

# WILD

## creations

Linda Hall has always had a fascination with bears.

DAVID MOYNAHAN

Artist Linda Hall riffs on the natural world in 'Beyond Gone'

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

"I wanted to do something different than teaching and making art," reflects mixed-media artist Linda Hall, about an important crossroads in her career. "I found out that Wakulla Springs was hiring an AmeriCorps member to drive boats and take care of the ecology of the parkland. That is what put me in the center of the natural world, and it was a huge influence on my love and my concern for nature."

Hall drove boats down the river for two years. She witnessed animals shedding winter coats, building nests and mothering offspring. This intimacy with the cyclical nature of the environment and coastal wildlife left a lasting mark, both on her mindset toward ecological preservation and her art.

Her exhibition "Beyond Gone," at the Gadsden Arts Center & Museum explores this close relationship, and humanity's impact on the environment as well.

"I've been distressed about the political situation and this is a way of letting go of despair and moving past it," says Hall. "We have to cherish what we have and love it because it is leaving. It's a make-believe world that is intentionally false with big flowers and colors. It is kind of like creating a hopeful world that doesn't exist."

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# Hall

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Hall sees many similarities between her work in the Munroe Family Community Gallery, on display through Feb. 29, and the feminine, natural, unusual and beautiful pieces Alexa Kleinbard renders in 2D in her concurrent exhibition, "Twilight in the Garden." "Beyond Gone" involves a variety of pieces from Hall, including many works from her animal series. Made with recycled, handmade textiles, Hall says the original impetus for her large-scale animal forms and masks came about after her mother's death.

Hall was compelled to make exultant, empty forms and embellish them with glitter, beads and embroidery. These forms then transform into "containers of spirit." Rather than constructing realistic taxidermies, she felt these empty suits and headdresses should stay open and fluid. Hall has held parades where people have donned papier-mâché masks and outfits, but the focus is always on a more symbolic body.

"It is like a spirit could come into them and they could leave," describes Hall. "It is what is left behind after someone leaves. To me, they are evidence that there was a life that was there, which is why some of them are laughing, some of them have their mouths open or are covered in glitter, but it is about the absence of what was inside."

While she has an affinity for raccoons and dearly loves her cat, Hall says the bear is an animal that continues to return as a source of inspiration. Hall is fascinated by how it mysteriously emerges from the woods, and how its imposing form and stance on its hind legs inspires awe.

"To me it is the essential of what is wild," says Hall. "I made a bear that is open down the middle, so you could contemplate being inside of it."

Hall has always longed to tell tales with images. Her eighth grade British literature class first sparked this inner storyteller. That is around the time she began painting murals on her bedroom wall — tipis aflame and wild jungle scenes. She attended Florida State University for art and was profoundly impacted by professors Mark Messersmith and Jim Roche.

Messersmith's rich color palette appealed to her eye, while Roche motivat-



Linda Hall's creations of recycled, handmade textiles will be on display in her **Almost Gone** exhibit at Gadsden Arts Center. LINDA HALL

ed her to trust her intuition. Roche also planted the idea that art did not have to fit neatly into art history in order to be valid. Hall took this to heart as she started painting murals around town, as well as making pieces on wood and nailing them to telephone poles.

"Making art public has been a strong thread of my work," says Hall. "I don't think art only belongs in the institution. It is not only the rich and well educated that get to have an artful experience. Everyone should."

Hall first started working with fabrics out of a need to craft with materials that would have been familiar in her mother's, grandmother's and great-grandmother's hands. She was drawn to clothing and linens imbued with history, and after she returned to Tallahassee, she continued making series' of works that involved second-hand textiles.

Her materials come from antique and thrift stores, but often people in the community will also give her old hand-me-downs in need of a second life.

Hall works in her studio in Smokey Hollow, a neighborhood rich in its own history. She holds each piece in her hands, finding energy in the quiet. Hall says each work takes anywhere from 20 to 30 hours to embellish, wax, bead, dye and paint. She teaches herself to attach paper to quilts, cross-stitching and layering until the piece resonates and informs her it's finished.

## If you go

**What:** Beyond Gone

**When:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday through Feb. 29

**Where:** Gadsden Arts Center & Museum, 13 N. Madison St, Quincy

**Cost:** \$5 adults; free for Gadsden Arts Members and children 17 and under

**Contact:** For more information, call 850-627-5023 or visit <https://www.gadsdenarts.org/>.

Though they may not speak in a traditional sense, while hanging work for "Beyond Gone," Hall said a passerby and musician commented that her work was "making sounds." She hopes other museumgoers will feel similar relationships to her imaginary environments, by extension, find connections to the wild outside and within.

"Art in the big sense tries to free things from passing," says Hall. "It is a way to make them tangible for a minute and to come away with something that is very much alive and sincere. I know I'm not going to live forever, but I have a lot to say and a lot of stories to tell. I'm lucky enough to do it and get into the studio everyday, make the work and have faith that it resonates with people. That is what keeps me going."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature



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"Beyond Gone" involves a variety of pieces including works from Linda Hall's animal series and those many with recycled textiles. LINDA HALL

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)).