



Dr. Christina Lanzl: Painted on the Wall - A Story of Memphis



Photo by Steve Roberts

Story by [Rachel Warren](#)
August 2014

Art communicates a story. It can convey an identity, a stance or a set of values. Usually encased in glass or distanced by a velvet rope, art is oftentimes something you plan on seeing in a museum or gallery. Since 1997, though, the UrbanArt Commission (UAC) of Memphis has been bringing art to the people, in their homes, on their street corners and into their public spaces. UAC's newest installment is worked into the very foundation of Memphis' newest public space, the Riverfront Development Corporation's Beale Street Landing.

Titled "Rollin' by the River," the 4,260 square foot design is a colorful pedestrian walkway created by Florida artist Gary Moore that weaves its way around the Beale Street Landing, stretching 570 feet from the pier along the river front park to a kinetic sculpture by artist Evan Lewis, also commissioned by UAC this last fall. Made up of blue, white, yellow and red bricks, the walkway reflects the ebb and flow of the Mississippi River as well as conceptually expanding the river as it leaps off the riverbed in brick form.

"The idea of urban art is that it is supposed to create a kind of sense of identity. It gives everybody a sense of here's Memphis, here is the best of what we can offer as a city and as a community," says Dr. Christina Lanzl, executive director of the UAC.

Lanzl says that is the exciting thing about urban art – it not only expresses to visitors the story of Memphis, but it also allows its own inhabitants to creatively tell those stories through a variety of mediums. Moreover, the UAC's installations are freely accessible and, largely, permanent. From the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library to the Broad Avenue warehouse mural, UAC is brightening the urban, and sometimes overlooked, spaces of Memphis. The nonprofit organization is really the grand conductor of Memphis' public art, gathering everyone at the table necessary to see a concept through.

“We always join up with a partner in the community. Anybody looking to create some exciting new feature is on our invitation list. We bring the expertise, the resources and the artist pool,” Lanzl explains.

With over 20 years experience as a leader in public art, Lanzl is passionate about using public art as a platform for a community to tell its story, and clear communication with the community about what they want the artist to portray is the first step to most UAC installations. Lanzl cites one of UAC’s recent projects, the Uptown Community Mural Project, as an instance of such collaboration. UAC met with members of the Uptown community at the Greenlaw Community Center, and together the group outlined five themes that they wished to be incorporated into the artists’ designs.

Furthermore, UAC worked with Habitat for Humanity and Uptown Memphis to facilitate this project. Through these talks and community alliance, there will be three murals as well as artist-designed bike racks in the Uptown community by December 2014 that will reflect the story of the neighborhood as seen by its residents. Murals will be located at Brian’s Grocery by artist Charlie Forrester, The Bakery at Uptown by artist Jonathan Hart and Roxie’s Grocery by Carl Scott. The National Ornamental Metal Museum will also be creating four bike racks for The Office@Uptown and three for street corners in the neighborhood.

Lanzl says UAC continues to portray the stories of Memphis through the generous support of the public. Take a look at their website www.urbanartcommission.org to view their extensive gallery of completed works across the Mid-South or to view their large registry of artists, which, by the way, is always looking for new talent. Most importantly, Lanzl asks that people support UAC by simply believing in urban art and the positive influence it has on our city and future generations.