

# ‘ART FOR CHANGE:’ LOCAL ARTIST GINA COLE PAINTS AT-RISK CHILDREN TO SHINE A LIGHT ON THEM

*Cole is holding an art show and fundraiser  
Thursday, Oct. 5 at Water’s Edge Gallery*

## KATE JACOBSON

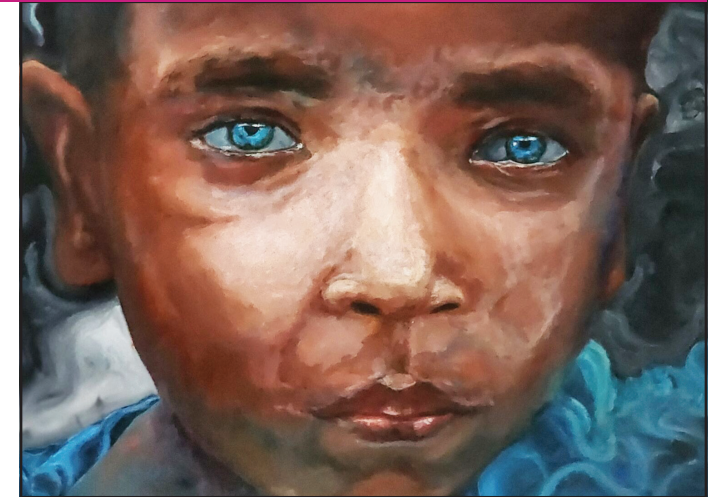
Inspiration can come from anywhere. For Boise-based artist Gina Cole, her inspiration came when watching the Netflix documentary series, “Tales by Light.” The series follows an array of photographers as they travel the world, but one episode in particular caught Cole’s eye: the episode features United Nations Children’s Fund photographer Simon Lister as he documents “impoverished, at-risk” children living and working in the inner city slums of Bangladesh. The story broke Cole’s heart, she said, especially because her own experience growing up in Thailand allowed her “to

understand such issues.” She felt like she had to do something. Ultimately, what Cole decided to do was create a series of paintings — each painting a portrait of one of the children featured in Lister’s episode. Through her artwork, Cole hopes to bring attention to social issues such as child labor and the sexual exploitation of minors. “No one can choose where one was born or in what conditions,” Cole said. “But one can choose to help make a difference in the world we live in.” Cole is hosting an art show and fundraising event, “Art for Change — Children of the World,” to showcase her collection of portraits and raise funds for the United Nations Children’s Fund, also known as UNICEF.

The event will be held at Water’s Edge Gallery at the Riverside Hotel from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 5. Cole’s original portraits won’t be for sale at the event, but prints will be available for custom orders.

The event will also feature a raffle to win items including themed gift baskets, gift cards and donated artworks by other local artists including Fred Choate, Tegwyn Matemaer, Jessie Swimeley and Zella Bardsley. One hundred percent of proceeds from the raffle will be donated to UNICEF.

Admission to the art show is free, but guests should reserve their spot on eventbrite.com. Boise Weekly caught up with Cole via email to learn more about her latest collection of paintings and upcoming show/fundraiser; the following has been gently edited.



GINA COLE  
“A child from Dhaka” painting by Gina Cole. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches.

## HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INTO PAINTING AND ART, IN GENERAL?

My interest in art came by chance when I visited a friend’s house and saw beautiful artworks created by her. I had never held a paint brush before that. That was in the year 2005. Since then, I started taking workshops, classes and practicing a lot. The more I painted the more I discovered my own identity. Painting has allowed me to grow and express my thoughts in ways I couldn’t have. When I graduated from Boise State, I went straight to work full time in Radiology and life became routine; I didn’t feel fulfilled. At that time, I often felt lonely and depressed, missing my family back home in Bangkok. I felt I couldn’t fit into the American society. I couldn’t connect with anyone. Most of the people I knew at that time were on a professional level or just (an) acquaintance. Painting gave me purpose and art became my therapy. My depression slowly disappeared and was replaced with self-confidence and self-love. The turning points came when I met two very special artists, Fred Choate and John Killmaster, who became my mentors and teachers. They both have not only given me lots of encouragement but their kindness and understanding has driven me to turn my passion into a second career.

## WHY IS UNICEF THE ORGANIZATION YOU CHOSE TO BENEFIT THROUGH YOUR EVENT?

UNICEF is a large organization and it has established networks and connections worldwide. The problem we are facing right now in regards to child exploitation is a global problem. UNICEF is providing a place to help these children in need. In a country like Bangladesh, the organization provides shelter and primary education for these children. They can spend a night at the shelter, instead of living on the streets. Many young children are homeless and their livelihood is vulnerable and at-risk — the organization provides them a safe place to stay and gives them an education so they can have a better future.

## Art for Change

**5:30 PM** Thursday, Oct. 5, 2023  
Water’s Edge Gallery  
Riverside Hotel  
2900 W. Chinden Blvd.  
Garden City, ID 83714

*A solo show by artist Gina Cole to raise funding and awareness for the at-risk and exploited children living in impoverished areas around the world who are supported through Unicef.*



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## WHAT WAS IT ABOUT SIMON LISTER'S EPISODE OF "TALES BY LIGHT" THAT MADE YOU WANT TO DO THIS PROJECT?

The documentary hit home for me. Growing up in Thailand, I saw poverty everywhere. When I was growing up, I saw kids about my age begging for money or asking for food. They lived on the street and most of them had nowhere to go and no family. I was young then but I often thought about why they had to live on the street. I wanted to help but I didn't have any resources then. When I saw the documentary, I cried. I could relate to their experience and how hard it must be to live such a difficult life. I didn't sleep that night and my thoughts were racing. I knew I had to do something and it was that split second thought that I felt I had to connect with Lister. In what way could I help and use my knowledge or skills to help? The idea of painting their portraits and shining the light on them came to my mind so I sent an email that night to Lister telling him what I wanted to do and the very next day, there it was, Lister's email responding back to me. I was overjoyed. I was in tears. I have since been in contact with him throughout the process. He has seen some of my paintings as we connected through social media and emails — he was overjoyed and very supportive.

## WAS IT EVER DIFFICULT TO PAINT THESE CHILDREN AND REFLECT THEIR STORY IN YOUR WORK WITHOUT EVER MEETING THEM?

Not at all. Painting portraits comes natural to me and the fact that I could relate to these children from the life and experience living in Thailand, I feel connected to them and appreciate the life and hardship these children must have gone through. Growing up there allowed me to relate with the children I painted, despite not knowing or seeing them in person.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER ARTISTS/PAINTERS THAT INSPIRE YOU?

As I mentioned above, John and Fred. As for master painters and their works, one that I really look up and refer to the most is Lucien Freud, the British painter. His works inspire me a lot.

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? DO YOU HAVE ANY SIMILAR PROJECTS LINED UP OR IN THE WORKS?

This project will continue. It has always been my plan from



GINA COLE  
"Girl with blue eyes" painting by Gina Cole. Mixed media oil and hand stitches on canvas. 24 x 30 inches.

the beginning to exhibit this elsewhere in Asia or any other part of the U.S. I don't know how or when yet, but I know the opportunity will come. My next exhibition for this project is scheduled to be at Crossroad Carnegie Center in Baker City in November of next year. Apart from that, I will continue to volunteer my time giving art classes to the veterans at (the Boise Veterans Affairs Medical Center) and creating more works.

## DIGGIN' IT: LET'S DIG A HOLE



### MARY ANN NEWCOMER

Now we are getting really down and dirty, folks. Get your gloves, shovel, hori hori knife, and a bucket for the weeds you will reap while planting ... BULBS!!!! Yes, I mentioned ordering them in an earlier column. Uh-huh, oh yes, I did.

I also mentioned shopping local at Edwards, FarWest, Neon, and Franz Witte and scouting

big box stores like Lowe's Home Depot and Costco. You can do this. I know you can. First timers? Go bold with the daffodils. Daffodils are tough as nails; most tend to "naturalize" or multiply right where they are planted. Squirrels, voles, and yellow-bellied marmots will not generally dig them up because they are poisonous. Or if they do, it's probably the last daffodil they dig for dinner.

When purchasing bulbs locally, select plump, firm, and blemish-free bulbs. Many have little tunics or "skins" like onions, and some of the skins may have fallen away. This isn't a problem as long as the bulb is nice looking and free of soft spots. If you cannot get them in the ground within a couple days of buying them, store them in a cool, dry location in mesh bags or containers with holes.

Believe it or not, soil temperatures have cooled down, and you can plant from now until Nov. 1. By planting in the fall, you

give the embryonic flower inside the bulb the cold it needs to work its magic. Hopefully, a healthy root system will develop before the ground freezes.

Follow the instructions on the package of bulbs. It will tell you how deep to plant and how far apart. Plant about an inch deeper than the package recommends if you are planting in jumbo (at least 20 inches across) containers. I also tend to fudge a bit on how close my bulbs are, especially in containers. And don't ever let me catch you planting bulbs in a row. Unless you are doing a thousand of them in rows, together, in a grand fashion. Straight lines and bulbs are ugly and do not mix. My husband once planted a bag of red tulips in a row in front of the house to set my hair on fire.

I love mixing two, three, four, or more kinds of daffodils in a box or bucket. Then, plant them. And please don't get fussy about the four-inch-apart notion. It looks better if some are close and "in clumps."

Prepare the flower bed, amending the soil if needed. Dig to the recommended depth, and don't cheat. Everything will be fine if you go a half inch or one inch deeper. I like to dig a large area where the bulbs are going and actually remove the soil, so I have a big hole. Add your bulb fertilizer as per the package instructions. I've been known to mix sand or lava into heavy soils for good drainage. Just don't overdo the amendments. I toss the appropriate number of bulbs into the hole and let them stay where they fall. Remember, pointy ends UP! You get a much more natural look that way. Fill the area with the soil you removed earlier, and tamp down gently but firmly.

Old trick: I like to use wooden popsicle sticks with a fine-tip black Sharpie to mark what I planted and where. Have those at the ready when you cover up the bulbs.

If it is really dry, I water thoroughly and let the water soak in and down about six inches. That should be enough until spring when you see the tips of the bulbs popping up.

Happy planting.



MARY ANN NEWCOMER  
Left: Tulips in Holland: always something new.  
Top right: At Keukenhof (a Dutch tulip festival), they really mix it up.  
Bottom right: Mixed bulbs, a gorgeous way to plant them.