

NEWS RELEASE

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Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences

Mural by Ben Volta and Alain Locke School Students on View at NAS

WASHINGTON – Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences announces “The NAS Building Timeline & Promethean Sparks Mural,” an exhibition celebrating the centennial of the NAS Building, which opened in 1924. The exhibition is on view at the National Academy of Sciences through Dec. 31, 2024.

Inspired by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Building, which turns 100 this year, sixth-grade students at the Alain Locke School in West Philadelphia created the “Promethean Sparks” mural. The students collaborated with artist and educator Ben Volta to imagine how scientific imagery in the building’s Great Hall—from the “Prometheus” mural by Albert Herter and the golden dome by Hildreth Meière—might look if recreated in the 21st century. Their vibrant mural is exhibited alongside a timeline highlighting the accomplishments of the Academy in the context of US and world events over the past century.

Working with Mural Arts Philadelphia, students merged diverse scientific symbols to create new imagery and spark new knowledge insights. Embodying a collective exploration of scientific heritage, this project empowered the students as creators. The students’ collection of unique designs reflects a journey of experimentation, learning, and discovery. Embracing roles beyond their student identities, they engaged as artists, scientists, and innovators.

Ben Volta works at the intersection of education, restorative justice, and urban planning. He views art as a catalyst for positive change in individuals and the institutions surrounding them. After completing his studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Volta began collaborating with teachers and students in Philadelphia public schools to create participatory art that is both exploratory and educational. Over nearly two decades, he has developed this collaborative process with public schools, art organizations, and communities, receiving funding for hundreds of projects in over 50 schools. As a young artist, Volta was a member of the groundbreaking art collective Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival) in New York City.

Mural Arts Philadelphia, the nation’s largest public art program, is rooted in the belief that art ignites change. For 40 years, Mural Arts has brought together artists and communities through a collaborative process steeped in mural-making traditions, creating art that transforms public spaces and individual lives.

“The NAS Building Timeline & Promethean Sparks Mural” is on exhibit at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. The building is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays, and closed weekends and holidays. A photo ID is required. It is part of a range of programs and exhibitions the NAS has organized to celebrate the building’s centennial. For more information, visit <http://www.100nasbuilding.org/>.

Cultural Programs of the NAS sponsors exhibitions, salons, theatrical readings, and other events that explore relationships among the arts and sciences. The NAS is a private, nonprofit institution that recognizes achievement in science by election to membership, and — with the National Academy of Engineering and the National Academy of Medicine — provides science, technology, and health policy advice to the federal government and other organizations.

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Press Images



1924–2024 NAS Building Timeline & Promethean Sparks Mural (full installation, details, and process photo), 2024, installed at the National Academy of Sciences Building, Washington, D.C.

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