

DDN 5/3/98 3C

Look, but touch, too

► Artist Susan Hensel wants viewers to read, see and feel between the lines of her work.

By Kathy Whyde Jesse
DAYTON DAILY NEWS

It's a rare art gallery that invites viewers to touch what they see, but Susan Hensel hopes you'll wrap your hands around the work she has created.

Hensel makes books, and books are meant to be opened. And read.

These aren't books in the conventional sense, though. Some of them are made from cigar boxes, standing on their sides. Some hang on the wall. Another book stretches out, accordion-style, on the floor of Kettering's Rosewood Arts Centre Gallery.

In Hensel's clever hands, a book becomes a sculptural object.

But it's sculpture that's meant to be read. Words fill the pages between the covers and spill out onto text panels.

Some of the books are about writers: "Emily" (Dickinson) is a book shaped like a door. Open the door, and a face peers from behind a lace-curtained window. Bundles of yellowed letters and faded roses complete the effect.

The East Lansing, Mich., artist's unique creations are a natural marriage of image and text. "I've always been a writer," says Hensel, who has also always been a sculptor, ever since getting her fine arts degree from the University of Michigan.

But several years ago she noticed that pieces of paper were starting to show up in her clay.

How to go

- **WHAT:** Works by Susan Hensel and Barbara Shilo.
- **WHERE:** Rosewood Arts Centre Gallery, 2655 Olson Drive, Kettering.
- **WHEN:** Through June 26; hours are 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday; and 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday.
- **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Call 296-0294.

She had recently been widowed, and she found herself "in transition. I wrote a tremendous amount. Words showed up in my drawings, on envelopes, on ticket stubs, everywhere."

She decided to take a paper-making course. One day, she stared down into a vat of pulp and water, "and it looked to me like the Milky Way on a summer night. I grew up in a rural area, and we used to look up at the sky on summer nights. My father would take out his telescope. It was a special time." At that moment, she says, "I had a feeling that I was a part of a bigger picture. I was more than this poor, grief-soaked individual." Paper became her medium, and she has never looked back.

"All art materials have their sensual aspects to them. We fall in love with our material. That's why we became artists."

But making "do-touch" art has created a problem for her: "It's now hard for me to go into a museum or a gallery and keep my hands at my sides," she said.



Susan Hensel's literary sculpture 'Emily' was inspired by Emily Dickinson.

Hensel will lead two bookbinding workshops June 27 at Rosewood. Participants will learn Western bookbinding and Japanese bookbinding. For more information, call 296-0294.

Also currently on view at Rosewood is work by California artist Barbara Shilo Her paintings, three-dimensional assemblages and multimedia collage pieces can be seen in an adjoining gallery.

► **CONTACT** Kathy Whyde Jesse at 225-2425 or by e-mail at kathy_whyde_jesse@coxohio.com