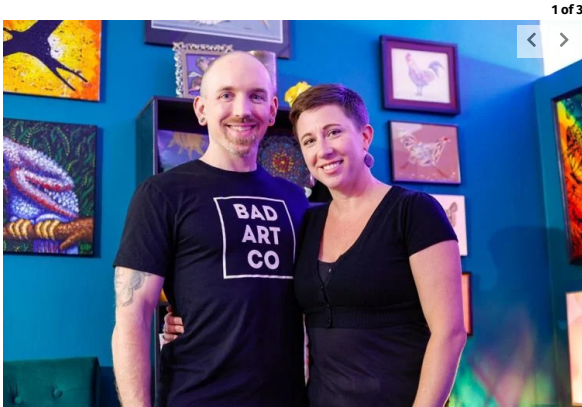


ARTS & CULTURE

# New Oregon studio wants everyone to make 'bad' art

By Victoria Davis, Special to the Cap Times  
Jul 24, 2024



Emma Dehlinger (right) and Mark Smith (left) are the co-owners of Bad Art Co. in Oregon. ASHLEY RODRIGUEZ

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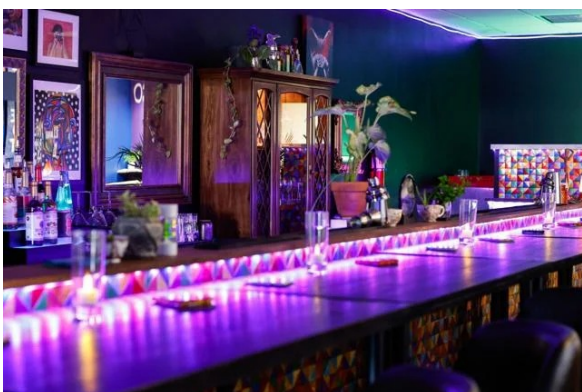
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From a hair salon to a Lutheran church, Unit 105 on 787 North Main St. in Oregon has led many lives. Now, it's living its most colorful era yet as an art lounge called Bad Art Co., which had its [grand opening in early July](#).

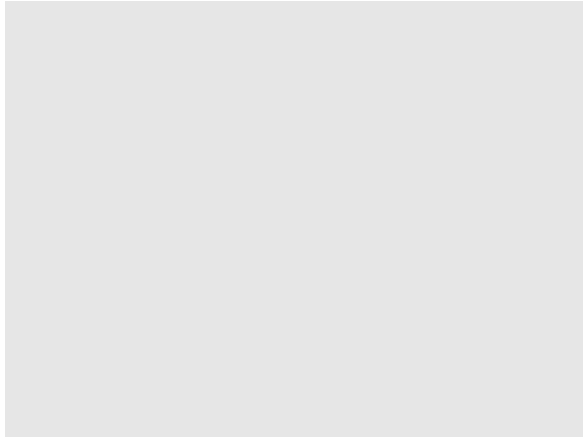
Groovy lava lamps and diamond-shaped rainbow lights accent what used to be the Community of Life Church's pulpit. Green velvet sofas, paintings of sloths and mushroom plant pots have made a home in the former reception for Cutting Edge Hair Etc.

There's a painted mural of swirling grape vines, a shelf full of games to play and books to read about the history of art and how to paint nudes. Tables with hand-made beaded centerpieces and a bar counter lined with purple neon lights make up the unit's central hub: "Open Art" creation stations.



Along with unpainted ceramics, canvases, birdhouses and more available for purchase at the entrance, five shelves worth of free, ready-to-use art supplies covers almost the entire opposite wall, waiting to be used to create something new. Next to the supplies is a large painted canvas with the shop's theme: "Make Bad Art."

"I've wanted to open a place like this for 15 years, since before I even went to college," said artist Emma Dehlinger, Bad Art's owner, art class instructor and bartender. Dehlinger earned a bachelor's degree in art therapy from Edgewood College in Madison.



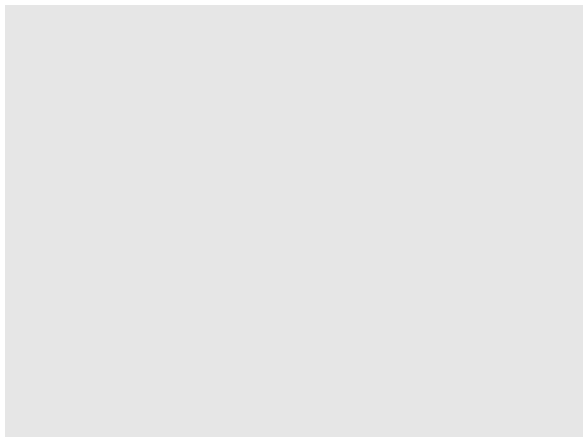
*Visitors to Bad Art Co. can buy ceramics, canvases, and birdhouses to make art with.*  
ASHLEY RODRIGUEZ

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Dehlinger envisioned "a place where people could come and have a mocktail or beer or coffee, make art, take classes and create without stress," she said. "We want to reach people who are artists, definitely, but also people who have never picked up a paintbrush and think, 'I'm not an artist.'"

## Places of sanctuary

In addition to unstructured, "Open Art" time at \$10 per session with supplies included, Bad Art also offers classes in watercolor and acrylic painting, charcoal, collage, air-dry clay and more.



*Bad Art Co. provides art supplies for patrons to make art with, including collages.*  
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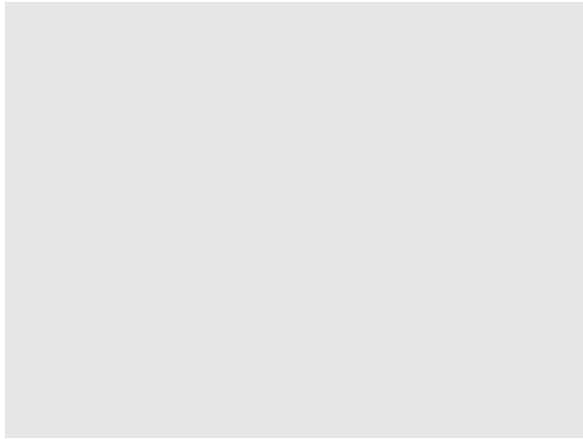
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Dehlinger convinced her art-apprehensive husband Mark Smith, now her Bad Art co-owner, to try his hand at making something when they

uncovered some ceramic coasters and alcohol ink belonging to Dehlinger's late mother, Christine "Onga" Dehlinger.

Onga, also an artist, passed away in 2021 from cancer. Emma Dehlinger took over the lease for the small rental space that was her mother's personal art studio before moving to Main Street.

During this transitional time, "we hosted a couple classes through the renovation," Dehlinger said. "We added a lot to the business model with the move — the bar, the lounge, the shop. I have built my business from the ground up."



*Along with classes, Bad Art Co. offers open studio time—for \$10, patrons can drop in and make art using the supplies provided.*

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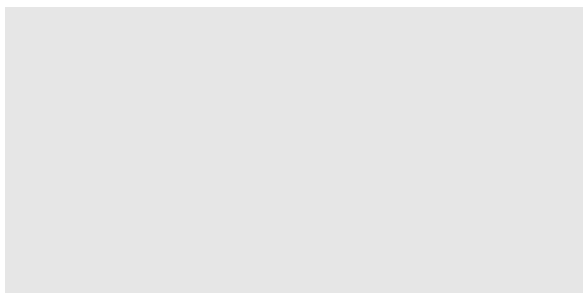
Dehlinger's mother's wax relief and pastel art is now featured on the lounge's gallery wall. Dehlinger and Smith plan to showcase other pieces by local artists on the regular, all available for purchase.

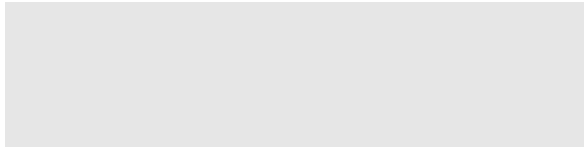
"Working on those coasters, I really enjoyed learning the art process where you're just completely detached from whatever the outcome of the project may be," Smith said. "You're just going through the motions and taking your time and suddenly you have this abstract pattern that looks amazing."

Dehlinger and Smith's son Ari works as a cashier, and was one of Dehlinger's other "guinea pigs" to see if her idea of art for non-art lovers would work.

"In the harsh Midwest winter months, we all get a little sad and start to look for places of sanctuary," she said. "I spent some time in the service industry and I'd hear people say, 'I'd love to make art. That'd be so cool. But I'm bad at it.'"

"And I'm like, 'So what? It's good for you anyway.'"





*A back wall is lined with art made on donated records.*  
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## Local contributions

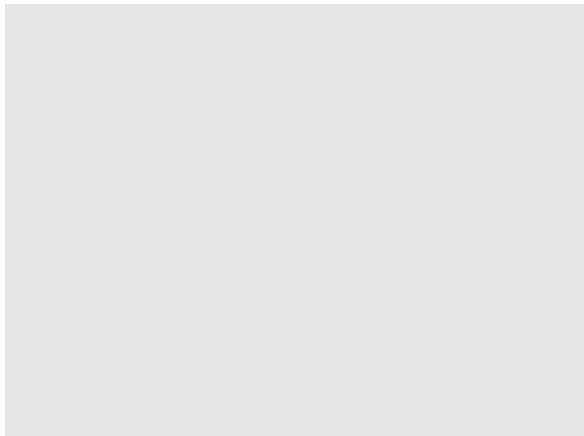
Individual creative empowerment is a big part of Bad Art's mission.

Another is community building.

On the hallway wall leading to the private studio rooms and class rooms, there are dozens of acrylic painted vintage records mounted on the wall. Dehlinger said the records were donated by Kathie Natzke. She founded Paul's Party, a nonprofit that honors her son who had mobility issues his whole life and then passed away.

"She's a lovely person and lives local and asked me, 'Do you guys take donations?' I said yes," Dehlinger said. "She came by with two huge boxes of records. We decided to use them for this community project. Each person got their own record to paint. We'd like to do more things like this in the future."

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*The lounge area includes a "bird wall" with collaged chickens made by local artist friend Mary Mullen using old address labels.*  
ASHLEY RODRIGUEZ

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Bad Art also has a "bird wall" with collaged chickens made by Dehlinger's local artist friend Mary Mullen, using old address labels. There's a cow overlooking the bar painted by one of Bad Art Co's instructors, Kelly Gratz. The beaded table-toppers were made by Gratz's son Auburn, who is also a local artist.

Bad Art Co. does accept art supplies donations, and Dehlinger plans to offer double the amount of classes in the winter. Event and class details can be found on their social media account, @thebadartco.

"This place is kind of like your weird, eccentric auntie's art den," said Dehlinger as she looked around. "That works though. I want to be everyone's weird, artsy aunt."

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## Bad Art Co.

787 N. Main St. Unit 105, Oregon

[badart.co](http://badart.co)

(608) 424-5674

HOURS:

Wednesday-Saturday 3-9 p.m.

Sunday 1-8 p.m.

Monday-Tuesday CLOSED

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