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Drag queen Piche prepares to perform, at the Debilly Bridge in Paris, during the opening ceremony of the 2024 Summer Olympics, Friday, July 26, 2024.

(AP/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi)

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In an unprecedented display of inclusivity, drag queens took center stage at the [Paris Olympics opening ceremony](#), showcasing the vibrant and influential role of the French LGBTQ+ community — while also attracting criticism over a tableau reminiscent of "The Last Supper."

Held along the Seine River, the [spectacular four-hour event](#) featured global stars such as [Celine Dion](#) and [Lady Gaga](#), both considered queer icons. The ceremony blended [historic and modern French culture](#) with a touch of kitsch, culminating in a flotilla of barges carrying thousands of Olympians.

Nicky Doll, known for competing on the 12th season of "RuPaul's Drag Race" and hosting "Drag Race France," participated in a high-octane fashion runway segment along with "Drag Race France" Season 1 winner Paloma, Season 3's Piche, and Giselle Palmer. Initially, they stood alongside the runway, gazing fiercely at the strutting models. Later, they joined in, showcasing their own style.

Le Filip, the recent winner of "Drag Race France," expressed their positive "surprise" and "pride" at the ceremony's scale and representation.

"I thought it would be a five-minute drag event with queer representation. I was amazed. It started with Lady Gaga, then we had drag queens, a huge rave, and a fire in the sky," they said. "It felt like a crowning all over again. I am proud to see my friends and queer people on the world stage."

[Among their bold performances](#) was a scene that seemed to evoke Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper," featuring the drag queens and other performers in a configuration reminiscent of Jesus Christ and his apostles. This segment drew significant attention — and mixed reactions.

"The (French) government knows what it's doing. They want to show themselves in the best way possible. They showed no restraints in expression," Le Filip told The Associated Press.

On the other hand, prominent [far-right politician Marion Maréchal](#) denounced the performance on social media.

"To all the Christians of the world who are watching the Paris 2024 ceremony and felt insulted by this drag queen parody of the Last Supper, know that it is not France

that is speaking but a left-wing minority ready for any provocation," she posted on the social platform X, a sentiment that was echoed by religious conservatives internationally.

"... because decapitating Habsburgs and ridiculing central Christian events are really the FIRST two things that spring to mind when you think of #OlympicGames," [Eduard Habsburg](#), Hungary's ambassador to the Vatican, posted on X, also referencing a scene depicting the beheading of Marie Antoinette.

[Thomas Jolly, the artistic director of the opening ceremony](#), afterward drew attention away from "The Last Supper" references, saying that hadn't been his intention.

Le Filip responded to the criticism of the scene with a touch of humor and sorrow.

"It feels like the words of somebody who didn't get on the guest list. We could all be laughing together. It's sad to me, honestly," they said.

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Inter-LGBT President James Leperlier was more circumspect, arguing that France still has [significant strides to make](#) in inclusivity.

"We know in the LGBTQ community in France we are far from what the ceremony showed. There's much progress to do in society regarding transgender people. It's terrible that to legally change their identity they are forced to be on trial," Leperlier said.

He also highlighted the disparity in acceptance, saying that the community is not visible in other official ceremonies and "has difficulty being heard."

"If you saw the opening ceremony last night you'd think it was like that normally, but it's not. France tried to show what it should be and not what it is," he said.

The [opening ceremony](#) came as drag and the voguing nightclub scene in France has experienced a revival. The cabaret club Madame Arthur, founded in 1946 in the ashes of World War II, is one of the world's oldest continually running LGBTQ+ theaters. It opened as Europe was only just beginning to understand the extent of the widespread murder of members of the queer community in WWII and is currently experiencing a massive renaissance.

Drag is not just a pastime; for many minority French communities who feel alienated over tensions arising from divisive politics and scars from the anti-gay marriage protests a decade ago, it's a statement of defiance. Many gay Black and Arab youths — especially those from Paris' less affluent and religiously conservative suburbs — and others who feel a sense of disconnect with French society [find voguing and drag events safe places](#) where their identities can be expressed without fear of reprisal.

Despite the backlash, Le Filip believes the opening ceremony will ultimately transcend controversy.

"The message of the show is freedom, and it's a good postcard for France," they concluded.