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Development

\$100K in Grants Awarded to Artists at State of the Arts Address

By REBECCA PANICO

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NEWARK, NJ - With the help of an ArtStart grant, Celeste Bateman and Gary Campbell will be able to put together a film about Newark artists who have died in recent years.

The documentary will focus on several artists and cultural icons, including [Jerry Gant](#), the late Clement Price and the late Brea "BikBry Molassez" Knight, a poet who died about three years ago. For Bateman, an arts management consultant, the film will help younger artists and newcomers remember their contributions to the city.

"There are a whole other type of people who are coming into the city with all this economic development who absolutely have no clue of who they are," Bateman said. "Some of them are coming into town - not to be negative - but they're rewriting our cultural history."

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The film will be titled, "Gone Too Soon: The Life, Legacy and Loss of Newark's Cultural Icons." Campbell, who works for the city's television station, said the documentary is all about creating institutional memory about artists from the immediate past.

"There's no documentation on them," Campbell said after receiving the grant on Tuesday at Express Newark. "We need to have movies, films, pieces done on them so we have some historical data on them that other people can tap into."

Bateman and Campbell were [one of 15 individuals or groups](#) to receive a cut of \$50,000 in grants from Newark nonprofit that works to expand resources for cultural groups. Another \$50,000 in partner grants were awarded other groups. The grants are funded in part by sponsors like Prudential, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and Jersey State Council on the Arts.

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The ceremony awarding the grants last night was also where Newark Arts Executive Director Jeremy Johnson gave his annual state of the arts address.

'WE ARE AT A CROSSROADS'

While Bateman and Campbell are focused on preserving history, Newark Arts Executive Director Jeremy Johnson's speech reflected on the past, present and future of the arts in New Jersey's most populated city.

MORE: [Newark art scene in flux as redevelopment changes city landscape](#)

That future has been paved with what elected officials say are billions of dollars in new development coming into the city, Johnson said.



"For artists and for creatives that have been part of Newark's long artistic past, will this ongoing march of development bring new opportunities or will artists and artists' spaces become more endangered?" Johnson said. "Well, my answer is this: Newark's arts community is strong."

Several art galleries face serious challenges today, like Aljira and [Index Arts Center](#). City Without Walls has shuttered too.

He called on artists to advocate for more funding from lawmakers. The [New Jersey State Council of the Arts](#) - a large funder of arts in the state - has been struggling with a flat budget for about the past decade, Johnson said.

But the arts community generates jobs and tax dollars for the city. It also helps to change the city's image: it's a sector that is often pitched to outsiders. (United Airlines' [magazine](#) featured Newark's art community back in March.)

"If the arts are good enough to promote our great city, then the arts are good enough to be invested in," he said.

This is how artists are gaining more support.

For the last 18 months, Newark Arts and other community groups have been creating a cultural plan to make Newark a "city of the arts." The plan, known as [Newark Creates](#), was recommended in Mayor Ras Baraka's 2014 [transition report](#).

MORE: [Ideas on Newark's Arts Spaces Flourish at Community Forum](#)

The plan focuses on funding, space and coordination. It called for enforcement of [inclusionary zoning](#), greater coordination of shared services like co-located art spaces, and a minimum of \$5 million in funding to address the needs of small and medium-sized arts organizations

An artists advisory council was created by Newark Arts in the past year too. It's composed of art professionals from near and far that work on initiatives, outreach and grantmaking.

Several pop-up art exhibits have been proposed for vacant retail spaces in the city's downtown too, Johnson said. Those areas developments like One Theater Square, Eleven80, Walker House, and the Hahne & Co. building.

The city has also [allocated \\$200,000](#) to seed the coordination of cultural groups and infrastructure in the Lincoln Park area.

"We are at a crossroads. It's an amazing crossroads, I feel," Johnson said. "The reason it's amazing is because we still feel and see the past but in a way, you can feel the future bearing down upon us. You really do."

Newark Arts is also [seeking participants](#) in its arts festival during October. The application deadline is July 1.

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