Emily Stanton

New York native Leela Corman literally draws from her experiences living north of the Upper West Side. She infused her love of New York and history to create her graphic novel “Unterzakhn.”

Corman’s graphic novel was released at the Sequential Artists Workshop Friday night.

People lined shoulder to shoulder to see Corman’s art on the walls of the colorful workshop located at 18 SE 5th Ave.

The crowd was mixed with University of Florida staff, students and Gainesville community members. Among them was history major and comic lover Caitlin Lvedla, who admired Corman’s unique artistic style.

“It’s beautiful,” Lvedla said. “She uses pen and brush really well together. It’s very loose. She’s very good at playing with black and white.”

Lvedla said that she’ll be playing with contrast more in her comics class at UF.

Twenty-year-old journalism student Tanner Yea said Corman’s characters have a depth to them that gives them a bulky yet lean composition.

“There’s some kind of cartoony elegance about it,” Yea said. “It’s very curvy.”

“Unterzakhn,” which is Yiddish for underthings, is the story of twin girls Esther and Fanya and their immigrant life on New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the 20th century.

Corman drew inspiration for “Unterzakhn” from many of her own experiences as well as social issues and her love of New York.

Showgirls, abortion, New York City history, her own life, a crazy teacher she once studied with and a dream she had where she worked in a brothel were some of the things that inspired “Unterzakhn,” she said.

The graphic novel was a long process.

She drew her first character from the novel, Fanya, in the fall of 2003 on a napkin, and she delivered the book to her publishing house in November 2011.

Corman leaves Gainesville on Monday to promote “Unterzakhn” on a book tour. She will make appearances in New York City, Boston, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Toronto and Gainesville.

“I’ll go wherever they’ll have me,” Corman said.

Though the payoff is unreliable, Corman loves making comics.

It affords her the freedom to not work in a desk job and wear a suit, she said.

“I love telling stories, and I’m not really capable of telling stories without pictures,” Corman said. “And hell, who doesn’t like comics? Whoever tells you they don’t like comics is lying.”

In addition to illustrating, Corman also belly dances.

Corman said she got into belly dancing accidentally. She was pulled up to dance in a restaurant and thought it was fun. She took a class when she was laid off from her job and fell in love with it.

“It sucked me in with its evil claws,” Corman joked.

Leela Corman

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