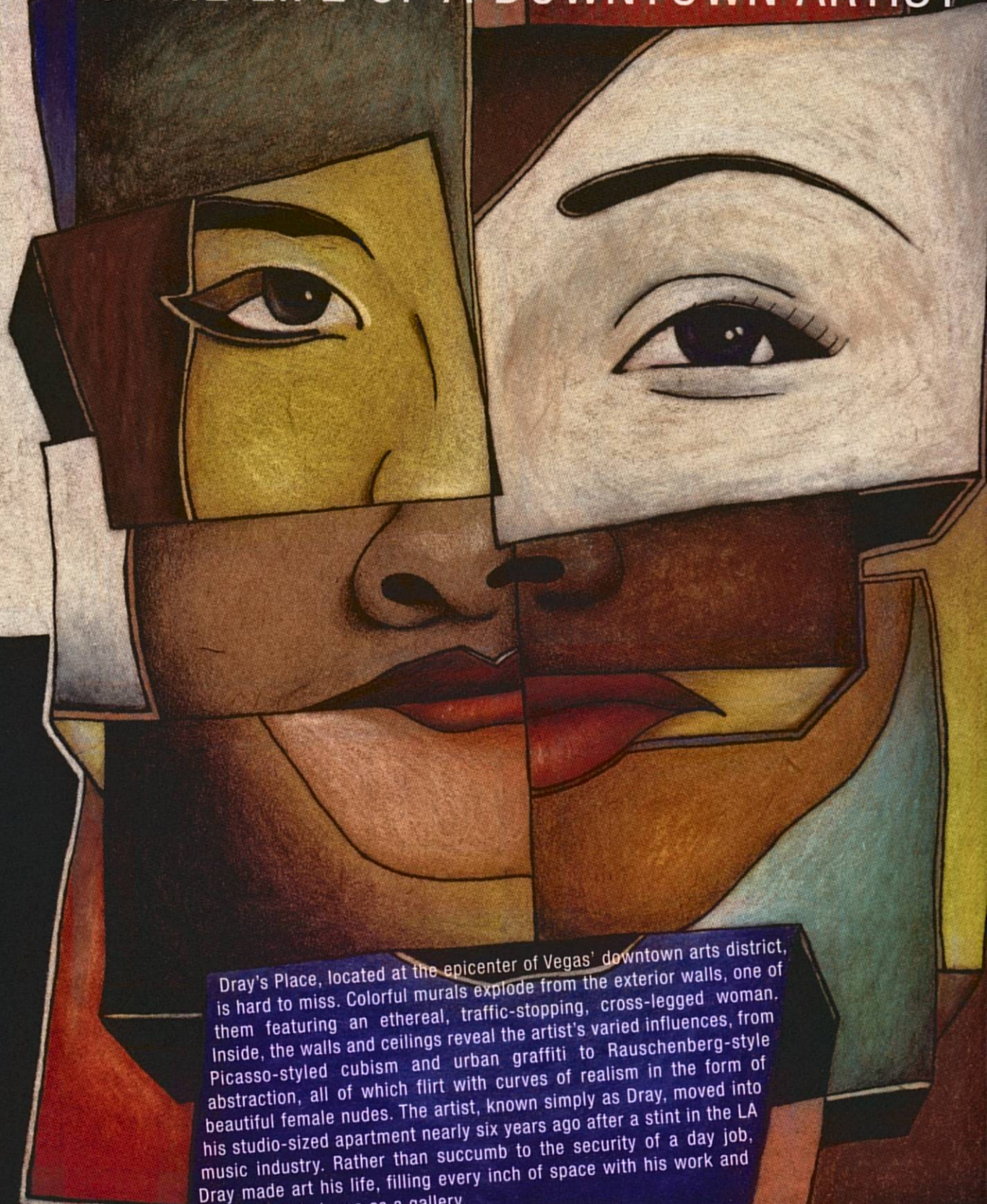


# DRAY DAYS

LIVING THE LIFE OF A DOWNTOWN ARTIST

BY KELLI SCHILLACI PHOTOGRAPHY BY REBECCA GUENTHER STRIP SEARCH



Dray's Place, located at the epicenter of Vegas' downtown arts district, is hard to miss. Colorful murals explode from the exterior walls, one of them featuring an ethereal, traffic-stopping, cross-legged woman. Inside, the walls and ceilings reveal the artist's varied influences, from Picasso-styled cubism and urban graffiti to Rauschenberg-style abstraction, all of which flirt with curves of realism in the form of beautiful female nudes. The artist, known simply as Dray, moved into his studio-sized apartment nearly six years ago after a stint in the LA music industry. Rather than succumb to the security of a day job, Dray made art his life, filling every inch of space with his work and opening up his home as a gallery.



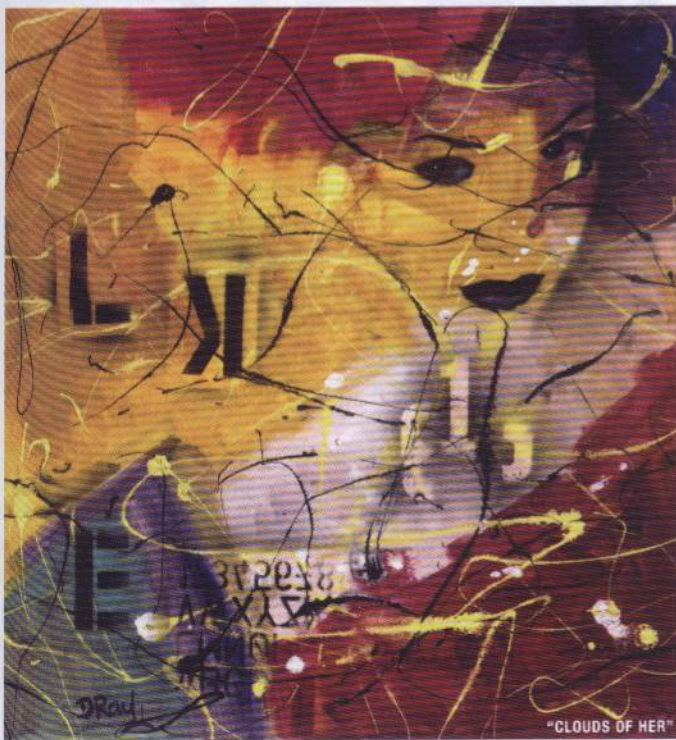
Across the street, an outer wall of the Funk House antique shop features a slot-themed work the artist was commissioned to paint as part of Las Vegas' "City of 100 Murals" Centennial project. Dray's most recent collaboration was with 300 local fourth-graders who helped design a sand wall mural that now decorates a stretch of I-95 (at Valley View) and celebrates both the city's 100th birthday and the Las Vegas Springs Preserve.

Dray compares the continued cultural growth of downtown to places like Los Angeles' trendy Los Feliz area, where he was recently commissioned to decorate the walls and tables of chic patio café El Greco. Los Feliz has developed into a boho mecca of coffee houses, boutiques and cafés inhabited by actors, musicians and artists, all of which Dray would like to see more of in his own neighborhood.

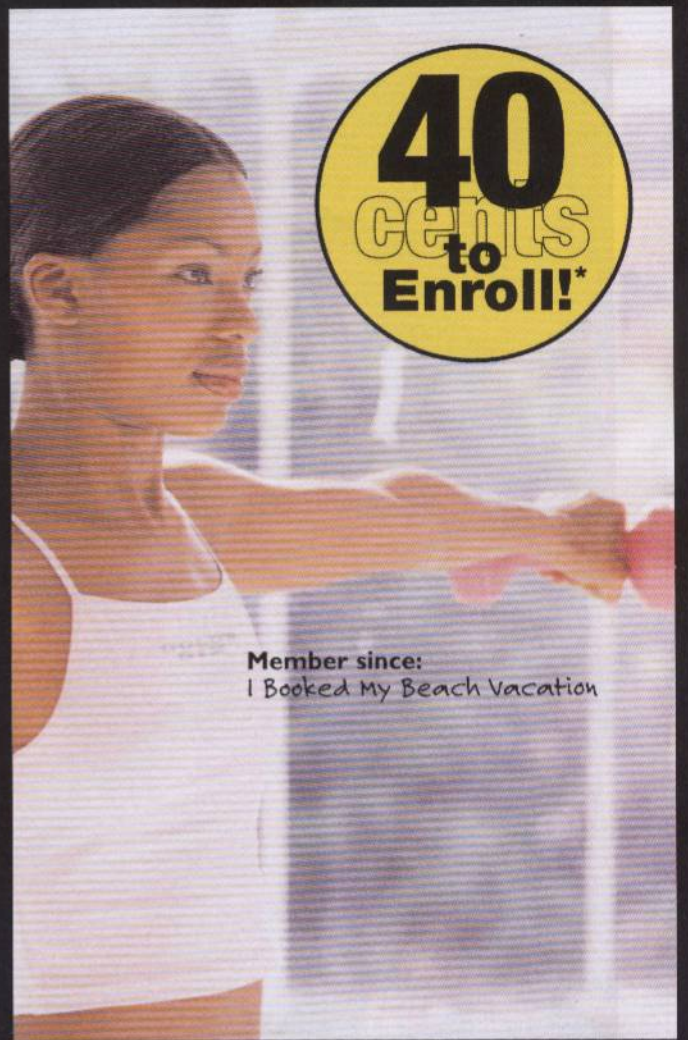
"There are a couple of things I'd still like to still see downtown," says Dray. "Coffee shops, bookstores, that kind of thing."

Dray has been working with local musicians to create an ongoing club event featuring live collaborations between DJs, musicians and artists. Meanwhile, he continues to watch as high-rise condominiums grow upward in what used to be some of the city's least desirable real estate.

Dray is optimistic about the influx of new, wealthy neighbors. "New condos have a lot of wall space," Dray says, as if already picturing his new work. Until then, he's happy to open his doors to friends and tourists alike, assured in his theory that while Vegas' art scene is still in its infancy, it's poised to explode in a very big way. He's stoked to be along for the ride.



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