



# *Animal affinity*

Artist's abstract sculpture inspired by a love of elephants, horses and more

**Amanda Sieradzki** Council on Culture & Arts

Gigi Gaulin considers nature to be her greatest mentor. A sculptor and veterinarian, she is returning to art after packing up her studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and relocating to Attapulcus, Georgia's elephant refuge.

Gaulin resides next to the refuge on 50 acres of land with her horse and miniature donkey. Her most recent work in progress is part equine, part pachyderm. She's also started to incorporate animal bones into her typically steel and wood sculptures.

"Part of my coming here was inspired by my view and experience of how the horse and elephant have been used and abused by humanity over the centuries," says Gaulin. "Both have been used for war, work and entertainment, and something is coming out of me that shows people that they deserve to have a place to be who they are."

Gaulin has three works included in this year's "Creative Tallahassee" online exhibition. The Council on Culture and Arts had a unique opportunity to feature all 94 applicants

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This abstract sculpture by Gigi Gaulin can be seen in the "Creative Tallahassee" online exhibit. COCA

# Sculpture

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and their 257 paintings, drawings, photographs, textiles, sculptures, and more this year, given the virtual format. Curated by COCA for the Art in Public Places program on behalf of the city of Tallahassee, the digital exhibit can be viewed through Sept. 14.

Gaulin is intrigued with how people will perceive her three-dimensional works after viewing their two-dimensional photographs. Often she will invite potential buyers to see a piece in person before purchasing it. She is still amazed when someone stands in the presence of something she created and wants to take it home.

"It's surreal," says Gaulin. "My artwork really didn't start until I did some deep personal healing, and so much was unleashed from the healing. I really had no idea that I had any art in me."

Once she allowed herself to open up, the creativity continued to flow. Gaulin began working part time as an artist and veterinarian and took a class at her local community college to learn the ins and outs of welding. She recalls hesitantly walking up to her professor and handing him a sketch of an imagined sculpture.

Instead of questioning its artistic merits, she was pleasantly surprised when he began to rattle off the list of the materials she would need to make it happen instead. For her first assignment, titled "Outside the Box," she crafted a round, Asian-inspired vessel. Gaulin entered it into the student showcase and won.

"I loved the energy of being around my classmates and seeing them create," says Gaulin. "All of that energy was my mentor. That's what was inspiring."

Now when she stands in her open-air studio, Gaulin finds inspiration in the raw materials. The scrapyards are her "candy store," and she has up to six pieces in progress at any given time.

She looks for patterns and shapes to emerge, forming the works based on intuition. Her biggest hurdle remains in controlling the patinas and rust on the metals while working outdoors given the South's climate.

"I'm learning how to be in a humid hot, environment with metal, since in Santa Fe it was dry and things did not rust fast," says Gaulin. "It keeps changing the face of it for me, so I'm challenged by that and will bring it into my house once I figure out what I need to do next."

The end results are abstract, intriguing metal forms with rounded edges like the soft, spiraling "Space," which Gaulin says speaks to the uncharted and unknown reaches of the universe. "The Offering" sprouts from a small, green seed, while "Sketch XI" reads like a rusted compass pointing towards its true north.

"I have something to put out into the world, I don't know what specifically that is, and that's OK because I'm not supposed to know," says Gaulin. "Someone else can see my work and it might move them or maybe it doesn't, but for the one it moves maybe that will trigger something."

In addition to the "Creative Tallahassee" online ex-



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## IF YOU GO

**What:** "Creative Tallahassee Online"

**When:** Through Sept. 14

**Visit:** [cocaonlinegallery.zenfolio.com](http://cocaonlinegallery.zenfolio.com)

hibit, Gaulin currently has work in The Joe Center for The Arts' "Paws, Claws, Wings, & Scales" online show. She's grateful to have found supportive outlets and resources to showcase her art in the region.

In the meantime, her home continues to fill with sculptures of all shapes, sizes and textures. Much like the animals she admires, she keeps her process wild and free.

"Art transcends dialogue and goes to a place that only it can take you to," says Gaulin. "Right now, everything is in this mental chaos and fear-oriented place, and so by having art, maybe we can find another voice beyond it all. It's dealing with the physical, and being with the spirit, and trying to bring those both together in a balanced way."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)). This article is part of COCA's Creativity Persists collection which highlights how our community uses the arts to stay connected and inspired during the COVID-19 pandemic.