

The art of death: Amanda Martinez's creative fascination with animal remains

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*She is a fixture at several Downtown area art markets.
(Photos courtesy of the artist.)*

Amanda Martinez knows her artwork isn't for everyone. From [gem-encrusted animal skulls](#) to delicately framed scorpions, she offers a dose of the macabre that can startle unsuspecting shoppers.

"Especially at the [Downtown] Growers' Market, when it's kind of an older demographic," Martinez told DAN. "I have all my jewelry on one table, and then I have all my oddities and décor on a separate table on the side. So, when they come into my booth - a couple old ladies chatting - they look around, and then they're like, 'Oh my god, what is that! Is that a bone?'"

Yes, it's a bone: Her handcrafted pieces include everything from [gracefully posed snake skeletons](#) to earrings with tiny mammalian jaws.

While Martinez has designed metal and resin jewelry for over a decade, she found her niche after teaching herself to handle insect and animal remains. She began selling this more distinctive work in 2012 under the name [Lust for Dead Oddities](#).

Gasps aside, she said most visitors admire the craftsmanship.

"Everybody at least still has an appreciation for them," she said. "They'll say, 'This is definitely not my thing, but you do absolutely beautiful work.'"



For many, however, it is very much their thing. Bone jewelry takes up the majority of her web sales and about half of in-person market sales.

Martinez also takes commissions for items made from particular animal species - as long as they meet both legal and ethical standards.

"My code of ethics behind my brand is very important to me," she noted. "I've spent years researching the sources across the country that follow my ethics."

For instance, she noted, federal law prohibits the possession of certain protected wildlife and some states layer on additional regulations. If a customer requests a particular skeletal sculpture or

shadowbox, she takes care to educate them about what's permitted in New Mexico and what can't cross into, say, California, where among other things it is illegal to possess bear remains.

Beyond that, she relies on a network of contacts across the country to procure antique or naturally deceased materials.

"There's a lot of people that are part of the oddities community. We're all friends. We all know each other," she explained. "I have a source for reptiles specifically. I have a source for skulls specifically. It's just a matter of finding the right person."

She even works with clients' pet remains to create memorial jewelry or displays, although she clarified that her work is distinct from taxidermy, which she calls "a whole other monster."

Customers can find Martinez almost every weekend at markets across the region. These days she's focused on Albuquerque, making regular appearances at [ABQ Artwalk](#), [OT Circus](#) (Seventh and Central), and the [Rail Yards Market](#). Her work has also appeared at the [Secret Gallery](#) (Fourth and Hazeldine).

"I've done a couple of pop-ups in Santa Fe, Cedar Crest, in the Moriarty area, the Belen and Los Lunas area - and it always just goes back to Downtown," she said. "The Downtown art scene is great. It's a great community."

—By *Karie Luidens*

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