

Mum likely to not appreciate another Marks and Spencer candle this year? Did Dad's reaction to festive socks last year fall short of joy? A pop-up market in Galway City Centre could be the perfect source for getting your loved ones something quirky and original this Christmas.

You can find the Creative Makers' Galway pop-up shop from next week at The Cornstore on Middle Street.

"It's a good location, and we have very friendly neighbours down there. We all help each other out which is great," says Joanna Cronin, secretary of Galway Creative Makers.

The group's pop-up shop this Christmas will feature 19 members selling their original crafts and design. There's something for everyone, including a wide range of jewellery, luxury scarves, writers and illustrators, and glasswork, to name a few.

Following the success from last year's Christmas shop, and a successive number of summer pop-ups, Joanna believes that they have the traction to follow it up this year.

"People expect us to be there, so either they come looking for us or they're keeping an eye out for when we're going to be there next."

All 35 members of the group are graduates of the Building Craft and Design Enterprise course, ran by the Design and Craft Council of Ireland and the Local Enterprise Office.

Joanna believes that exclusively keeping the group for graduates of the course keeps the standard of the crafts and design high.

"We do our best to really show the public the level of skill we all have. We run ourselves as if we were a shop, so you come in and it's all set up and merchandised professionally.

"Each maker takes a turn to man the shop, so you get to meet the maker on any given day, and they can talk you through their stock. We're all pretty familiar with each other's work, so anyone that's on can talk about anyone else's work."

Along with providing an opportunity to connect with customers, Joanna notes that the pop-up shop is great hands-on experience for those new to the business.

“For us, it’s not all about the selling. It’s all about the learning. It’s a learning environment for new members coming in, in how to set up a shop and what a shop looks like and how it runs in the background.”

Joanna herself is the founder of Peppermint Jewellery. Based in Oranmore, she specialises in semi-precious gemstone and costume jewellery.

“Peppermint was born out of a love for jewellery,” says Joanna. “I used to travel a fair bit and every time I travelled, my first love was handmade markets, high quality and jewellery specifically. I like a bit of bling, as we all do.”

Joanna believes that her jewellery brings something different to the Irish jewellery market.

“It’s a cross between bohemian and classic Irish. It’s something I couldn’t find here myself.

You get a lot of bright, fresh colours when you get to the European mainland, but here it tended to be earthy colours, whereas I would like the ocean colours.

“I’ve always lived on the west coast and that’s my major inspiration. There will always be seaside colours in everything I do.”

Other makers that will be featuring in this year’s Christmas shop include Galway-based Mayo artist, and treasurer of group, David (Bog) O’Malley and chairperson Ambrose O’Halloran, who along with his wife Brid O’Halloran are the woodturners behind Ambrose and Brid. They create a wide range of crafts, from jewellery to wooden platters.

While the Galway Creative Makers are supported by the Local Enterprise Office Galway, Joanna notes that the life of independent craftspeople and designers can be tough.

“We do feel hugely supported here in Galway, but it can still be difficult. It’s a real challenge to succeed. Even with the support we get here, it’s a slog.

“But what I would add to that is that there’s very few crafters who are in it to make the money. Obviously you want your business to be successful and you want to make a living out of it, but most of us are in it because we love it, not to take home the big money.”

The Galway Creative Makers will be running their pop-up shop from Friday December 6<sup>th</sup> and Sunday December 22<sup>nd</sup>. As well as finding unique gifts for family members, it also helps support local and independent craftspeople.