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## Artist to entrepreneur: Gomez opens art supply shop to meet UNL demand

by Jessica Rial

Peggy Gomez, owner of Gomez Art Supply, joked about wishing she had taken some business classes in college. "It's behind everything," she said.

Gomez, 41, opened the supply store with four art studios in downtown Lincoln 16 months ago.

As a young artist and UNL professor, Gomez hadn't thought about owning her own business. "I'd never really thought of myself as an entrepreneur," she said.

"I think a lot of artists are entrepreneurs they just don't take the turn into retail."

Gomez, who has no employees, caters to the University of Nebraska with her business. She sells supplies for painting, printmaking, drawing, ceramics and drafting tools. She direct markets to professors and places fliers where students will see them.

Professors often contact Gomez directly about supplies. She said they tell students "I'm one of them, because I got my bachelor's degree there and I taught there, which is a really important part of my success so far."

Gomez also has a master's in fine arts from the University of Minnesota. She taught part-time at UNL before becoming a full-time printmaking instructor and print technician. "I found I really liked ordering things and doing inventory," she said.

Gomez was accustomed to working in small businesses before teaching full-time. As a professor she noticed that students felt unappreciated and could not get their questions answered when they were shopping for art supplies.

"There was a niche market and I was ready for a change," she said of her decision to open the shop.



Peggy Gomez in her shop in downtown Lincoln.

"I have a wall of fame where I put up pictures of repeat customers," she said. "I put up artwork in my store, and students have shows here."

In the basement of the shop Gomez hosted "Down N' Dirty," a series of art shows. "Alternative spaces are popping up all over Lincoln," she said.

Other nontraditional gallery settings can be found in old garages used by mechanics and shoe repair shops. Gomez said there are lots of empty spaces that owners will rent for a few days for a show.

Generating revenue is a challenge.

"It's so hard to make it by selling art," Gomez said. "You have to figure out another way to pay your bills."

Gomez Art Supply is the only authorized dealer in Nebraska of Utrecht art supplies. Gomez said

square footage," she said of the 25 by 40-foot retail floor. Although Gomez cannot compete directly with big boxes like Hobby Lobby and Michael's, she said they are not beating her prices.

As a working artist with a studio at her business, Gomez is able to offer customers advice on time-tested and new products. She has the advantage of saying, "Come into my studio and let me show you this."

As a child Gomez would draw and create her own comics. "I had always known that art was what I wanted to do," she said.

There are three additional studios in the shop. "It's turned into a little artist community," Gomez said. She rents the studios to students and professional artists.

With time she wants to move the shop and studio into a larger downtown space and purchase a printing press. With the additional space she hopes to hold life drawing classes and gallery shows and become a bigger part of the art community.

Gomez said her busiest time comes at the beginning of each semester.

Gomez is trying to increase the inventory. With the creation of new products and diversified lines, she said, it's interesting to see what customers decide to buy.

Of her own art, Gomez said, "I really try to be wide-open in how I think and what I like to look at."

Although she likes many different styles, she said her favorites are abstract, contemporary, text and digital. Gomez paints and draws and makes collages and prints.

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