A city opens its doors

FROM THE GALLERIES TO THE STREETS, NEWARK WILL SPOTLIGHT ITS ARTS SCENE THIS WEEKEND

It's happening in the parks and in the streets, in small galleries and studios, and in large buildings such as the Prudential Center and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

This weekend brings the 10th annual Open Doors Studio Tour to Newark.

This celebration of the city's downtown arts community, sponsored by the Newark Arts Council, features a gallery crawl, musical performances, parades, artists greeting visitors in their private studios and major exhibitions of work by hundreds of local and international artists.

Galleries and institutions throughout the city take part, hosting group exhibitions or special events with the goal of capturing something of the spirit of the visual arts in our city today.

This year's headline exhibition, "Call & Response," curated by Jennifer Junkermeier on the 14th floor of 570 Broad St., addresses economic disenfranchisement and African-American issues more directly than previous shows.

Works at this exhibition — such as "House," by the now Detroit-based Osman Khan, using fluorescent tube lights, aluminum pipe fighting, wire electronics and wood — put an urban focus on the financial crimes in the housing market that crippled the world economy, and illustrate the fragility of our "recovery."

A second Khan piece, consisting of an aluminum beam held in mid-air by magnets, will periodically crash to the floor throughout the exhibition.

But many other "Call & Response" artists, like Kevin Sampson, are even more explicitly political, referencing Sarah Palin, President Obama, the tea party et al., while Jon Laustsen's fake fallen column comments wryly on the fact that the exhibition is taking place in a space under construction in the middle of an urban environment.

"We wanted this show to very definitely be about Newark and what's happening in the world right now," Junkermeier says.

"One idea behind the title of the show was the call and response in churches, but it also comes from jazz — the way one musician plays a note and another responds with a note of his own. Risa Puno, for example, has created an accessory piece to every other artist's work."

It's likely that one of the standout shows will be "Personal Effects," at Gallery Aferro 73 Market St. — an exhibition drawn from the collection of photographer Eric Wolfe that focuses on street art, the irreverent (and often illegal) ephemeral art spawned by skateboarders and kids from around the world.

Works by 65 of the better-known young artists of the 21st century — including Banksy, Shepard Fairey, Kara Walker, Lorrae Simpson, Swoon and even neo-oop star Jeff Koons — will be featured.

Street art often goes on the pretensions to originality projected by fine art, and...
employs sampling and ironic parodies of corporate values to make its points. Fairey, for example, is represented by a self-portrait that shows a target on his shirt—a reference to either his frequent arrests for graffiti or the megastore, depending on your point of view.

Banksy, the British artist who was featured in the Oscar-nominated 2010 documentary “Exit Through the Gift Shop” — and whose hoodie disguise was imitated by so many of the rioters in London this fall — is represented by a stencil showing Native Americans stalking ... shopping carts.

But this gives only a taste of the wide array of art available throughout the weekend, which includes the abstract expressionism of Anthony E. Boone (in the Prudential Center) and more working studios than you probably have time to visit. Regular shuttle service among the many venues will be available all weekend long.

And as it does every year, the weekend culminates outdoors, on Sunday, with the Creation Nation Art and Peace Parade, from Lincoln Park to Washington Park, and the Washington Park Art Festival.

There's really no better way to take in Newark's particular aesthetic in one weekend than the Open Doors Studio Tour. 

Dan Bischoff: dbischoff@starledger.com

Clockwise from above: “Troll Hunters” by street art provocateur Banksy will be shown at Gallery Aferro, 73 Market St; “House” by Osman Khan will be part of the “Call & Response” show at 570 Broad St., 14th floor; “Field” by Daniel Brophy can be seen at Index Art Center, 585 Broad St.; “Jasper Cream” by Shepard Fairey will also be at Aferro; “CMY” by Kati Vilim will be at the Kedar Studio of Art, 585 Broad St.