

# Art funding ‘paints’ a brighter future for Memphis

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Over the years, art organizations in Memphis have made the visual arts more accessible to locals in the city. As a result of these efforts, museums and art enrichment initiatives are available, and emerging artists have a better opportunity to break into the local art scene.

Funding plays huge role in sustaining these opportunities and the process requires gathering donations and doing extensive planning on how these funds will be distributed to local artists, art enrichment programs, and public galleries. Although the process has been a yearly progression, the outcome has been encouraging with public art creating better visual landscapes in Memphis. Furthermore, art programs are now available and dreams are coming true for artists trying to promote their work.

“There are a lot of great organizations doing a lot of good things for the city. They are making the arts more visible, and that’s something that’s improving neighborhoods and getting people excited about the city itself and is a way of promoting the visual arts,” said Marina Pacini, chief curator at the Brooks Museum.

Funding organizations contribute a larger amount for the visual arts, as they are mainly geared towards collecting large amounts of money to redistribute to the art community.

ArtsMemphis is one of the biggest contributors, and over the past 10 years has raised more than \$40 million, part of which has been used to support the visual arts. The distribution process is selective, but still gives local art museums and independent artists better opportunities to promote their art.

“In our last fiscal year, we gave 160 grants to just over 60 individual artists, totaling over \$3 million,” said Lauren Boyer, a marketing manager for ArtsMemphis.

Other contributors like the Urban Arts Commission raise funds for a similar purpose and create several public art projects every year to improve the city’s landscape.

“The organization is designed through our Percent for Art program to use up to 1 percent of the city’s Community Investment Program funds for city public art. That money pays for the artists as well as the supplies needed to complete every project. Projects range from \$15,000 to \$80,000 per year, but the average cost is \$30, 000,” said Siphne Syle, funding director for the Urban Arts Commission.

Galleries like the Brooks Museum receive funding through organizations like ArtsMemphis, and also have to raise money independently to provide opportunities for artists to get involved in the community. Pacini describes this process as challenging, but is a way of giving artists a chance to get noticed.

“We have to raise a lot of money and what we can do is totally affected by how much money we raise. Without suitable resources, we can’t bring the national and international artists here that are important for the local community in order to help them,” she said.

As a result of these efforts, local artists are reaping the benefits of these initiatives and praise Memphis for the thriving art scene that has developed over time.

Terrence Mason, a studio arts major at the University of Memphis, has been able to show his artwork in several group showcases around the city, and acknowledges the opportunities available for artists.

“Memphis is a great starting point for artists because many of the places here are geared towards starting artists. Galleries are really welcoming towards people who are just now starting their career or doing a gallery show for the first time,” he said.

Another artist, Guadalupe Padilla, has benefited greatly from funding as well. This November, the international business sophomore at the University of Memphis, had the opportunity to experience her first art show at the “Mi Sur/My South” showcase at Crosstown Arts Gallery, which also receives funding from ArtsMemphis.

This experience was life-changing for Padilla, who didn’t intend to continue art after her experiences in high school.

“This was the first time my art work has ever been in an art show. In high school my work was turned down for showcases I submitted to, so being chosen for this show really surprised me,” she said.

Pacini praises the city for the outcome that has made art more accessible for locals and has made dreams a reality for so many artists like Padilla, who were turned down earlier in their efforts to be showcased.

“It’s been extraordinary watching people come in and how their lives have been changed by the experience of viewing the art or participating in the programs around it,” she said.

Padilla plans to use her experience as a gateway to more showcasing. “After participating in ‘Mi Sur,’ I want to draw again. Hopefully people will see more of my work in the future,” she said.