

# PEOPLE WE KNOW

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## A brand new start

In her 50s, artist Susan

Hensel took a leap of faith and landed in Minneapolis.

BY MATT PEIKEN  
Pioneer Press

Susan Hensel's husband had recently died, and her only child was away at college. Rather than hug the familiar — her gallery and life in Lansing, Mich. — Hensel leaped into the unknown.

"I did my research, but really it was just a feeling," Hensel says of her move seven months ago to Minneapolis. "I would love to live in Manhattan, but my work doesn't belong in Manhattan," she says. "I'm a storyteller, and that goes well in the South and Midwest, but not in the South? I don't think so."

At 54, Hensel came to Minneapolis with a sense of

urgency rarely found in local artists. She opened Susan Hensel Design, a bedroom-sized gallery on Cedar Avenue, at East 34th Street. Hensel and her poozie, Baby, live upstairs.

She opened her fall with group shows themed around politics and religion, and artists from all over the country submitted work. A solo show, "War Games," is an installation by Karl Gunter-Seymour, an Ohio artist whose her son was called to serve in Iraq. Opening reception is 7 to 10 p.m. Friday.

Conceptual art isn't favored territory for any profit-minded gallery, but Hensel wants to distinguish her place in the local visual arts scene and provide a home, however small, for artists otherwise shut out of commu-



Artist and gallery owner Susan Hensel recently moved to Minneapolis from Lansing, Mich., and opened Susan Hensel Design on Cedar Avenue at East 34th Street.

PHOTOS BY THOMAS WHISENAND, PIONEER PRESS

cial galleries. At least for Hensel, if not for the artists she exhibits, sales seem beside the point.

"If someone comes in and asks about buying something, I'll definitely try to close the deal," she says. "I find it's hard to connect with a public that defines art as something pretty you put over the couch. The (artists) contacting me could be hungry and looking to change the world with their work." Hensel uses the back half of

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will make a difference."

the lower floor as a studio for her own work, a mix of installation, multimedia, performance and book arts. New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art owns two of her pieces, she says. Hensel will dot her group shows with some of her own work, but she doesn't plan to use her gallery as a personal showcase.

As it is, most of the people who have found their way to Hensel's out-of-the-way gallery are other artists, and traffic after the opening-night recep-

tions has been slight. Hensel says she's driven by a larger sense of purpose. "One can start over in their 50s," she says. "I'm not going to go out and hold protest signs. But I do my art — that's my little grass roots. I have no illusions of world peace in my lifetime. But in 10 lifetimes, this art will make a difference."

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Hensel explains the concept of one of her works to John Vasilion when he stopped in earlier this month to look around.

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