



**MEDIA ALERT**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs  
Awarded \$250,000 Our Town Grant  
from the National Endowment for the Arts  
for Design of  
Watts Historic Train Station Visitors Center and Artist Pathways**

**Project is One Out of 51 Grants Nationwide  
Selected to Support Creative Placemaking**

The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) announced today that it will receive an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), one of only 51 grants awarded nationwide. DCA will receive a \$250,000 award, the largest grant amount available, to support the design of the Watts Historic Train Station Visitors Center and Artist Pathways. Principal partners are the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) and the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC), as well as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), which is already providing preservation services for the Watts Towers.

Our Town is the NEA's new leadership initiative focused on creative placemaking projects. In creative placemaking, partners from both public and private sectors come together to strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities.

National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Rocco Landesman said, "Communities across our country are using smart design and leveraging the arts to enhance quality of life and promote their distinctive identities. In this time of great economic upheaval, Our Town provides communities an opportunity to reignite their economies."

NEA funding will be part of a larger placemaking initiative in Watts that will include urban greening, streetscape enhancements, and cultural and artistic renewal. The NEA funding is being matched with over \$2,500,000 from project partners for design and construction of streetscape and environmental enhancements along 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and in areas adjacent to the active 103<sup>rd</sup> Street Metro Rail station. Funders include the City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Bureau of Street Services, which will implement improvements in the Watts community with Transportation Enhancement Funds provided by Metro, as well as the State of California Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) through



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the Harbor Watts Economic Development Corporation, for a total of over \$2,750,000 in funds benefiting the Watts community.

“As Mayor of Los Angeles, I am committed to environmentally sustainable, transit-oriented development and forward looking urban design,” Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said. “This generous award will allow us to utilize the arts to improve livability, promote tourism, and increase economic opportunities in the Watts Community. This community and its cultural legacy is essential to the fabric of our great city.”

Our Town will expand the scope of Watts revitalization efforts, and be part of the Watts Cultural Crescent – a community-driven plan to rebuild 10 acres surrounding the Watts Towers through cultural enhancements. Taken as a whole, the Visitors Center and Artist Pathways project, along with connecting area improvements, will use the arts, public transit, and environmental sustainability strategies to improve livability and quality of life for residents and visitors, promote cultural tourism, and increase economic opportunities.

Councilmember Janice Hahn, whose district includes Watts, said, “I am heartened that such a broad-based consortium of public and private entities have come together for the NEA’s visionary Our Town initiative. The Watts Historic Train Station Visitors Center and Artist Pathways will celebrate our community’s cultural and historic legacy, and provide greater accessibility to the Watts Towers, a Los Angeles Landmark and national treasure. The partnership between the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, LACMA, and the Watts Labor Community Action Committee created for this project is truly innovative, and will serve to preserve community heritage and improve quality of life for both residents and visitors.”

The Watts Historic Train Station Visitors Center and Artist Pathways project will result in design plans for an exhibition space and transit-oriented point of entry to Watts. As envisioned, the Visitors Center would convert a 1904 train station, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, into a LEED certified exhibition space celebrating the arts and historic significance of the Watts Community.

The Artist Pathways would incorporate the work of environmental artists to create a “green” walkway, linking the Visitor’s Center with the nearby Watts Towers, also a National Register Historic Listed site, as well as the nearby Martin Luther King, Jr. shopping center. The pathways would also connect the Visitors Center to the Wattstar Theater and Education Center, a \$25 million public/private movie complex and education center, which will be used to train local youth in film, video, web, and music production. A public park adjoining the theater is planned to increase green space and be part of the overall design.



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The historic train station is the starting point for the story of Watts, when in 1902, the Watts family donated its ranch to the Pacific Electric Railroad to spur economic development for its ranch, Rancho La Tajuata. The Watts community developed around this train station and was annexed to the City of Los Angeles in 1926. The Watts area began as a rural community, both divided and united by Pacific Electric rail and the Los Angeles River waterways.

Watts symbolizes a rich national history, including the Restoration Era, Civil Rights movement, Farm Workers movement, and Pullman Porters legacy. After the Watts rebellion in 1965, the historic train station was the only structure that remained intact along 103rd street; it is a symbol of continuity and renewal. The Watts station also tells the broader story of America’s westward expansion and the evolution from an agrarian society dominated by individual landholders, to an industrialized nation made up of diverse communities.

The Watts community has had an immeasurable impact on the arts. Using broken glass, bottle caps, and other found objects picked up along the train station (the same one being developed for this project), Simon Rodia, an Italian immigrant, built what he called “Nuestro Pueblo” or “Our Town” over the course of 34 years (1921-1954). Rodia, without benefit of machine equipment, scaffolding, or bolts, built the Watts Towers, a national treasure that stands as a monument to community, immigration, and the human spirit.

In the visual arts, Watts is identified with assemblage and outsider art, nurturing groundbreaking artists such as Betye Saar, Noah Purifoy, and John Outterbridge. The impact of jazz musicians identified with Watts such as Charles Mingus, Buddy Collette, and Patrice Rushen is also notable. The DCA operated Watts Towers Arts Center and the Charles Mingus Youth Arts Center continue this legacy as exemplified by the Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival and the Watts Towers Day of the Drum Festivals.

A strong consortium of the following public, nonprofit, and community partners has come together for this project:

**Public Partners**

Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA, Principal); Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA); City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Bureau of Street Services (BSS); City of Los Angeles Planning Department; and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro).

**Nonprofit Partners**

Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); American Institute of Architects and National



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Organization of Minority Architects (AIA/LA and NOMA); Harbor Watts Economic Development Corporation; and the Arts: Earth Partnership (AEP).

**Community Partners**

Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts; Friends of Watts Towers Arts Center; Watts Towers Community Action Council; and the Watts Century Latino Organization.

The Los Angeles County Arts Commission was also awarded a \$100,000 Our Town grant toward artistic and cultural development in the adjacent neighborhood of Willowbrook. DCA and the County Arts Commission will work together to capitalize on the significant cultural investment being made in the South Los Angeles area.

**About the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)**

Congress established the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. Visit [arts.gov](http://arts.gov).

**About the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA)**

The Department of Cultural Affairs generates and supports high-quality arts and cultural experiences for Los Angeles's 4 million residents and 25 million annual visitors. DCA advances the social and economic impact of the arts and assures access to arts and cultural experiences through grant-making, marketing, public art, community arts programming, arts education, and partnerships with artists and arts and cultural organizations in neighborhoods throughout the City of Los Angeles.

DCA managed a portfolio of \$36.3 million in fiscal year 2009/10, which consisted of \$9.6 million in Transient Occupancy Tax funds; \$11.4 million in funds from the Public Works Improvements Arts Program; \$8.9 million from the Private Arts Development Fee Program; \$5.1 million in City related and indirect costs; and over \$1.3 million in private and public funds raised during the year. DCA grants approximately \$3 million annually to over 280 artists and nonprofit arts organizations through its long-established Grants Administration Division. The Department provides arts and cultural programming in its numerous neighborhood arts and cultural centers, theaters, and historic sites, and manages several arts and education programs.





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The Department also administers the City's Private Arts Development Fee and Public Works Improvements Arts Programs, a portfolio of approximately \$20.3 million in fiscal year 2009/10. In addition, the agency raises outside public and private funds, over \$14 million since 2007, used to re-grant to LA-based arts and cultural organizations for special grant initiatives and to fund DCA programs and facilities. DCA markets the City's cultural events through development and collaboration with strategic partners, design and production of creative promotional materials, and management of the [culturela.org](http://culturela.org) website, visited by over 2.7 million people annually. Visit [culturela.org](http://culturela.org).

### **About the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC)**

Watts Labor Community Action Committee is a community-based nonprofit development corporation founded in 1965, with the mission of improving the quality of life for the residents of Watts and South Los Angeles. The vision of WLCAC is to ensure an economically and culturally rich community that is peaceful, healthy, and a place where people are happy to be. WLCAC serves more than 30,000 residents in the immediate target area, and is a venerated advocate for art, culture, and community development. Visit [wlcac.org](http://wlcac.org).

Working with DCA, the Watts Labor Community Action Committee will coordinate community engagement and the visioning process.

### **About the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)**

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing Transformation project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection. Visit [lacma.org](http://lacma.org).

LACMA will lead efforts on Artists Pathways and advise on overall project design.

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