



ART By Dwayne Butcher

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## Place-Making

UrbanArt's new director has a vision for Memphis.



Vito Acconci's *Roof Like Fluid Flung Over the Plaza*; Chris Fennell's *Steel Guitar*; Greely Myatt's *Quiltsurround*

**T**he first three months for Christina Lanzl as new executive director for the UrbanArt Commission have been busy. Since accepting the position, she has overseen the installation of two new sculptures and the dedication of another, with four additional dedications scheduled this fall.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Germany, Lanzl was taken with Memphis instantly. She's been impressed with how substantial the public art collection that UrbanArt has been able to amass in just 15 years, and she is delighted that internationally renowned artists Vito Acconci and James Carpenter have permanent installations at the Cannon Center for the Performing Arts. She is also impressed with the local representations as well, particularly Greely Myatt's *Quiltsurround* at City Hall.

A cultural planner and public-art consultant with more than 20 years experience, Lanzl is interested in place-making, thinking about communities in a holistic fashion.

"You do not simply put a sculpture in a neighborhood because you have a spot there. You need to think of the overall composition of what is surrounding the sculpture," she says. "I am developing a sense of place with cultural assets in a neighborhood context, in an urban context, and in a city context."

With this in mind, Lanzl is interested in engaging local communities even more than in the past, bringing in volunteers from these communities to be part of the design and fabrication of the objects. "Public art is for everybody," she says, "and can be accessed by people for free."

During her first week on the job, she traveled with the UrbanArt staff and the seven artists who had been selected to create murals in Memphis to Philadelphia, which has a world-renowned mural program. Lanzl led the artists on tours of various murals and organized workshops and studio visits with the artists who completed those projects.

Each of the seven Memphis murals are currently in the fabrication stage and are scheduled to be installed late spring or early summer 2013. Artists selected to create murals are: Jamond Bullock at Bethel LaBelle Community Center; TWIN (Jerry and Terry Lynn) at Halle Stadium; Beth Edwards at Willow Park; Brandon Marshall at Greenlaw Community Center; Sowgand Sheikoleslami at Gooch Park; Chad Irwin and Kyle Taylor at Pine Hill Community Center; and Jason Miller at Gaisman Community Center.

Miller, who for three months documented his participation in activities such as bingo, billiards, Zumba, basketball, and ballroom dancing, got a sense of how important the

Gaisman center is for that community. From the thousands of photographs he took during those three months, his mural is made for the very people who use the Gaisman Community Center on a daily basis.

The selection committee for the projects at UrbanArt can move at a glacial pace. The mural artists were notified of their selection in early 2011, with fabrication only beginning in the last two months. Several prominent Memphis artists who have previously created projects told me they have no intention of submitting additional proposals, stating that two years is just too long to commit to a single project. The projects that UrbanArt manages from private sponsors have a tendency to move a lot faster, as they do not require extensive committee-based processes, if any. However, the projects for Memphis' "Percent for Art" program are a different story. Each stage in the process requires a different committee, selecting, contracting, reviewing, approving, fabricating, and installing. It can be overwhelming and frustrating for the artists.

Another issue that UrbanArt has to deal with is the lack of artists who can actually make public work. There are even fewer artists teaching in Memphis-area colleges and universities who have public art experience and are able to instruct and mentor current and recent students on their proposals.

"You have to have a portfolio and you must show initiative to be selected for a project," Lanzl says. She is excited that University of Memphis painting professor Beth Edwards is one of the artists selected to create a mural. "Edwards is currently working on her first public art commission. She can now go back to her classes and share her experiences. Growing the talent, so to speak."

A perceived lack of communication with the community and the artists whom UrbanArt works with has also been a problem the last several years. (UrbanArt, in its defense, had been without an executive director for more than a year.) Lanzl understands the frustrations that artists have had in the past with the organization, and she is working hard to correct that. She began by working to increase the social media presence of the organization and increasing the frequency of email updates and calls for local and national proposals.

Lanzl is working to increase UrbanArt's presence on a national level as well. She recently enrolled UrbanArt in cultureNOW, a network of organizations working together to create a digital "national gallery" of art and architecture in the public realm. She is interested in not only bringing the rest of the world to Memphis but bringing Memphis to the rest of the world. Lanzl is making a concentrated effort to get Memphis artists to apply and be awarded projects throughout the country. So, growing the talents of artists in Memphis is essential. ■