



COMPASSION & CREATIVITY

by Tio Aiken

South Main Artspace Lofts resident Danielle Sumler is an emerging curator and visual artist who constantly dabbles in new mediums: painting, sculpture, and various forms of installation. She also works as an outreach instructor for the Dixon Gallery and Gardens and as a teacher for Art to Grow, a free program used by schools, libraries, community centers, and other educational organizations. “We create lesson plans that relate to the exhibitions or gardens at the Dixon, and provide all materials needed for the students to complete their project. With my job, I get to visit elementary- and middle school- aged children all over the city.” Her work with children, and collaborations with educators and coworkers, are one of the many points of inspiration for her art—but the impact of her work is why she loves showing up every day. Expanding their worlds with the power of imagination, “I get to make art with them and watch their creativity blossom.”

Sumler grew up in Shelby County in a single parent household, but credits her mother for her giving spirit. “I was fortunate enough to be raised by an amazing single mother. My mom always taught me to be considerate of and look out for other people.” She describes her mother as the type of person who would bring a coffee and hash browns to the guy selling Sunday papers, “just because it’s a little cold outside.” Sumler learned through her mother’s example that small gestures can make all the difference, and in her own life has sought out ways to help others where she can, when she can.

In 2016 she co-curated her first major exhibition, Nasty Women Memphis, where 50% of proceeds were donated to the local Memphis Planned

Parenthood. The exhibition was the first time she intentionally infused a philanthropic spirit in her shows by identifying local causes where she could donate a portion the sales. The exhibition was so successful that Sumler was inspired to co-curate an exhibition, Vital Ingredients, the following year. The show featured the work of eight local artists, and 20% of sales were donated to Dorothy Day House Memphis, a homeless shelter that keeps families together. This year, Sumler was invited to host a second iteration of her 2016 exhibition, titled Nasty Women Memphis: Still Here. Still Fighting., in the ArtUp gallery in South Main Artspace Lofts. Half of the proceeds were again donated to the Memphis Planned Parenthood.

Whether it’s through inspiring the creativity in a child or raising awareness for local causes, Sumler is living her beliefs: that it is important for everyone to find ways to give back to the world around them—especially for artists. “Creativity is a powerful tool—one that artists use frequently to problem solve and think outside the box. When artists decide to help others, they usually come up with ways to do so which have an incredible impact.”

Top: Danielle photographed by Matteo Servente. Below: Works from the Nasty Women Memphis: Still Here exhibition, ArtUp gallery at South Main Artspace Lofts, 2016.

See more of Danielle’s work at daniellesumler.com or on Instagram at [@thedailysum](https://www.instagram.com/thedailysum).

