

Artist's mind put on display

By JUSTIN D. BROWN
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Local artist Susan Hensel asks herself a lot of questions, from "What if my name wasn't Susan?" to "What if Liberate was your best friend?"

So many questions, in fact, that Hensel has put her questions — and her brain — on display in her new installation, "What if ...?" on display at The Art Apartment, 210 Abbott Road, known for its edgy and bizarre installations and exhibits.

An installation is a form of art that utilizes the space it's in and may not fit elsewhere.

"I developed a seemingly never-ending list of 'What if' questions ... from the outrageous to the absurd," said Hensel, who said she conjures up the questions on sleepy mornings.

People visiting "What If ...?" are blinded by a completely white room, light boxes, ambient music, "What if" questions, and blue surgical booties. Though not part of her brain, Hensel believes the booties are essential.



Susan Hensel, co-director of The Art Apartment, displays work in her interactive thinking environment called "What if ...?" Hensel's work, located in The Art Apartment at 210 Abbott Road, will be on display from Oct. 1 to Oct. 28.

"If you are going to walk around in my brain, you better have clean feet," Hensel said.

Hensel's questions — written all in black — create a strong contrast to the mostly white room. Hensel said the words not only create mental pictures but that some, like the Liberate question, spark different reactions.

"(Hensel's installation is) quite provocative and innovative," DeWitt artist and attorney Dan Watson said. "I was impressed by the starkness of the white (light boxes), the way the black letters made the questions

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more poignant."

The exhibit is interactive, too. People are encouraged to share their "What if" questions with Hensel by writing them down and placing them in fish bowls. The interactivity inspires its own

questions, said Randall Curry, a fan of Hensel's work.

"What if you were surrounded by art that made you think?" Curry said. Hensel said the installation is symbolic of herself, but that the brain shown is different from her

actual life, which she compares to a tornado.

"My brain is an orderly, peaceful place that just flows," Hensel said.

The installation probes into Hensel's thoughts through investigation, problem-solving and questioning, she said.

Examining Hensel's thoughts can be serene and inspiring at the same time, Curry said. "It had a Zen-like quality to it, a peacefulness — it created a thought-provoking, comfortable quietness," he said.

Hensel said the questions allow

people to come up with their own opinions instead of being told what to see in her work. Nancy McKay, co-director of The Art Apartment, said the installation has been an artistic success.

"She achieved her intentions really well," she said. "She wanted to communicate with the audience her creative process. 'What if' envelopes you and does just that."

Hensel's "What if ...?" can be seen at The Art Apartment by appointment only and is open to the public the first Sunday of every month. The next public day is Oct. 1. To set up an appointment, call Hensel at (517) 337-9370.