

# Stitches secure memories for quilter

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Stashes of fabric, buckets of buttons, shelves of textured scraps and a wall of every color spool adorns fiber artist Deon Lewis' studio. Sourced from thrift shops and online stores, each item carries a unique history that Lewis transforms and imbues into her quilts. As a Tallahassee native, there's one particular crazy quilt that she'll never part with given the meaning she sees in every hand-stitched image.

"It's covered in willow trees, mermaids and birds," says Lewis. "It's something I'll keep forever because each little embroidery represents a certain time or event in [my family's] life."



**Deon Lewis** For a recent quilt commission, Lewis recreated a photograph from a 1950s wedding as an anniversary present. For this work she was able to incorporate the fabrics from the people in the photograph, giving the finished quilt even more special meaning.

This sentiment of recollection is wholly present in "Persistence of Memory," a City Hall Gallery exhibition curated by COCA for the Art in Public Places program, where Lewis' quilts are on display through Nov. 19.

"Each piece I created was based on a memory or evoked some sort of emotional response," describes Lewis.

Lewis can recall the first quilt she ever made, comprised of leftover clothing that her grandmother, a seamstress, had lying about. It was fashioned on an old, treadle sewing machine one summer on her grandmother's front porch, and in spite of the clashing color palette — Pepto-Bismol pink and baby blue — Lewis was a proud 12-year-old to have completed it.

Mostly self-taught, Lewis was always inclined toward art, but found her passion in fiber art. After she was married, Lewis would sit with her mother-in-law and put together fabrics, learning and admiring her mother-in-law's skill and talent. She looks up to fellow fiber artists Susan Carlson and Caryl Breyer-Fallert for their ability to create depth with texture. Lewis connects with artists outside of her own medium as well, especially in the paintings of Harold Braul.

"I love the light he uses in his work," says Lewis. "His brushstrokes are so simple but they have so much depth. I can see that easily transferring to fabric."

Her piece, "Every Little Girl," displays Lewis' own attention to color and depth. She aimed to represent every skin tone and hair type within the texture of her fabrics. The final piece is very different from her initial color palette, however, as she moved away from turquoise into pinks. Admittedly, Lewis is often drawn to jewel tones and prefers using oranges, reds, blues and purples to convey movement and emotion.

Lewis will use hand dyed fabrics so that she can acquire many different values in her color palette. Sometimes she'll use natural fibers and plants to create prints and takes a lot of inspiration from her natural surroundings.

"I'm really drawn to flowers and birds, but recently I've been fascinated with faces and figures," says Lewis, who starts her quilts from either a photograph she's taken or a copyright-free image.

Ultimately, the quilting process is one of building up, tearing down, and trial and error. Lewis sets aside time from 3 to 6 every afternoon to work in



**Free at Last** is one of the quilt images by Deon Lewis, whose work is part of the "Persistence of Memory" show at City Hall.  
DEON LEWIS

## If you go

**What:** Persistence of Memory: Artworks by Deon Lewis, Charity Myers and Julie Guyot

**When:** 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday through Nov. 19

**Where:** City Hall Gallery, 300 South Adams St.

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more information, call 850-224-2500 or visit <http://coca.tallahasseearts.org/art-in-public-places/city-hall-gallery>.

her studio. Once she has an idea in mind, Lewis will select a color palette and types of fabrics and begin laying out a pattern. From there, the process of collaging and pinning the fabrics can take any number of months.

Lewis likes tweaking her fabrics before working with the sewing machine, arranging and rearranging colors like a

painter manipulates paint with their brush. When it comes time to stitch it all down, Lewis prefers her faithful, 25-year-old Bernina sewing machine. Lewis is unafraid of trying radical techniques when it comes to her fabrics as well and says that one must be willing to fail to keep the work exciting.

"There's always that little bit of doubt that creeps in and you get frustrated with a piece, and when that happens I just have to walk away and come back another day to see it with fresh eyes," says Lewis. "Sometimes I'll create a piece and it'll be making me crazy. With painting, you have to wipe it all out and start over, but I may just rip it in half and add to it."

Lewis has been the cover artist for Lemoyné's Chain of Parks Festival and was a traveling artist with the "Piecing Together a Changing Planet" exhibit that toured national parks around the U.S. She is a part of Tallahassee's Quilter's Unlimited guild and donates a few works a year to various benefits and causes.

With the current COCA exhibition, Lewis is amazed at how her work intertwines with that of Charity Myers and Julie Guyot as each one dives into memory from a different angle. In her work, "Broken Windows," Lewis sought to express the loneliness, despair and vulnerability of mental illness in fabrics. On the other end of the emotional spectrum, she creates a soaring, red ballerina in "Free At Last" as well as a contemplative "Afternoon in Paris" on the water.

"I hope that when [visitors] view [the work] it evokes a response or emotion with them and is something that they can connect with," says Lewis. "To me, that's what art is all about. It's looking at a piece, falling in love with it and relating it to some memory in your life."

*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)).*