

## **Bearing Witness in Color:**

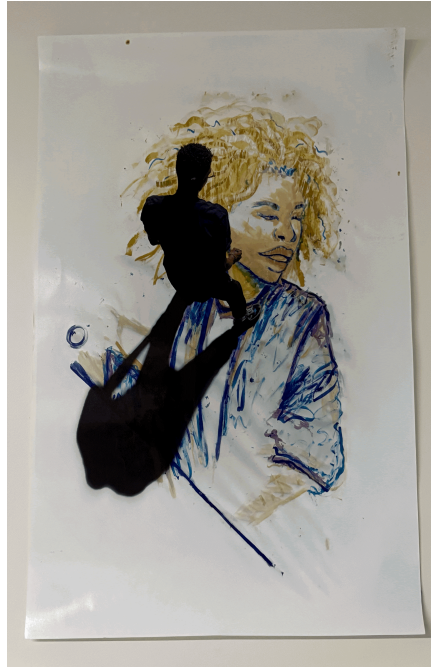
### **How Black Artists in Las Vegas Turn Trauma into Healing**

By: Alexis Guzman

In Las Vegas, where creativity shapes the city's identity, local artists are turning to their craft as a pathway to healing. Painters, dancers, writers, and musicians are using art to process trauma, both personal and cultural, revealing how creative expression can serve as a powerful tool for recovery and self-understanding.

Visual storytelling has long served as a means of documenting injustice, amplifying marginalized voices, and preserving collective memory in the face of dominant narratives. In moments of racial violence, protest, and public grief, images. Whether it's documented in photographs, smartphone videos, or visual art, it often becomes the primary way the public encounters truth. In Las Vegas, Black artists continue this tradition by using art not only to bear witness, but to heal themselves and their communities while reclaiming control over how their stories are told.

During an interview with Perry Porter, as we strolled through his art gallery, I asked him to elaborate on one of his pieces. He then smirked and said, "This is actually a collab.. I was working on the mural when one of my buddies came by and took a photo of me painting. So it's actually a capture of art within art."



Mixed-media portrait presented at the Playhouse Art Gallery. Dec 11, 2025.

The image reflects more than technique, it embodies how documentation and creation merge to preserve lived experience. For Porter, art has always been personal. He began creating at a very young age. By the age of sixteen, he transformed his closet into a studio where he could create, escape, and experiment. Over time, that private space evolved into a communal one, where others could connect, relate, and feel seen.

“As an artist, people expect me to be a street-ally skater dude,” Porter says. “As a musician, people compare me to artists like Tyler, the Creator—which I don’t identify with at all, especially for what I stand for and produce” (P. Porter, personal communication, December 11, 2025).



Artwork and a promotional poster for artist Perry Porter hang on a gallery wall during his residency exhibition, where his paintings explore themes of identity, healing, and Black joy through layered color and abstract portraiture. Dec. 11, 2025.

His work resists these narrow expectations, instead centering introspection, vulnerability, and cultural memory. The role of visual storytelling as both healing and resistance has deep historical roots. In *Bearing Witness While Black*, scholar Allissa V. Richardson explains how smartphones empower Black Americans to reclaim narrative authority by documenting injustice outside traditional news institutions. This form of mobile journalism functions as a contemporary

extension of Black witnessing, allowing everyday people to challenge misrepresentation and demand accountability.

Yet this impulse predates digital media. According to Kyra Chambers, visual expression has long served as a vital language for Black communities, particularly when speech, authorship, and public voice were systematically denied. From the artistic practices of enslaved individuals to the Harlem Renaissance's celebration of Black life, art has preserved memory, asserted humanity, and fostered resilience across generations.

This intergenerational role of art as healing was echoed during a recent panel on racial healing and the arts. Speakers emphasized that creative expression is often rooted in ancestral tradition and ritual, serving as a grounding force in the face of trauma. Jerry Thao highlighted the importance of acknowledging ancestral struggles and dreams, explaining that doing so allows individuals to live their “sacred purpose” while remaining resilient. Winter Brianne reflected on how affirming cultural identity builds the confidence needed to challenge injustice.

Natalia Cisneros described visual art as both meditation and vessel, allowing creators to process pain while inviting audiences into empathy and understanding.

“Art has always been a healing practice,” Cisneros said. “It’s your story—you can’t take it away” (Kellogg Foundation, 2020).

Across generations, Black artists have used visual storytelling to confront erasure, transform grief, and reclaim agency. During the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, art became inseparable from activism, reframing creative expression as an ethical practice aligned with liberation. Today, this legacy continues through galleries, performances, and digital

platforms that mirror the decentralized nature of smartphone journalism, offering artists greater autonomy in how Black life is represented. For Porter, this lineage comes with responsibility.

“Yes, I feel like it’s my duty,” he says. “To put back into my community and reach other Black individuals who want to grow creatively” (P. Porter, personal communication, December 11, 2025).

His exhibitions resonate deeply with the Black community, more specifically towards Black women, amplifying experiences often overlooked in mainstream art spaces. By centering lived experience and intergenerational narratives, Porter creates environments that foster dialogue, validation, and collective healing.

From ancestral rituals to contemporary galleries, visual storytelling remains a powerful form of testimony and transformation. In Las Vegas, Black artists, such as Perry Porter are not only creating art, they are preserving memory, confronting injustice, and nurturing resilience. Through image, intention, and creativity, they ensure that personal and collective stories are not only seen, but remembered.



Framed watercolor paintings by artist Perry Porter are displayed at the Playhouse Art Gallery.

Dec 11, 2025.

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