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The Star's editorial | Arts honor comes to KC with premiere of 'America: Now and Here'

Starting Friday, Kansas City's already thriving arts scene will see a major infusion.

The local arts community is teaming up with a national project called "America: Now and Here." While the ultimate goal is lofty — using the arts to create a new national dialogue — the immediate effect here will be a three-week run of exhibits and events that are intentionally accessible to people of all ages and interests.

Eric Fischl, a prolific New York City painter and sculptor, says he conceived of the project to combat increasing vitriol and polarization among Americans. The arts, he says, present an opportunity to engage in a shared experience.

"This is not an art show," he said. "This is about trying to find a way for us all to connect effectively."

Eventually, Fischl plans to turn "America: Now and Here" into a traveling road show, with trucks carrying galleries and performance space into the nation's nooks and crannies.

But to start, he is setting up in Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District. The launch is scheduled to coincide with the monthly "First Friday" celebration. Multimedia artist DJ Spooky will perform in the Crossroads district at dusk.

An exhibition by local and national artists will be at the Leedy-Voukos Art Center, 2012 Baltimore Ave.

The coming weeks will feature opportunities for the public to participate in movies, plays, collaborative poetry, yoga, brown bag lunch discussions, live and recorded music, and a mask-making party. For more about the project and a full calendar of events, go to kansascity.americanowandhere.org.

In a sense, the "America: Now and Here" events are an extension of what the arts community here routinely makes available to area residents. But the three-week run, with its concentration of programming and the participation of national artists, is an honor and a treat that Kansas Citians shouldn't miss out on.