



The Lost Artist

Gail Lukasik

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Chicago performance artist Rose Caffrey is desperate to sell her sister's nineteenth-century farmhouse in southern Illinois. She's haunted by her sister's death from a fall inside the house.

But when Rose discovers three murals in an upstairs bedroom depicting strange images of Native Americans and bizarre nineteenth-century landscapes, she becomes obsessed with knowing the artist's identity and the meaning of the murals. Buried for over one hundred and seventy-five years under wallpaper and paint, the murals hint at secrets tied to the old house, the artist, and the nearby 1836 Trail of Tears Camp Ground Cemetery. Only one mural remains to be uncovered. And Rose is convinced the hidden mural holds the key to deciphering the other three.

As art restorer Alex Hague peels away the layers of wallpaper from the last mural, Rose searches for the artist's identity. But all her discoveries only add to the murals' mysteries.

What the last mural reveals launches Rose and Alex on a quest for one of the greatest lost art treasures of sixteenth century America. Pursued by an unknown adversary who seems to know their every move, they race across the country hunting for the treasure. What Rose never expects to find are crimes going back over four hundred years with the potential to transform American history—if she can escape the fate of the other lost artists before her.

The Lost Artist is a fast-paced mystery thriller that shatters the very foundation of American history. Beneath the layers of time lurks a truth worth killing for.

The Lost Artist Details

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From Reader Review The Lost Artist for online ebook

Jenny says

Good story. Was a little bit too slow at some points, and when it hit a fast pace only to slow down it left me a little wanting. I'm not sure what was the point of having Emily's past life shown. I'm left with a lot of questions unanswered and it's a good book for people who don't mind cliffhangers and some questions not answered.

I received this book free through Goodreads First Reads

Zora says

The first half of this book was well-enough written, with interesting enough characters and two connected stories set in both the present day and 1831, in an old Southern Illinois home today and a boarding school for young ladies in Connecticut in the past. But then something went quite wacky with the story and it was suddenly about something else and there's a drawing from 1600 macguffining all over the place and loose ends dangle, and soon there are Celts referenced, and the climax didn't make much sense, and the denouement made less sense still, so much so that I wondered if perhaps signatures from a different book had been sewn into this book, but upon reflection, I don't think that's the explanation for why it went so wildly askew in the last third. Did the author write the first half, put it down, and get back to it five years later and forget what her own novel was about? Irrespective of why it went off track, it fails as a mystery. I can't recommend it.

Julie H. says

The concept underlying *The Lost Artist* is quite clever--the "responsible sister" is murdered in her home because of something to do with a series of murals being restored on the walls in an upstairs room of her 19th-century Illinois farmhouse. Upon her death, her "irresponsible performance artist younger sister" inherits the house, the menacing feeling that the house is being watched (which escalates into physical attacks on her), and the increasing sense that the people associated with the house, the murals, and her sister's research into how these things connect with the dislocation of the Cherokee Indians westward along the Trail of Tears all fit together. This part of the story worked quite well.

Gosh, I *really* had high hopes for this book. It dealt with a terrible but nonetheless fascinating moment in American history, it tackled the academic world's sometimes hypocrisy in affording higher status to written vs. oral forms of knowledge and tradition, and it integrated some quite interesting threads in ethnohistorical forms of documentation and tribal history. Plus, when Rose and Alex went to visit the Cherokee elder, I was extremely impressed by Rose's sense of why the woman would value the drawing and feel a tremendous sense of responsibility in protecting this item that had been placed in her care. Moreover, I enjoyed how Rose tried (albeit largely unsuccessfully) to silence Alex who adopted what has historically been far too many academic and outsider's attitude that "I know better than you what the fate of this item should be." Rose instinctively knew that Alex needed to close his mouth before he totally alienated this gatekeeper to an astounding source of information.

On the whole, *The Lost Artist* contained great detail, well-balanced shifts between the present day narration and historic events. The art history and tribal dislocation pieces were deftly handled. Without spoiling

anything, so-called "irresponsible sister" Rose's instincts are mostly sound which serves to in large part vindicate what we've been told of her life choices--largely alluded to in passing (e.g., two failed marriages, nearly maxed-out credit cards, her spotty employment history, and the fact that she's just been evicted from her Chicago apartment). Unfortunately, there was a specific late-in-the-story development which was, for me, the fictional equivalent of "jumping the shark." While doubtless intended as a major "Gotcha!" plot twist at the tail end of the story and, not wanting to spoil any details, I will say that the part that failed so utterly for me was not the who/what/when/where/how of the murals and their art historical genealogy. Instead, where the otherwise carefully constructed house of cards irretrievably fell apart was what I'll refer to obliquely as the "deep sea treasure" part and its implications for the timing of and participants involved in the earliest culture contact in the New World. To just dump that in at the end was ungrounded empirically and did nothing whatsoever, in my estimation, to further, resolve, embellish, or in any way improve the story that was 99.6% complete by that point. To use a sailing analogy, up until this last point author Gail Lukasik had successfully achieved optimal trim. Our sails were full, and we were flying toward the book's successful finish, our hair happily streaming behind us with our faces tilted to the sun. What this last-minute drop-in accomplished was an end-of-novel equivalent of luffing. We lost all the momentum and just sat there, with sagging empty sails, wondering what had just happened. (We/I knew what had happened, but were powerless to imagine why the story/author felt it necessary to "go there.") Up to that point, the story had been really quite good (i.e., thoughtfully developed, evidentiary chains established, etc.), but this last bit just totally blew it for me. I'd be interested to know whether others who have read this book felt the same way.

Don't get me wrong, I'm lamenting a last-minute plot twist that I feel failed. Lukasik is a very fine writer and the dust jacket notes that she writes a Leigh Girard mystery series. I am definitely going to check them out.

Diane S ? says

This turned out to be a nice little mystery with some very interesting plot developments. Love the history, the murals uncovered in an old farmhouse in Southern, Illinois, an old cemetery and a mystery stemming from a missing grave and the Trail of Tears.

Margee says

A moody, ominous, and suspenseful tale unfolds concerning a Chicago performance artist investigating the death of her sister, a researcher at a southern Illinois college. Arriving to see to the last details of her sister's passing, Rose Caffery discovers a roomful of historic murals in the decrepit 19th century farmhouse her sister has bequeathed her. What follows is a hair-raising adventure loaded with gripping historical lore, from southern Illinois to Chicago to New England to Gatlinburg, and back, and a whole cast of suspects with motives for murder.

Marcela Sara says

I enjoyed this book. I won it in a First Reads Giveaway. It is historical, which I don't often read, however one of my great great grandmothers endured the Trail of Tears. I have always loved my family history and this reminded me of a family member I never got to meet. Thank you!

Ruth Kevghas says

I finished it in 2 days because I couldn't put it down.

Jan Prucnal says

I was looking forward to reading this book, as it was highly recommended. Unfortunately, I was a bit disappointed. The storyline was good- a mystery, some history and chapters alternating from present time to mid 1800's and fair character development. The downfall was absurd dialogue and thin plot, as it developed. Dialogue was mundane , stilted, and repetitious. It's a quick read; so if you can gloss over some of the predictable dialogue, you might enjoy it.

Linda Munro says

Oh my, this has been on my want to read list since November of 2012, I feel like such a slacker, but I am glad that I am finally catching up. For the first time in a long time, I have read book after book that are all deserving of a 10 star rating (to heck with this 5 star crap!)! This book was no exception.

This bks written to cover two eras, present day and the Trail of Tears era. So, how can I classify it, hmmm, how about a psychological thriller, a murder mystery nd historical fiction all rolled into one! I truly appreciated the significance of the Native American symbology, since I live so close to a Reservation and have been for years trying to understand everything I can concerning the Native American.

The concept was imaginative and quite easy to become involved in. I am truly glad that this book was on myto read list.

Htulipanagmail.com says

The main character made some of the most implausible decisions... The story shot off in all different directions... first it was the Trail of Tears and Native Americans.. then a brief stint of abolitionism and then a short burst of Celtic theory. There were so many things left unsaid, like why the church minister was so sinister and sly, where are all those buried Cherokee and what was supposed to happen with the Trail of Tears center? Did she ever feel healing from the rift in her relationship with her sister, how did the sale of the artwork benefit the remaining Native Americans living in the mountains? Poorly developed story line and baffling characters... very disappointing.

Alisha says

3.7

Wisteriouswoman says

It kept my interest--I stayed up late trying to finish it. It was an unique of blend of history, art, troubled family relationships, and mystery/thriller.

There were a few things that didn't tie together very well. It would have been nice if she had explained Rose's performance art better. And her relationship with an old lover wasn't understandable. We never find out why she told him she didn't want to sleep with him any more. I wished the sister hadn't been killed off in the beginning. We didn't get to know her. It seemed part of the book was about the contrast between the sisters but we don't get to see that in action.

She explores trust issues as well and the reader wonders: who should Rose trust? Very few people it turns out.

Kate says

Mysterious old house research mystery! Bestill my heart, it's a grown-up, non-supernatural Wait 'Til Helen Comes or The Dollhouse Murders! Rose discovers her sister dead and initially wants to get rid of the house and her feelings in short order, to return to her somewhat impoverished life as a performance artist. Unexpected mysterious murals draw (pun!) her to learn more. Minus one star for too many coincidences and extra bits dragged in at the end, and also because I find it hard to believe that a woman two months behind on her rent would have the credit (not to mention blithe attitude) to spend money the way she does - it's a mismatch for the character whose money attitude seems more like an upper middle class woman's. But despite the flaws, this was addictive and nearly as good as my old standbys. Love.

Susan says

Can I give two different ratings, write two different reviews, for different parts of the same book? Guess not, but I'd like to in this case. Performance artist Rose finds her dead older sister Karen, a college professor, in the historical house she's unexpectedly bought. The house hid secrets, and so did Karen, which Rose struggles to understand. There's also an historical excerpt about the life of the farm wife who lived there in the 19th century. So far so good. But suddenly the novel turns into a treasure hunt, with Rose and the art restorer Karen hired flying and driving around the country as Rose tries to figure out who she can trust (not much of anyone, alas).

R J Mckay says

Sisters Rose and Karen Caffrey couldn't be more different. Where Rose is a free-spirited performance artist, Karen is a down-to-earth college professor. Rose's trip to southern Illinois to visit her sister over the Fourth of July holiday goes horribly wrong when she finds Karen dead in the old farmhouse she has been restoring. It seems her sister died as the result of a fall from a ladder. Rose is equally surprised to find that her sister left her the old farmhouse in her will. Initially, Rose's plan is to sell the place as quickly as possible. But while she is going through the house, packing her sisters personal belongings, she finds one room that has

been decorated with murals on all four walls. Apparently Karen had hired art restorer, Alex Hague to uncover and restore the bizarre paintings. Her curiosity piqued, Rose throws herself into discovering everything she can about the previous owners of the property and the identity of the painter. While Alex slowly works to uncover the final picture, Rose attempts to unravel the story behind the strange images.

The Last Artist is an intriguing and fast-moving novel that keeps the reader turning pages.
