



Sheila Urévbú

Sheila and her husband Ephraim own and manage Art Village Gallery, an art gallery in downtown Memphis dedicated to connecting Memphis to different cultures through art. We recently sat down with Sheila to learn more about her history, what has led her to being a key cultural leader in Memphis, and how the Dixon fits in to her story.

Tell us a little bit about you. Where did you grow up? What do you do? I consider myself a Memphian although I grew up in the Mississippi Delta. My family relocated to Memphis in 1994, and after graduating from Delta State University in Cleveland, MS, I made Memphis my home. I then began a 20+ year career in human resources with various Fortune 500 companies located in the city. Fast forward to 2015, something really pivotal happened in my world... I lost my job. Prior to this occurring, I had already begun to think a bit more intentionally about building my own dream instead of someone else's. So when this seemingly devastating thing happened to me, I made the decision not to return to work in Corporate America again. Coincidentally enough, the timing of losing my job was perfect. My husband, Ephraim Urevbu, who founded Art Village Gallery, had been encouraging me for years to leave my job and take on the full-time management of the gallery versus assisting part-time, as I had been doing. The timing was impeccable and was a win - win. Being relatively new and with my enthusiasm at that time, I immediately began to outline and revive the gallery programming and determine what exhibitions and artist could fit our overall goals.

I had found my calling.

What is your main criteria when choosing artists to be featured in Art Village Gallery? Art Village Gallery's focus is highly mission based. So first and foremost the artist and their work have to be in dialogue with our mission. Our focus is primarily supporting a community of artists who've been overlooked or disadvantaged historically (i.e. women and artists from Africa and its Diaspora). I address that imbalance. Having said that, and having evolved as a curator and art collector, I do rather enjoy engaging artists who have a lot to say politically or socially through their work, and you'll see that come through in the exhibitions held at the gallery. The quality of work and how transformational the work is are also equally important. The mission of the gallery is to "inspire an appreciation for diversity and culture" and I have a tremendous amount of confidence in inserting this mission into our community. I hear time and time again from visitors, patrons, and collectors how much they appreciate and connect with the innovative exhibitions launched here.

What is your favorite thing about being a Dixon Member? I'm a connector, and so being a Dixon member provides me access to a variety of member perks and special events that allow me to meet new people. Memberships are also not one size fits all. You can choose how involved you want to be and at what level. I've had the opportunity to volunteer and to also meet the amazing staff who all give me a sense that they truly have a passion for what they do.

What do you wish more people knew about the Dixon? I truly believe there's something at the Dixon for everyone. I wish others knew that too! All one needs to do is look. For a long time I overlooked the Dixon based on an assumption that there was nothing here that would interest me. The Young at Art membership initially ushered me into Art on Fire and Art on the Rocks, which I completely connected with. Those experiences were the hook or beginning of my exploration and evolution to being curious enough to seek more hidden gems here. So I would definitely encourage everyone who's been "sleeping" on the Dixon like I was to look closer because I know they'll find something they connect with. For example, Colorcopia, a program for seniors, was perfect for me to share with my parents. Regardless of age, there is something relevant for all, and I'm pleased with the diversity of programming I continue to discover.

Why is the Dixon special to you? Anything or anyone with whom you find connection is special to you. The Dixon has made so many wonderful enhancements over the last few years that really reveal a strategic commitment to connecting with its neighborhood and surrounding community, and I'm so excited to be a part of it because these efforts are in sync with and support Art Village Gallery's overall mission as well. This type of intentional engagement is something I've certainly noticed and connect with. I can say I feel at home when I walk through the doors. It's a special place.