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Culture

The High Tide of Creativity

No Boundaries International Artist Colony retreats to this South Beach Bald Head Island destination, November 2 through 16.

By Jamie Lynn Miller



Above, Pam Toll creates in Captain Charlie's No. 1. Top, No Boundaries artists create flashlight art at Captain Charlie's Station on Bald Head Island.

This November, No Boundaries International Artist Colony enters its 14th season on Bald Head Island, as local and international artists leave the distractions of the work-day world to commune and create around the dune-filled horizons of Captain Charlie's. Co-founders Pam Toll and Gayle Tustin are looking forward to the uninterrupted time and space to create.

"It's about the ocean, the meditative sound of the waves, deer in the dunes, seeing the sunrise and sunset over the water — and having the time to work like there's no tomorrow," Tustin says.

Toll elaborates on the transformative power of No Boundaries: "You're surrounded by people who are all the same tribe and you instantly feel at ease," she says. "I'm like a little kid. I don't want to go to bed because I don't want to miss anything!"

For Pam Toll, this includes making time to swim in the sea.

"My work is very physical," Toll says, "and I love water. I recently went to my grandma's 97th birthday in Texas and swam in the Rio Grande," she says with a laugh, recalling her grandmother's surprise. "Once, I followed some dolphins out to sea; I saw their raggedy fins, heard their clicking and the sound of water being pushed out of their air holes. I even had flippers on," she says, laughing. "And finally, this boat came up alongside me and asked if I needed a lift back, because I was out so far."

"I always knew I was somehow going to be an artist," Toll says, "but sabotage and distraction got in the way. I worked at Pearl Paints; I remade clothing for a costume designer — I was always working around art. I studied English and art at Chapel Hill

and ended up teaching high school English in Pender, which ultimately brought me to my knees. Finally, I had my first one-woman show at Duke and I remember saying to myself: 'OK, it's now or never. You want to be an artist. Do it.'

In 1994, Toll boarded a plane for a three-week artist's colony in Macedonia. "I was 39, married with two kids, and at first I was like, 'Oh my God. I don't know anyone here; I don't speak the language, and no one's meeting me. What am I doing?'"

She chuckles, recalling her sense of displacement, which soon gave way to a sense of euphoria at finally feeling like an artist.

"The whole thing was like a dream. I really found out who I was. I was inspired to work harder."

"I've always known I have to challenge myself," she continues. "To make the kind of art I want to make, I have to break out of my patterns. I gotta stick my neck out."

Like her friend Pam Toll, artist and No Boundaries' co-founder Gayle Tustin is similarly moved by water.

"Water has been a paramount influence in my life," Tustin says. "I once sailed the coast of Turkey for two weeks, anchoring over tumbled ruins and mosaic floors. I felt a core connection with the ancient past that I continue to draw on when I'm able to turn myself over to my artist self."

Her artist self started young, in New Castle, Pennsylvania, making collage and paper dolls and dresses. With an eye for detail and an interest in fashion, she was accepted to the



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Above, Artists gather at Bald Head Island's Captain Charlie's Station during No Boundaries. Opposite, Gayle Tustin paints inside Captain Charlie's No 3.

University of Arizona for fashion design, but her parents steered her toward an associate's degree in business, instead.

"After two years of business college, I tried to be in the normal world," Tustin says. "I worked in the offices of Price Waterhouse, Hertz Rent-A-Car, a bank, an eyeglass distributor. None of these jobs felt right. I started taking art classes at night and before too long, I decided to study ceramics at Penn State. Finally, I felt like I fit in."

Giving back through art is paramount to Tustin, who makes donor and memorial ceramic tiles for the Lower Cape Fear Hospice and LifeCare Center in Wilmington for the Safe Passages gardens, and in Whiteville with the six Bountiful Life tile murals.

"I think I'll always be looking for courage to be an artist," she says, on the ebb and flow of creativity.

"Some days I think it's absolutely crazy. What an erratic profession: creating something out of nothing and trying to make a living from the things you make. Especially when you're not a realist."



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