

VoyageLA

Rising Stars: Meet Carla Jay Harris of San Pedro
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Today we'd like to introduce you to Carla Jay Harris.

Hi Carla Jay, it's an honor to have you on the platform. Thanks for taking the time to share your story with us – to start maybe you can share some of your backstory with our readers?

I grew up in a military family, so home was always changing. Before I was an adult, I had lived throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. While I didn't realize it at the time, constantly starting over shaped the way I see the world. I became fascinated by the idea of home, the places and people we carry with us, and the ways our identities are formed through memory rather than geography.

As a quiet kid, art became my way of making sense of those experiences. My first creative love was cinema. I was captivated by the way film could transport people into another world and tell deeply human stories through image, atmosphere, and emotion. That interest eventually led me to photography, where I found a way to create narratives through still images. Looking back, I can see that many of the questions I explore today began during those years of constant transition.

I eventually earned my MFA from UCLA, and after moving to Los Angeles my work began to shift. While photography remains the foundation of my practice, I found myself wanting to build worlds rather than simply document them. I began incorporating collage, textiles, drawing, and installation to create layered environments where personal narratives and collective memory could exist together. Los Angeles, with its rich history of migration, reinvention, and cultural exchange, became an important source of inspiration and helped shape the direction of my work.

Today, my practice explores migration, memory, labor, and belonging through immersive visual storytelling. Much of my work draws from overlooked histories and the everyday experiences of Black and brown communities, asking how identity is carried across generations and how memory shapes our understanding of place.

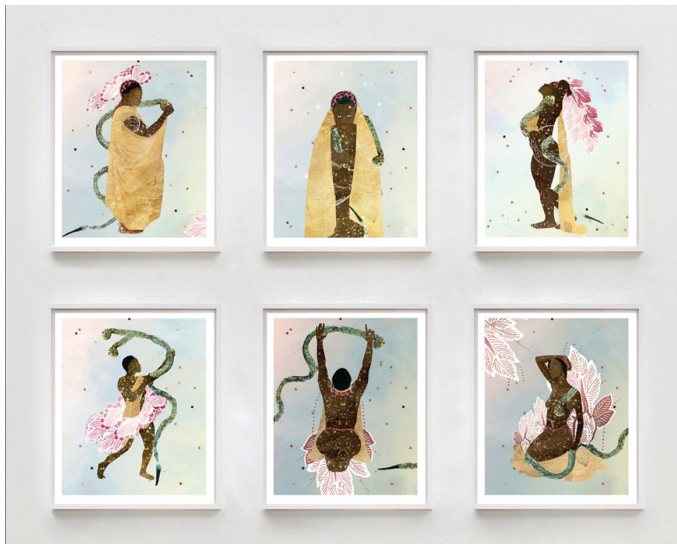


Window to the World, 2020, ink on vinyl 10x20 ft

Public art has become an especially meaningful part of my practice because it allows these conversations to happen outside of traditional gallery spaces. I love creating work that people encounter in hospitals, parks, transit stations, and other civic spaces where art becomes part of everyday life. Alongside my studio practice, I've worked as a creative project manager leading large, collaborative creative initiatives. That experience has strengthened my ability to listen, collaborate, and bring together many voices while staying true to a creative vision.

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***The Snake Bearers*, 2020, six Inkjet prints, 10x8 in each**

artists who are able to devote all of their time to the studio.

At the same time, having a career outside of my art has given me something incredibly valuable: the freedom to develop my work on my own terms. I haven't felt pressured to make work based solely on what the market wants. I've been able to let my practice evolve slowly, follow my curiosity, and take creative risks that might not have been possible otherwise.

Longevity has become one of the most important lessons I've learned. An artistic career isn't built in a single exhibition or commission. It's built over decades through consistency, persistence, and continuing to show up, even when progress feels slow.

I'm still learning how to balance everything, but I've stopped thinking of it as a race. My goal isn't simply to make more work. It's to make work that is honest, meaningful, and worth the time it takes to create.

Alright, so let's switch gears a bit and talk business. What should we know about your work?

I'm less interested in documenting history than in exploring how history is remembered. My work examines how the stories we preserve, the ones we forget, and even the ones we imagine shape our sense of identity and belonging.

I work across photography, collage, textiles, and installation because each medium offers a different way to think about memory. Photography grounds the work in lived experience, while collage allows me to layer fragments of history, place, and imagination into something entirely new. I often draw from archives, family photographs, oral histories, and community research, but my goal isn't to reconstruct the past. It's to create images that feel emotionally familiar and invite viewers to reflect on their own histories.

Looking back, I don't think there was a single moment when I decided to become an artist. It's been a gradual journey of following my curiosity. Every project brings me back to the same questions: What do we choose to remember? What gets lost? And how can art help us feel more connected to one another?

We all face challenges, but looking back would you describe it as a relatively smooth road?

It definitely hasn't been a smooth road. I think one of the biggest challenges for many artists is not simply making art, but figuring out how to sustain a creative life over the long term.

I've spent much of my career balancing my studio practice with full-time work. That has meant making art early in the morning, late at night, and on weekends. There have been periods when I questioned whether I was moving fast enough or producing enough. It's easy to compare yourself to



***Sphinx*, 2018, Inkjet print on two panels, 40x30 in each**

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What I'm most proud of is creating work that resonates across different audiences. Whether someone encounters it in a gallery, a hospital, or a public space, I hope they find a point of connection that encourages them to think differently about where they come from and what they carry forward.

I think what sets my work apart is that it lives in the space between fact and memory. Rather than offering a single narrative, I create layered visual worlds where personal stories and collective history intersect, leaving room for viewers to bring their own experiences into the work.

Is there something surprising that you feel even people who know you might not know about?

One thing that surprises people is that I didn't begin my career studying art. I studied business as an undergraduate and spent years building a professional career before deciding to pursue an MFA in my thirties.

For a long time, art was something I made alongside everything else. Eventually, I realized it had become more than a creative outlet. It had become the way I wanted to engage with the world. I also realized that, while my career was fulfilling in many ways, I was missing the sense of passion and purpose that I found in the studio. Going back to graduate school was my way of committing fully to that part of myself.

Looking back, I don't see those years as a detour. My experiences outside the art world have shaped the artist I am today. They've influenced how I think about collaboration, community, and bringing ambitious ideas to life.

That journey also taught me that there isn't one path to becoming an artist. Some people know from an early age exactly what they want to do. My path was less direct, and I'm grateful for that. I entered graduate school with a broader perspective, a clearer sense of purpose, and life experiences that continue to shape my work today.

If there's one thing I hope people take from my story, it's that it's never too late to choose the life that feels most authentic to you.



Brandon, 2016, Inkjet print, 36x24 in



Bitter Earth, 2018, mixed media installation, dimensions variable



The Ways of Gods, 2020, hand-embellished Inkjet print, 30x40 in