

public art at njpac

Reading Room Frieze Mural - FI 1

Cooperman Family Arts Education
and Community Center

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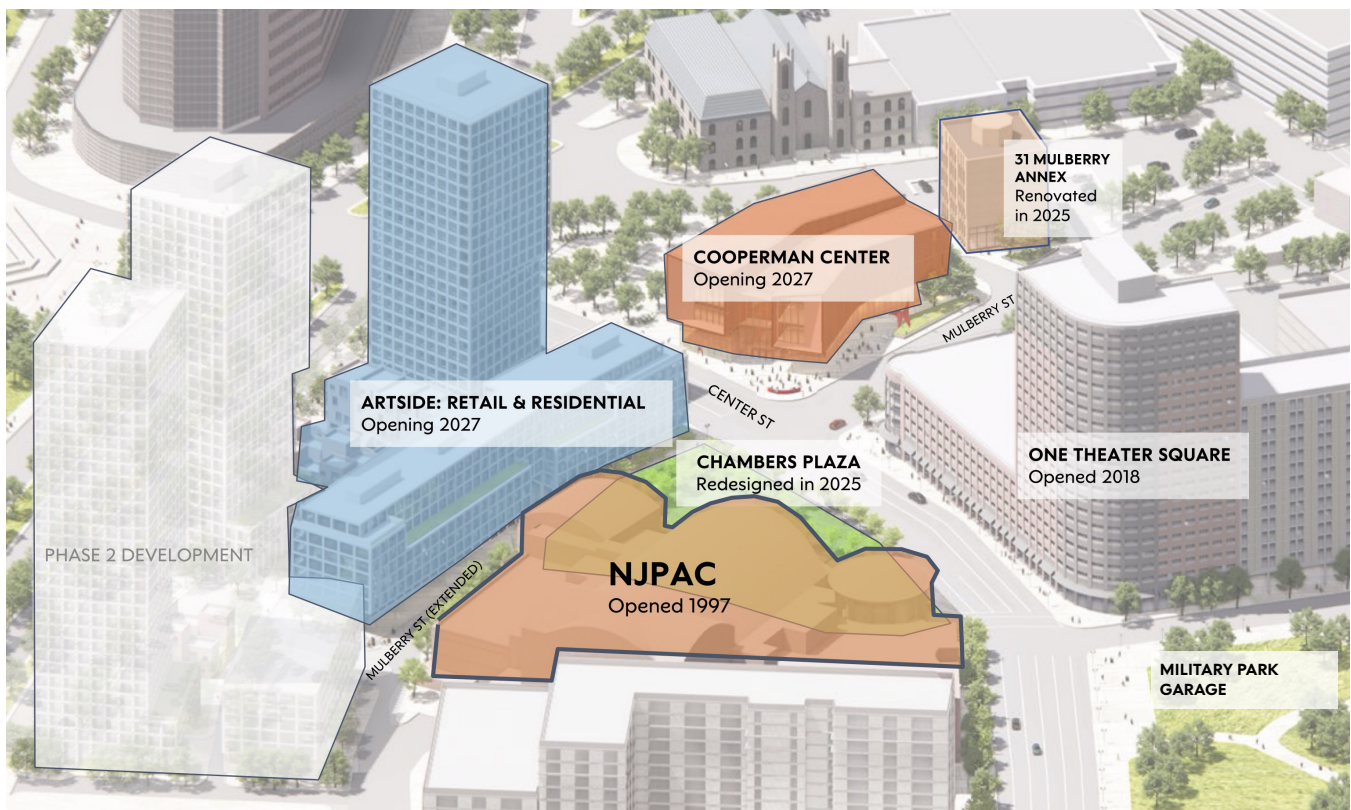
stories in sound, movement and community

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NJPAC – an anchor cultural institution for the city of Newark and state of New Jersey – is building a brand new downtown neighborhood on the parking lots surrounding our theaters. When it's completed, our campus will include new mixed-income residential buildings, retail spaces, parks, education, rehearsal and community space.

To activate this redeveloped campus and contribute to Newark's thriving public art scene, NJPAC is commissioning **thirteen new public artworks** to be installed in locations across our campus, both indoors and out. We look forward to inviting artists, particularly those with community-engaged practices, to create these pieces and help envision and energize this new neighborhood. We hope these works of art will capture both the spirit and mission of NJPAC and the energy of our home city, Newark.

This new public art program weaves together stories in sound, movement, and community – vital elements of all of NJPAC's work both on stage and off – using installations and interactive experiences to illuminate the cultural life of our community. Each work traces a story of **evolution** – stories of past, present and tomorrow carried forward through the lens of music, spoken word, dance, and performance. In Newark, these traditions continue to flourish through grassroots arts programs, youth initiatives, and public gatherings, sustaining a vibrant dialogue between generations. Through this layering of history, rhythm, and movement, ***Stories in Sound, Movement, and Community*** illustrates an institution, a city and a community in constant evolution.



about njpac, the location and initiative

New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), located in downtown Newark, New Jersey, is an anchor cultural institution of both the city of Newark and the state of New Jersey. It is an artistic, cultural, educational and civic center where great performances and events enhance and transform lives every day. NJPAC brings communities together both on and off of our campus – on stages, in schools and community settings – providing access to the arts for all and showcasing the state's and the world's best artists, while acting as a leading catalyst in the revitalization of its home city. Through its extensive Social Impact programs, NJPAC leverages the arts to advance positive outcomes in education, health and well-being, civic engagement and community development. NJPAC has attracted more than 12 million visitors (including more than two million children) since opening its doors in 1997. Visit njpac.org to learn more.

In September 2024, NJPAC broke ground on a campus-wide redevelopment project that includes mixed-income residential, retail spaces, parks, and a new home for arts education, rehearsal and community. The two main developments – where public art will be located – are **ArtSide** and the **Cooperman Center**. **ArtSide**, developed in partnership with LMXD, will feature 350-units of mixed-income residential units, including 70 affordable units across a mid-rise and high-rise building, as well as 15 townhouse-style units along a pedestrian street lot. The development also includes 20,000 square feet of ground-floor retail/commercial space, housing WBGO's headquarters and studios, the redesign of Chambers Plaza (completed in 2025), and an extension of Mulberry Street. Construction is underway, with completion expected in summer 2027. NJPAC also currently leases **Military Park Garage**, an 1,100-space parking garage underneath Military Park. The Garage serves as the primary parking place for all NJPAC activities and many others in the neighborhood.

The **Cooperman Family Arts Education and Community Center** will be a three-story, 58,000 square foot building featuring a dozen classrooms, a 169-seat Arts Education Lab with a walkable tension wire grid for technical theater training, breakout rooms, a Children's Arts Reading Room, a student lounge, office space for NJPAC Social Impact staff, and an entire floor of professional-grade rehearsal studios. The lobby will feature a grand staircase, community-informed environmental graphics, and a skylight open to the third floor. Construction is underway, with opening expected in the first quarter of 2027. An annex at the existing five-story building at **31 Mulberry Street** will serve as additional administrative space for NJPAC staff.

The Cooperman Center will primarily be home to NJPAC's on-campus Social Impact programs – Arts Education, Community Engagement and Arts & Well-Being. Ranging from semester and summer-long arts training programs for young artists in jazz, hip hop, theater, musical theater, band and poetry, to professional development for educators, to film screenings, lectures, panel discussions, workshops, performances, heritage celebrations, convenings and so much more, NJPAC's Social Impact programs serve everyone from young artists, to educators, healthcare practitioners, emerging artists, community members of all ages from babies to older adults, new and expecting mothers, formerly incarcerated individuals, families, teaching artists and more. The Cooperman Center will also be a home for artists and other community groups to host events, performances, classes and initiatives. The third floor of the Cooperman Center will be a suite of professional, commercial rehearsal studios for artists and companies to create and rehearse new work. Studios will be made available and accessible to non-profits and local artists through a space grants program.

about the request for proposals

Artists based within NJPAC's core audience zones—New Jersey and New York—are invited to apply to this series of new public art opportunities across the campus. Exterior sites include the NJPAC East Facade, the ArtSide Underpass, ArtSide Retail Windows, the Military Park Parking Garage with three levels of escalator murals, and the Mulberry Street-facing facade at 31 Mulberry Street. Additionally, six interior locations within the Cooperman Family Arts Education and Community Center will provide opportunities for artists to activate and enliven public gathering spaces. Project briefs for each site can be found at njpac.org/publicart.

This program was developed in partnership with **Project for Empty Space** and **WeShouldDoltAll**, a creative agency contributing to the design of the Cooperman Center. The Request for Proposals is available through Project for Empty Space's Submittable platform. A community information session will be held on December 11, 2025, at 3:00 PM on Zoom, and applications are due by **January 19, 2026 at midnight**. Selected works are scheduled for installation during the summer of 2026 and winter of 2027.

eligibility

This public art commission is open to individual artists and artist collectives based in **New Jersey or New York**. Individual artists must be at least 18 years old, and collectives must designate a lead artist or representative. Selected applicants are required to comply with all federal, state, and local laws, including permitting and contractual obligations. Employees of the commissioning agency and members of the selection panel, along with their immediate family, are ineligible to apply.

To demonstrate eligibility, applicants must provide evidence of residency or active artistic practice in New Jersey or New York. Acceptable documentation may include:

- An active home or studio lease
- A current utility bill
- A current letter of employment
- A letter of reference from an arts organization, gallery, or community arts program confirming the applicant's artistic practice in NJ or NY

All applicants must demonstrate the capacity to execute a project of this scale within the designated timeline and budget. The commissioning entity reserves the right to verify eligibility at any stage of the selection process.

NJPAC identified several core themes through community meetings, roundtables, and surveys, reflecting both widely shared and unique perspectives. Applicants are encouraged to engage with these themes or introduce new stories inspired by their own experiences to expand and deepen narratives that empower our community's public spaces.

evolution of cultural life

Newark's culture stretches from the Lenni Lenape, the city's first inhabitants, to generations of African American and immigrant communities, including Irish, German, Portuguese, Jewish, Italian and Latinx residents. Each group has left its mark on the city's streets, institutions, and celebrations. Lesser-known histories, such as German businesses along Broad Street, Newark's Chinatown along Mulberry Street, Theatre Row, Jazz clubs, or early African American enterprises near NJPAC, highlight how communities shaped Newark's economy and culture. Neighborhoods keep these traditions alive through food, music, festivals, and family stories. Artists and community projects also preserve local stories and amplify new perspectives, ensuring that Newark's traditions continue to thrive.

Consider artworks that depict unlocking the future while embracing the past. Those that celebrate the cultural renaissance happening in Newark today, with an eye towards the future, while preserving the culture and history that make Newark, and our surrounding region, legendary.

Key words / themes: cultural hub; global city; lost histories; renaissance; legacy; paying homage; new directions; heritage; tradition; local stories with national and global impact; preservation; family; layered; warm; authentic; claim and reclaim; storied places

evolution of music & sound

Newark's rich sonic history spans centuries – from church choirs, to classical, to influential jazz, to hip hop, Jersey club, R&B, fado, funk, house and poetry and spoken word. The city has given rise to musical legends whose influence continues to resonate today, while nurturing new generations of local artists and youth arts initiatives that preserve these traditions. Whether selling out NJPAC or performing in a community park, artists with Newark roots and connections have shaped a layered sonic identity, connecting historical practices to broader cultural and civic expression.

Consider artworks (not the production of sound itself) that will activate NJPAC's public and interior spaces that represent sound in all of its forms and bring the music from community settings, home studios, and inside NJPAC's concert halls and classrooms, to the public realm.

Key words/themes: jazz; hip hop; world music; R&B; American Song; spoken word; fado; poetry; funk; classical; salsa; house; speeches; gospel; declarations; conversation; laughs; pioneers; literature; tranquility; storytelling; memoir; contemporary; performance; roots; the "greats"; rhythm

evolution of resilience

Newark's resilience is reflected in the activism and leadership of local figures, grassroots organizers, and civil rights activists. Community organizations and networks of anchor institutions large and small supported rebuilding efforts. Institutions and community spaces act as convening spaces for dialogue, conversation, organizing and healing. Newark's nickname "Brick City" can symbolize strength, solidness, overcoming and resilience. There are often histories hidden beneath the city's streets that connect past and present struggles and opportunities, including the African Burial Ground where NJPAC now stands.

Consider artworks that tell the story of a city, people, a region, institutions and communities that are grounded, steadfast, and resilient yet ever evolving.

Key words/themes: sustainability; resiliency; healing; well-being; strength; solid; foundation; building; civil rights; rebellion; social cohesion; community organizing; lift every voice; peace; overcoming; inclusive; believers; powerful; unafraid; activism; truth; agency; civic engagement; endurance; spirited; pivotal; resistance; renewal; building; inclusive; fierce; social justice; persistence

evolution of innovation

Innovation has shaped Newark across generations, from industrial and engineering achievements to musical experimentation and artistic breakthroughs. NJPAC's stages have hosted genre-bending collaborations with jazz and spoken word artists, classical Indian, rock and bluegrass artists, tap and ballet dancers. NJPAC's Arts Education young artists are encouraged to find their voices, collaborate and innovate across genres. Local inventors, composers, and experimental performers continue to contribute to evolving forms of creativity, reflecting a city blending practical problem-solving with artistic exploration.

Consider experimental mediums (light, video, three-dimensional) as well as typical ones to represent the innovators and innovations across genres, industries and spaces.

Key themes/references: education; advancements; technology; ingenuity; experimental; experimentation; modern; new rhythms; presentation; non-traditional; multimedia; graffiti; sculpture; installation; interactive; expression; immersive; informal; collaboration; exchange; D.I.Y.; spontaneity; unabashed; unsanctioned

evolution of possibility

The NJPAC site is already a place where stories of arrival, resilience, and creative transformation converge, and the new campus will only expand those storytelling opportunities. NJPAC's stages, classrooms and public spaces serve as a blank canvas for creatives, hopefuls and neighbors to amplify their ideas. These narratives honor while imagining futures filled with empowerment, development, creativity, and collective imagination. Newark becomes a living, transformative landscape where culture, performance, and civic life continuously shape what the city can become, inviting young people, older adults, visitors, audiences, residents and artists alike to envision and enact a more equitable future.

Consider artworks that allow visitors of all ages to see their own reflections, ideas and hopes within the colors, shapes, images, words and collage.

Key words/themes: education; self-progression; blank canvas; process and practice (v. precision and perfection); take risks; build confidence; playfulness; youth; development; citizen artists; reflection; finding your voice; imagining the future; transformation; transformational; collective imagination; participatory; historical memory; equity; joy; joyful; vibrant; energetic; expansive; futuristic; nurturing; welcoming; home; reflective; inspiring; transparent

Note: Submitted proposals should not include realistic renderings or likenesses of notable living public figures. Artists are encouraged to approach concepts using their distinct visual language, symbolism, abstraction, layered narratives, or other conceptual methods.

reading room frieze mural - fl 1

Cooperman Family Arts Education and Community Center
Newark, NJ

This mural will be painted on wood above a bookshelf inside the Cooperman Center's children's arts reading room. The reading room is located on street level and visible from Center Street. The room will be filled with books about art and artists that invite the youngest readers – ages 0 - 3rd grade - and their families, educators and caregivers together to nurture a love of reading. This will be a public space for both drop-in visitors and regularly scheduled readings, school visits, early childhood music classes and more. The artwork will be created on a wood veneer surface, with sections intentionally left unpainted to reveal the natural wood grain.

application: painted mural

display dimensions: 41'3" w x 4' h

exhibition duration: 10 - 15 years with option to extend

project timeline: summer - fall 2026

compensation: \$15,000

Budget Note: This amount reflects the artist honorarium. All costs related to materials, production, and installation are allocated separately.

nearby finishes:



walls: maple veneer on appleply wood panel



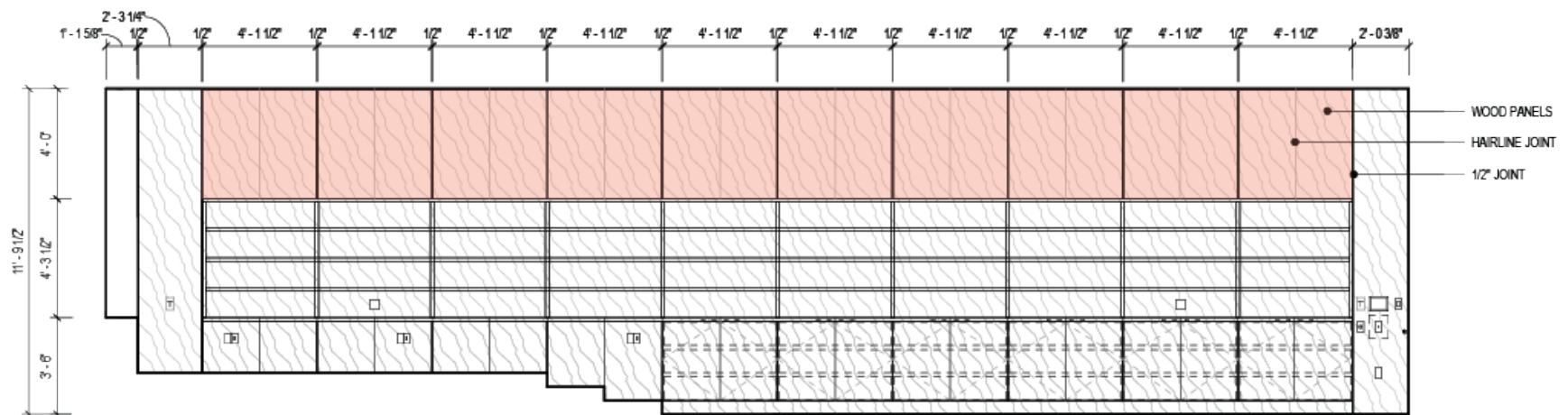
floor: dark grey polished concrete

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site images:



elevation & dimensions:



insert artwork here:

