

TEMPE

—AND GUADALUPE—

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Art supply store morphs into art, entertainment venue

By Georgia Geis
The Arizona Republic

Wet Paint Art Supply in Tempe is a daughter-and-pop shop that is offering more than paintbrushes and color wheels.

"We want to be more than an art store. We want to give back to the local community," said owner Tom Jordan, 50.

Once a month, Wet Paint is transformed into an art and entertainment venue. The shelves built on casters are rolled back and stored behind a gray curtain.

The walls are packed with art of all styles from more than 20 local artists while live music and a poetry reading can also be found.

The event has been growing, and more than 300 people came out for the last show.

The next show will be at 7 p.m. May 17.

Jordan's daughter, Jessica, 22, for years had envisioned a place to show local art. She had worked at Binders Art Center for two years and knew when it was on its way out. She jumped at the chance and persuaded her father to buy the store on the southeastern corner of Forest Avenue and Seventh Street.

"I take care of the business side and Jessica handles the artistic side. We are learning from each other," Tom said.

Jessica enlisted the help of Mary Beth Hittner, 22, to coordinate the gallery showings.

"I wanted to do this all my life. This is a dream," said Hittner, of Tempe, who is graduating this month with an



Lettice Pelotte of Mesa looks over paintings during a monthly art show at Wet Paint Art Supply in Tempe.

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art history degree from Arizona State University.

The participating artists find the store a dream as well.

"They gave me a chance to express myself and it has been very liberating," said artist Jules Demetrius, 32, of Mesa.

Demetrius had not painted in years and had walked into the store to buy supplies. He couldn't believe Wet Paint asked to see samples of his work.

The store liked what it saw and showcased his work in an earlier show.

Wet Paint encouraged him to make some larger paintings and gave him a reduced rate on the canvas. In 28 days, he painted six more large pieces.

The paintings exhibit humor and darkness. One piece shows a woman, an icon of the 1950s, with a man's head on a platter. The background is lined with ads for military academies from old magazines. Another piece shows a woman holding her swollen belly. It's a present to his wife, who is eight months pregnant.

Matt Torres of Tempe noticed the store's call for art and brought in some of his photographs. Torres, 25, is studying for his master's at ASU and offered photos that are bold and graphic.

Each image seems to be ordinary, the man getting his hair cut at the barbershop



Deirdre Hamill/The Arizona Republic

Art lovers mill around at Wet Paint Art Supply at a recent art show. The next show will be at 7 p.m. May 17.

or the man sitting at his desk in a typical office. But in each piece there is blood.

He hopes to show how commonplace violence is on TV and in the movies.

"These are not the kind of photos to

show in some uptown gallery," Torres said. "It is great to have a place that is open."

The Jordans have other ideas. This summer they plan to renovate the upstairs area as a studio for local artists.