

TINA BAILEY: Balancing Art, Faith, and Life

By [Beth Logan](#)



One of the most appealingly quirky things about living in Savannah is the connections one finds between people in a city of this size. Recently, I met with performing and visual artist Tina Bailey to discuss her current exhibition and upcoming workshop. We discover she attended SCAD with Rob Forbes (dad to Rule of Three Gallery owner Stephanie Forbes) who is currently working in Savannah as a SCAD Ambassador and participating in a full-term residency program, and whose cathartic show “Childish Things” was the subject of my April 20, 2022 column.

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Back when Bailey enrolled at SCAD in 1984, it was a small college of 300 where everyone, including “Paula,” was on a first name basis, and the entire school was housed in one building, now called Poetter Hall.





Bailey stands with her painting "The Company of Women," of which she says, "I was going through an uncertain, difficult time. But in being open and vulnerable, and sharing relationships, we show more power."

Bailey grew up in Springfield, and credits earning her BFA in Illustration from SCAD with introducing her to the world. "It was my first exposure to breaking down stereotypes, and not judging people by what they look like on the outside. I encountered some of the most genuine and amazing people. That was formative for me." With her gentle southern drawl and broad smile, she explains that attending SCAD influenced how she went on to see the world and, "how I connect to people. Everybody has a story. And everybody has a right to be heard and seen."

It is this ability to listen and empathize, blended with her creativity and faith, which has led to over 25 years of helping others to "repair the disconnect between mind, body, spirituality and imagination." Bailey is a visual and performing artist, a certified Trauma-informed Expressive Arts Therapist, an ordained minister, and a Chaplain who works cross-culturally.


We meet in the education building of Savannah's First Baptist Church where her artwork is on display through February 26. She is home for a visit from Bali, Indonesia where she has lived and worked since completing master's degrees in communication and in religious education.

"I grew up doing dance in Effingham County and did some dance work and theater performances at SCAD even though there were no majors in any of that back then. While in college I was the youth director of my home church back in Springfield and had always felt my church work would supplement my art career." She went off to seminary in Texas and did repertory theater work "where I brought a lot of dance and actually did a dance thesis, and that opened up doors in my life to incorporating art and faith." Later, in 2011, she would attain a doctorate in her areas of interest - the intersection of visual art, dance and spirituality.

"In Bali, there is one word that means art/drama/dance. One word for that integration. Those components are not siloed in their culture. For me, that grounding is what enriches my life." Bailey has used this grounding to help others enduring traumatic

situations, to work with West African refugees, displaced people in northern Iraq, at-risk kids in South Carolina, and displaced people in eastern Indonesia.

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Her first trauma-related work was a dance she created and performed at two memorial services following the 2002 Bali nightclub bombings, “one year, one month and one day after 9/11” in which 202 people were killed by “al-Qaeda brain-washed naïve kids.” Afterwards, the British Counsel told her, “Thank you. I’ve had to be strong for so many people and your dance gave me space and permission to cry...I think that’s what started me on my path.” Two years later, following the Asian tsunami, she led a team of artists to work with children to help them create images of their experience. “Each child spoke about their individual piece and in telling their story, they let some of their trauma out.”

Perhaps one of the most intriguing places Bailey has worked is within the prison in Bali where she was invited to assist in a visual arts program initiated by inmates for inmates. Her participation grew into over a decade of mentoring prisoners in multiple prisons through trauma counseling, life skills development, and therapeutic art making.

She speaks about working with Myuran Sukumaran, one of the Bali Nine who became an accomplished artist on death row before his execution by firing squad in 2015. (Recruited by a financier and drug dealer at a Brisbane karaoke bar, the eight young men and one woman who comprise The Bali Nine were young Australians convicted for attempting to smuggle 18lb of heroin out of Indonesia in 2005.) “I went back to the prison the day after he was executed to try to help put things back together. One of the last things he said to me was to not let the art program die.”

A year after Sukumaran’s execution she went to Iraq with an Atlanta-based humanitarian aid nonprofit called Conscience International to work with internally displaced populations. Working through a translator, she held three days of workshops with Christian teenagers and young adults who had been run out of their

villages by ISIS, or Daish as she prefers to call the terrorists. (Use of this name is said to delegitimize the group's claim to be an "Islamic state.") She says the young people "blew me away with their resiliency."

During her time in Bali, Bailey has studied many forms of Indonesian traditional art, dance and music, always having her own art practice outside of the work she does with her clients. In her current exhibition are many paintings of Balinese dancers, her interpretations of bible characters or of the Christ. She is always mindful of cultural appropriation, striving to have authentic spiritual relationships with others, and, although employed through an Atlanta-based Baptist organization, says she was sent to help, and not to convert.

She shows several batik pieces – created by drawing onto fabric with wax and then dying the cloth in multiple steps, before ultimately boiling out all the wax. "My mentor has trained me in a reverse process where you start with the darkest color and come forward." Also on display are numerous watercolors and acrylics, but "oil will mildew in the tropics because of the humidity." Interestingly, she incorporated her own hair into wet gesso to achieve texture in some of her larger works.

Bailey welcomes the public to a discussion and workshop on Saturday, February 24 from 1 to 4pm. She says to bring an instrument if you play one, to wear comfortable clothing to allow for movement, and says art materials will be available. Sign up under the "upcoming events" tab under "news and events" at fbc-sav.org.

And be sure to view her artwork in the education building at 102 West McDonough Street, behind First Baptist Church, Monday – Thursday, 11am and 4pm. It hangs through next weekend. Dr. Tina Bailey can be contacted via her website artworksmindbodyspirit.com



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