word that suits you well. This is hardly surprising, for gourmandise and generosity are twin sisters. Did not Brillat-Savarin say: “Gourmandise is one of the main bonds of society. It is what gradually spreads this spirit of conviviality that brings together the various classes every day, unites them into a single whole, animates conversation, and softens the edges of conventional inequality.”

Generosity, a love of good food, and a taste for happiness are inseparable from your personality. From this flows, quite naturally, a joie de vivre that never wavers. “I believe,” you say, “in the joie de vivre as a virtue that affects us, our view of the world, and our loved ones.”

You possessed a zest for life, a love of happiness, and immense generosity in sharing beauty with as many people as possible. You were a connoisseur of everything, which necessarily places you among the geniuses, according to Maupassant, since he believed that “true gourmets are as rare as men of genius.” Ladies and gentlemen, I am deeply impressed and delighted to have nothing but connoisseurs before me!