

Newark Arts Celebrates a City Thriving Through Creativity and Culture

NEWARK , NEW JERSEY, UNITED STATES,
July 3, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ --

Newark Arts hosted its highly anticipated Annual Meeting and State of the Arts address at its ArtSpace gallery located at Vermella Broad Street, drawing together artists, cultural leaders, and community visionaries to celebrate Newark's flourishing creative sector. The evening was a powerful affirmation that the arts are not just surviving, but thriving, in New Jersey's largest city.



ArtStart grantees, Newark Arts staff, and City of Newark dignitaries. Photo Credit: AWillToShoot

The evening, powered by the creative energy of this year's Newark Arts Festival 2025 theme —JOY — opened with a powerful performance by Euphony and was hosted by Newark Arts' Board President, Marcy DePina. In an atmosphere charged with possibility, as Newark Arts unveiled a transformative vision to propel Newark forward as a national model for arts-driven community building and cultural innovation, advancing Mayor Ras J. Baraka's bold commitment to firmly establishing Newark as a City of the Arts.

Director of Arts and Cultural Affairs for the City of Newark, fayemi shakur, offered opening remarks, reaffirming the city's commitment to supporting the arts. "Newark Arts has been a vital advocate for our creative community since 1981," said shakur. "What we're seeing now is a cultural movement that's inspiring cities across the country."

The highlight of the evening was the State of the Arts Address delivered by Newark Arts Executive Director Lauren LeBeaux Craig, who electrified the room with her passionate vision: "In Newark, the arts are not an accessory to development—they are the blueprint," Craig declared. "We're not just uplifting artists—we're advocating for them, funding them, and building futures with them."

Craig spotlighted ongoing and upcoming projects that are reshaping Newark's cultural landscape—from the revitalization of Newark Symphony Hall and NJPAC's Cooperman Center to the emerging Newark Grounds corridor and Newark Museum of Art transformations. She also emphasized the critical role of Newark Arts' initiatives such as ArtStart, ArtSource, ArtSpace, and the Newark Arts Festival, which continue to invest in local talent and strengthen Newark's reputation as a hub of artistic innovation.

This year's meeting also formally announced the 2025-2026 cohort of ArtStart Grantees — a distinguished group of creative entrepreneurs whose projects will contribute to the cultural and civic life of Newark's neighborhoods. Through this long-standing initiative, Newark Arts has awarded more than \$1 million in grants to Newark-based artists, affirming its commitment to advancing artistic excellence and community enrichment across the city.

This year's ArtStart Grantees reflect Newark's bold, creative spirit, with projects that span visual arts, public art, music, film, and intergenerational engagement:

* Abigail Alabre | The Art Walk, Love
The Art Walk, Love: Fresh Canvas

* Aleta J Bess | Just Say It Inc.
Just Say It

* Alia Berry | The Village Revival Project
Villagers United Workshop

* Heather Davis | ProjectArt Newark
ProjectArt Newark

* Hellane Freeman
BrickCityStories Murals: Art & the Griot

* Janice Alderman | United Parks as One
National Night Out

* Jee-Hoon Krska | Keys 2 Success
Intergenerational Harmony

* Karen Gonon | GlassRoots
Garden of Hope Mosaic Mural

* Khaatim Sherrer El | Clinton Hill Community Action
Home Made - Reimagine Your Space: Upcycling Art Program

* Matt Gosser | Halsey Arts Collaborations
Generational Influences

* Matt Williams | IM SO NEWARK INC.
Short Film Festival

* Maybelle Lincoln | Pathways to Trust
Re-Imagining Pain Through Art

* Noelle Lorraine Williams
Liberation Music and Words: 250 Years of Declarations of Freedom

* Rashia “Rah Digga” Fisher | Lyrics Matter Foundation
Lyrics Matter Foundation’s “Hip Hop S.T.E.A.M. Team”

* Rashidah Nelson
I Got a Story to Tell: Release and Discover through image, sound and movement

* Sharon Salvador | Newark School of the Arts
Golden Cradle: Creative Aging in the Arts

* Sukripa Shah | Mighty Writers Newark
Mighty Writers Newark After-School Visual Art Program

“With the support of ART START and Newark Arts, the program was able to conduct its first in-person sessions since pre-COVID; find a home at West Side High School in my native ward; and produce a final mixtape project, which will debut—along with a live performance—at the 20th annual Lincoln Park Music Festival,” said ArtStart grantee and CEO/Co-founder of Lyrics Matter Foundation, Rashia “Rah Digga” Fisher-Weeks, “This kind of funding not only helps sustain operations but also deepens community impact, providing underserved youth with access to quality arts education and creative outlets.”

With the support of city leaders, institutional partners, and programs like the NJEDA’s CAFE tax credit, Newark is positioned to become a national model for what an artist-forward city can look like—where creativity drives community development, economic growth, and civic pride.

“The State of the Arts in Newark is strong, and only getting stronger,” Craig said. “We don’t focus on what’s missing. We measure success by what we’re building, together.” As the evening concluded with networking, music, and celebration, one message rang clear: Newark isn’t waiting to be seen—it’s making itself unmistakably visible through the arts.

About Newark Arts Founded in 1981, Newark Arts is a nonprofit organization committed to powering the arts to transform lives. Through programs like ArtStart, ArtSource, the Newark Arts Festival, and its ArtSpace gallery, Newark Arts champions local artists, fuels cultural equity, and ensures the arts remain central to Newark's identity and future. To learn more or get involved, visit: www.newarkarts

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