

For Immediate Release

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**Public Art Initiative “Windows of Understanding”
Returns on MLK Day with Expanded Reach and Youth
Engagement
*January 15 – March 31, 2024***

New Brunswick, N.J. (January 10, 2024) - The New Brunswick Community Arts Council, Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, Highland Park Arts Commission, Metuchen Arts Council, South Plainfield Cultural Arts Commission, and ASquared in Rahway, announce the seventh annual “Windows of Understanding” season, running January 15 through March 31, 2024, in various communities throughout Middlesex and introducing Union County. Building a healthy community is the center of this year’s initiative that unites local artists, organizations, and businesses to promote awareness and engagement around social justice issues impacting local communities. All events are free and open to the public.

Taking place in New Brunswick, Highland Park, Metuchen, South Plainfield, and Rahway, Windows of Understanding (WOU) is a creative, community-building response to the negativity and hate perpetuated in today’s media landscape. Through visual language, artists communicate methods of understanding today’s most pressing social issues in powerful ways that cut across cultural boundaries.

“Windows of Understanding illuminates the path towards a brighter future, where our youth actively engage in shaping a sustainable world and foster understanding,” said **New Brunswick Mayor Jim Cahill**. “This event not only showcases creativity, but also inspires positive change. Together, let us open these windows to a world where art becomes a catalyst for transformation and a beacon of hope for generations to come.”

This season, 20 social justice missioned non-profit organizations have paired with an artist-facilitator to illuminate positive strides and resources in local communities. The works will be on display in storefronts and public spaces in participating cities from January 15 through March 31, 2024. This year’s Windows of Understanding highlights the following topics: **youth engagement, climate change, food equity, human rights, and violence prevention**.

For the third year in a row, the Windows of Understanding team is proud to partner with the New Brunswick Public Schools to present a “**Day of Understanding**” in schools across the district this spring. Day of Understanding brings this collaborative project directly into the schools, further activating the student art selections displayed in a public storefront. Day of Understanding offers the opportunity for all students, K-12, to participate in creatively synthesizing this year’s topics being discussed with their teachers, transforming classrooms and hallways of each school into galleries of their artwork for their peers and parents to view.

The day's program will also give the opportunity to several of the Windows of Understanding partnering organizations to engage with participating students and receive feedback regarding their challenges and imagining possible solutions together around these topics that have a direct impact on their community.

Retrospectives of student artwork from past Windows of Understanding Exhibitions will be on display in satellite exhibitions in New Brunswick and across Middlesex County, including the American Hungarian Foundation (New Brunswick), New Jersey Mexican Consulate (New Brunswick), Woodbridge Library (Woodbridge), and Berkshire Hathaway Home Services (Metuchen). These Exhibitions will debut in February and run through the culmination of the project.

"It's important to note that art is a universal language that evokes thoughts, ideas, and meaning to the eye of the beholder," said **Dr. Aubrey A. Johnson, Superintendent of Schools for New Brunswick Public Schools**. "We are proud of this partnership with Windows of Understanding, which provides our students a framework to develop a critical consciousness, understand the world as they see fit and take action around social injustices."

Windows of Understanding has also served to expand collaborative opportunities within the Rutgers University community. "Windows of Understanding embodies the commitment to community that we at Mason Gross believe is a key aspect of the arts and that we hope to instill in all of our students," said **Mason Gross School of the Arts Dean Jason Geary**.

Joining the Windows of Understanding project this year as a co-presenter is ASquared in Rahway. ASquared, a collaborative consisting of Amy Garcia Phillips and Ann Marie Williams, residents of Rahway, believed WOU would be an ideal initiative to bring to their hometown. This Windows of Understanding Rahway debut will feature an original artwork illustrating the mission of the Iris House, a nonprofit organization which began by providing support to women with HIV/AIDS.

The project launches on Monday, January 15, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, as a way of paying homage to Dr. King's legacy. Free programming such as panel discussions, educational workshops, community conversations, and wellness sessions around social justice themes will complement the window displays throughout the run.

"It is truly inspiring what a group of passionate, socially conscious artists can accomplish. Highland Park is blessed with a group of talented and creative people, who bring attention to important causes in eye-catching art works," said **Highland Park Mayor Elsie Foster**. "The exhibits of Windows of Understanding highlight our collective humanity and inspire us to improve our community. We are delighted to see our Highland Park artists participating in this wonderful initiative."

"Using art to draw attention to solutions to social and environmental problems on a local level leads to discussion, civic involvement and progress. Here in Metuchen, we have welcomed that process year after year through the Windows of Understanding," said **Metuchen Mayor Jonathan Busch**.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS: The Caritas Program; Middlesex County Center for Empowerment; New Brunswick Police Department; Elijah's Promise; Highland Park

Community Food Pantry; Highland Park Gives a Hoot; Interfaith Rise; Iris House; Kids In Need of Defense (KIND); Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership; Meals on Wheels in Greater New Brunswick; Metuchen Environmental Commission; Moms Demand Action; New Brunswick Tomorrow; Peter Barnes Wildlife Preservation Commission; REPLENISH; Rutgers Climate and Energy Institute; South Plainfield Green Team; Vulcan Pioneers of New Brunswick (New Brunswick Fire Department); and Women Aware.

Support for Windows of Understanding 2024 has been provided by The New Brunswick Cultural Center; The Arts Institute of Middlesex County; New Brunswick City Center; Berkshire Hathaway Home Services -Fox & Roach Realtors; Hoboken Farms; Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts; Highland Park Arts Commission; the Metuchen Arts Council; The Rahway Chamber of Commerce; and the South Plainfield Cultural Arts Commission.

Windows of Understanding is grateful for the exemplary support of the Arts Institute of Middlesex County and Rutgers University Office of Community Affairs. Special thanks to the following entities for graciously hosting 2024 art installations: New Brunswick Performing Arts Center (NBPAC), The Heldrich Hotel & Conference Center, New Brunswick Farmers Market, New Brunswick Parking Authority, Harvest Moon, Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce, New Brunswick City Center, Rite Aid of Highland Park, Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, Merle Norman, and The Coffee Box.

This year's Windows of Understanding program partners include Civic League of Greater New Brunswick, New Brunswick Free Public Library, New Brunswick Public Schools, Rutgers Collaborative Center for Community Engagement, and the Zimmerli Art Museum.

For more information on Windows of Understanding, including a complete list of featured organizations, participating storefronts, and a full calendar of free events, please visit www.windowsofunderstanding.org. On Instagram at [@windowsofunderstanding](https://www.instagram.com/windowsofunderstanding)

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About the New Brunswick Community Arts Council

Comprised of leaders from across the Arts sector appointed by the Mayor to serve three-year terms, the New Brunswick Community Arts Council exists to promote a diverse range of Art and Culture throughout the city. "Windows of Understanding" complements the council's existing programs such as the New Brunswick Holiday Market.

About Mason Gross School of the Arts

Mason Gross School of the Arts is a vibrant community of artists and scholars committed to pursuing excellence, innovation, and inclusivity. Its mission is to create socially relevant art, foster diverse programming and curricula, cultivate community partnerships, and advance the arts through teaching, creative activity, advocacy, and research that contributes to the public good. Comprising 1,200 undergraduate and graduate students across programs in music, theater, dance, filmmaking, and art & design, Mason Gross is housed within Rutgers–New Brunswick, a premier Big Ten research university that

serves some 50,000 students and is the flagship campus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

About the Highland Park Arts Commission

The purpose of the Arts Commission is to support and facilitate cultural programs in Highland Park for the benefit of its residents. Such programs may include, but are not limited to, dance, theatre, music, visual arts, poetry, spoken word, culinary arts, fashion design, paper arts, woodworking, and interdisciplinary art forms. Of particular interest to the Arts Commission is both the inclusion of diverse cultural programming and the training of students (of any age) in these art forms.

About the Metuchen Arts Council

The Metuchen Arts Council was established in 1967 to advocate and promote culturally enriching programs which foster an appreciation for the arts in the community. The Metuchen Arts Council accomplishes its mission by sponsoring exciting, innovative, and entertaining programs in all arts disciplines; supporting local artists and arts organizations through grants, sponsorships, and networking opportunities; working with others to create a welcoming community to attract artists and audiences of all ages, backgrounds and cultures; and by being an advocate for arts education at all levels.

About South Plainfield Cultural Arts Commission

The South Plainfield Cultural Arts Commission was founded to promote a variety of cultural arts programs to the residents of South Plainfield.

About ASquared

Ann Marie Williams and Amy Garcia Phillips, former Directors of Rahway, NJ's Special Improvement District (the Rahway Arts and Business Partnership) worked hard to improve the community and economic development of Rahway using arts as the catalyst. Still passionate about connecting, creating, and helping in any way they can, they created ASquared. Together, they find opportunities to bring positive experiences to communities.