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Susan Hensel

Art activist

by Lisa Radunz Strohkirch

With a mission to communicate, change and share, Susan Hensel opened her Minneapolis gallery on Cedar Avenue to bring story making into narrative art. “I wanted to open a gallery where art, story and activism would dominate,” she said. Beginning with a call for art that focused on change, asking artists what they wanted to change, she presented the first show on the intersection of faith and politics.

At each show, Hensel sees how art transforms the audience experience when they approach her with their reactions. “Humans are a story-making species who will always seek, find or provide a story for any experience,” she said. “People come to my gallery because they know they will be challenged and they will learn something. How we tell our stories is how we share our lives.” In short: Communicate using art, change the audience and share stories.

For those who can’t go to the gallery, the exhibits are featured on the website. Viewers from all over the country subscribe to Hensel’s email notices and see the work online through images and video. “I spoke with a teacher in Maryland that printed images to show his class,” she said.

The 324-square-foot gallery is fully scheduled for the next two years, presenting five to six shows a year from local and national artists. In addition, Hensel also teaches classes at the gallery in papermaking and book arts. She puts her own work into three categories: literary sculpture, narrative sculpture

and artist books. Everything in her work is inspired by literature, from the recent collection of poems and music for random performance, to poetry on aging seen through old neckties in an antique tie case.

Choosing Minneapolis because of the art scene and the energy in politics, Hensel opened her gallery in 2004 as part of her 40-year career in art. Her work history reads like an art-school guide: ceramics, papermaking, drawing, writing, handmade books and most recently, handspun yarn sculpture. For Hensel, the most rewarding part is seeing how art affects the audience. “I love putting together an installation and the totality of manufacturing a space and experience that has a potential to change people,” she said.

FFI

Susan Hensel Gallery

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bend in the river *chiropractic*



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