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MAX DAMIAN'S

VISIONARY AERIAL ART



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Max Damian's journey from aerialist to photographer is a testament to artistic evolution. In this interview, he shares the inspiration behind *Floralism*, his groundbreaking coffee table book that transforms aerial performers into floral illusions, blending movement, photography, and personal expression into breathtaking art.

In our new groundbreaking series *DEI and the Road Ahead*, Holly Reese shares her insights on the challenges, misconceptions, and future of DEI, emphasizing values-driven leadership, corporate responsibility, allyship, and the need for sustainable, inclusive practices in today's evolving landscape.



Russ White & Garrett Pattiani
Publishers, QVegas & QLife Media



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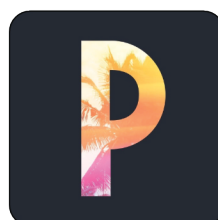
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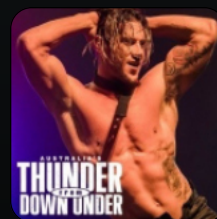
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ART IN FLIGHT

MAX DAMIAN'S *FLORIALISM* BRINGS AERIALISTS TO LIFE IN STUNNING IMAGERY

At QVegas Magazine, we celebrate artists who push the boundaries of creativity and redefine artistic expression. One such visionary is Max Damian, a former aerial performer who has transitioned into the world of photography, capturing breathtaking images that merge movement with visual storytelling. His latest work, *Florialism*, is a coffee table book that transforms aerialists suspended in silks into mesmerizing floral illusions. Through the lens of his camera, Max creates images that mimic petals in motion, offering a fresh perspective on both photography and aerial artistry.

Now, Las Vegas audiences have the unique opportunity to experience *Florialism* in person. On March 15, Max will showcase his work at Gipsy Nightclub as part of a special collaboration with Slonina ARTSpace for Canvas and Cocktails. This one-night-only event will bring *Florialism* to life, immersing guests in a world of color, motion, and breathtaking visuals. But Max's artistic journey extends far beyond this project, spanning a career in performance, photography, and directing that has taken him across the globe.

From Buenos Aires to the World Stage

Born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Max discovered his passion for the arts at a young age. Despite an early interest in ballet, his dreams were delayed due to family circumstances. "I grew up in a divided household," Max recalls. "My father was very religious and traditional, while my mother had a more free-spirited approach to life. It took time before I could truly explore my creative side."

Though he was unable to pursue ballet, Max found himself drawn to physical expression through fitness and later modeling. At just 18, he landed on the cover of an Argentine gay magazine, which catapulted him into the nightlife scene as a go-go dancer. "That magazine cover changed everything," he says. "One moment I was just a gym-going teenager, and the next, I was being booked in nightclubs."

It was during his time performing in Argentina's nightclub scene that Max first encountered aerial silks. A fellow performer invited him to join circus training sessions, and the experience was transformative. "The moment I touched the silks, it felt natural," he explains. "Aerial performance became my way of expressing movement in a way that felt both powerful and graceful."

Aerial Acrobatics and Cirque Dreams

Max Damian's career took him from Argentina to Mexico, where he continued to hone his aerial skills while teaching at a circus school. A short trip turned into three years as he immersed himself in Mexico's growing performance industry, taking part in musicals, cabaret shows, and high-profile productions.

His talent eventually brought him to the United States, where he began working in Los Angeles as an aerial instructor at Hollywood Aerial Arts. His performances caught the attention of major industry figures, including Dorian Sanchez, a renowned choreographer and creative director for Cher. Sanchez invited him to audition for Cher's Las Vegas residency, and he landed a role in her show at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. "Working with Cher was a dream," he reflects. "It was a defining moment in my career."

While performing with Cher, Max also pursued opportunities with Cirque du Soleil. After multiple auditions, he was cast as

Join Max Damian for two exclusive *Florialism* exhibitions at Gipsy Nightclub on March 15, presented in partnership with Slonina ARTSpace, and at Slonina ARTSpace on March 8th and on display through April 7th. These events will showcase the stunning visuals of *Florialism* in an immersive setting.



an original performer for Cirque's nightclub experience, Light at Mandalay Bay. Later, he joined the cast of Michael Jackson ONE by Cirque du Soleil, where he performed as a solo rope artist for four years.

A Transition into Photography

As his career progressed, Max recognized the importance of preparing for life beyond performing. "As artists, we often don't think about what comes next until it's too late," he says. Determined to establish a second career, he enrolled in photography courses at East Los Angeles College while still performing on stage.

Though he initially kept his photography and aerial careers separate, a chance photoshoot with a fellow aerialist changed everything. "A friend convinced me to photograph her on red silks, and one of the images we captured looked exactly like a blooming flower," he recalls. "That moment sparked the concept of Floralism."

Over the next five years, Max developed the concept, photographing 93 aerial artists in Las Vegas and beyond. "It became a love letter to my community," he says. "Every artist featured in the book represents a part of my journey, a part of the evolution of aerial artistry."

The Art of Floralism

In traditional art, Floralism refers to the depiction of flowers and natural elements in creative works. Max reimagines this concept by using the human body as the canvas. In his images, aerialists take on shapes that resemble petals, vines, and blossoms, their movements frozen in time to create ethereal illusions.

For Max, Floralism is not just about aesthetics—it's a deeply personal exploration of identity, transformation, and the interplay between strength and delicacy. "As a queer artist, this work is an embrace of both my masculine and feminine sides," he explains. "The fluidity of movement, the softness of the compositions—there's something beautifully non-binary about the entire project."

The book also serves as a testament to the resilience of aerial artists. "The industry has grown tremendously since I started," Max notes. "But financial support for performers hasn't kept pace. I wanted to create something that immortalizes these artists and the incredible dedication they bring to their craft."

Bringing Floralism to Life in Las Vegas

On March 15, Floralism will take center stage at Gipsy Nightclub in a special one-

night exhibition. Presented in partnership with Slonina ARTSpace, the event will offer attendees a chance to experience Max's work in an immersive setting.

"The space at Gipsy is perfect for this type of exhibition," Max says. "Guests can expect a vibrant atmosphere filled with color, texture, and the energy of blooming artistry." The event will feature a curated selection of prints from the book, a live DJ, and a sushi bar, making it a multisensory experience.

As a playful nod to the book's theme, guests are encouraged to dress in floral-inspired outfits, turning the evening into a celebration of nature, movement, and expression. "It's not just an art show," he adds. "It's a night to come together, celebrate life, and appreciate the beauty of human motion."

A Legacy of Creativity

Looking ahead, Max has no plans to slow down. While Floralism marks his first published book, he hints at future projects that explore darker, more abstract themes. "I love working in series," he says. "Each project allows me to dive deeper into a concept, to push the boundaries of what's possible."

He also hopes to see continued evolution in the performing arts industry. "I want to see performers paid what they're worth," he asserts. "Entertainment is evolving, but we need to ensure that artists are supported financially so they can continue creating at the highest level."

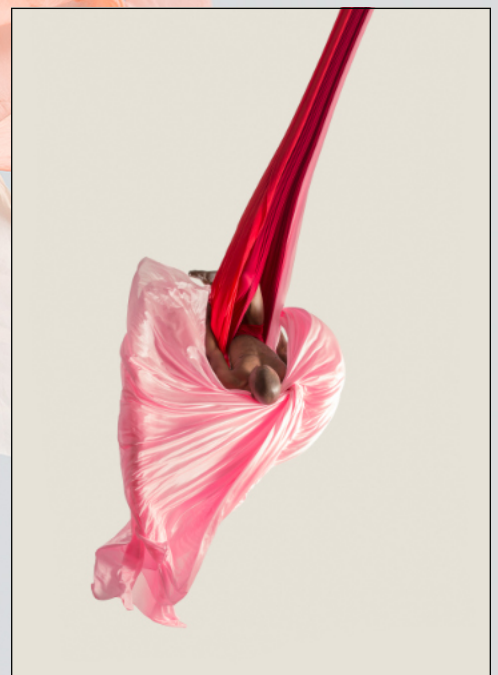
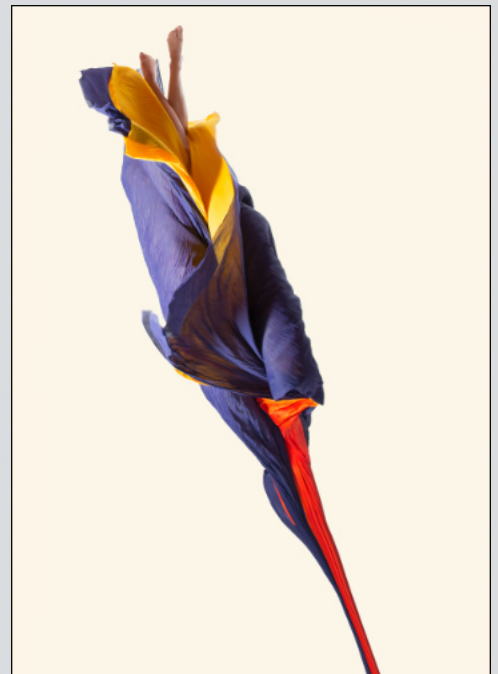
For aspiring queer creatives looking to carve out a space in the art world, Max offers simple but powerful advice: "Don't give up. It's not always easy, but the world needs your perspective. Keep pushing boundaries, keep creating, and trust that your work has value."

Experience Floralism

Join Max Damian for an exclusive Floralism art exhibition at Gipsy Nightclub on March 15, presented in partnership with Slonina ARTSpace. This one-night-only event will showcase the stunning visuals of Floralism in an immersive setting.

For those unable to attend in person, Floralism is available for purchase online, allowing art lovers to bring the beauty of aerial artistry into their homes.

Stay connected with Max Damian via Instagram at [@max_damian_photography](#) and [@VerseConcepts](#), or visit his website at [verseconcepts.com](#) to explore more.





HOLLY REESE

Senior Director of Programming at The Center

In recent years, conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become a focal point in corporate, nonprofit, and community spaces. However, in today's political and social climate, DEI efforts are facing increasing scrutiny, with funding restrictions, policy changes, and public discourse challenging the very foundation of these initiatives. To gain deeper insight into the challenges and the future of DEI, we sat down with Holly Reese, Senior Director of Programming at The Center, to discuss the importance of inclusion, the misconceptions surrounding DEI, and what organizations can do to sustain meaningful progress in this space.

The Journey to Advocacy

A Personal Mission to Help Others

Holly Reese's path to advocacy and leadership in DEI was shaped by deeply personal experiences. "My journey started long before I had a title for it," Reese reflects. "I'm a survivor of sexual assault and domestic violence, and I've navigated many challenges in life, starting from my youth." These experiences, rather than breaking her, fueled a passion for creating systemic change and ensuring that marginalized voices are heard and protected.

Beyond her personal survival, her role as a mother to a child with Rett syndrome deeply influenced her understanding of advocacy, accessibility, and inclusion. "My daughter needed full-time care, and our home often resembled an ICU unit," she shares. "Through her, I learned what it meant to fight for resources, support, and recognition. She taught me how to be an advocate."

That experience became the foundation of her work at The Center LV, where she initially focused on advocacy for individuals in crisis. "When I started here, I saw a huge gap in services for victims of crime—particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals, trans people, and male survivors of sexual violence. The shelters were built on an outdated model where women were assumed to be the only victims and men the only perpetrators. There was nowhere for a trans person to go, no support groups for men who had experienced sexual assault, and no real options for LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic violence."

Through her efforts, she worked to bridge these gaps, build relationships, and push organizations to acknowledge the necessity of true inclusivity. "At the time, DEI wasn't even the term we used. It was just the fundamental idea that we can't

claim to serve a community if we're leaving people out."

The Current Challenges Facing DEI

The Political and Social Backlash

"DEI is at a critical turning point," Reese notes. "We've seen organizations work tirelessly to integrate equity, inclusion, and belonging into their structures. But now, we're facing a wave of pushback. Funding is being cut, policies are shifting, and organizations are struggling to adapt."

Part of this backlash comes from misconceptions about what DEI actually is. "There's this idea being pushed that DEI is about exclusion rather than inclusion, or that it forces organizations to prioritize identity over merit. But that's a misrepresentation. At its core, DEI is simply about creating environments where everyone—regardless of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ability—has a fair opportunity to succeed."

Reese emphasizes that many organizations are now at a crossroads. "The challenge now is, how do we continue our work when 'DEI' has become a weaponized term? How do we ensure organizations can stay true to their mission without being derailed by political rhetoric?"

She adds that many organizations that once proudly embraced DEI are now reassessing their commitment due to political pressure and shifting financial incentives. "The reality is, some businesses are pulling back not because they don't believe in DEI, but because they fear the backlash. We need to create a framework that allows companies and organizations to remain committed without becoming a target."

Redefining DEI for the Future

Moving Beyond Buzzwords

For DEI to survive and thrive, Reese believes organizations need to reframe the conversation. "A lot of the language we use—terms like 'woke' and even 'DEI' itself—has been co-opted and turned into political talking points. But the principles behind DEI remain vital. We have to shift the focus from compliance-driven DEI to values-driven leadership."

What does that mean in practice? "It means embedding fairness, dignity, and inclusion into every aspect of organizational culture. Instead of viewing DEI as an external requirement, we need to make it the foundation of how we operate. That means integrating it into policies, leadership training, hiring processes, and community engagement strategies."

She argues that we should focus on storytelling and human connection rather than relying solely on data. "Numbers are important, but people connect with stories.

If we want DEI to resonate, we need to show real-world examples of how inclusion benefits everyone."

The Role of Allies and Corporate Partners

As corporations become targets of anti-DEI movements, many are questioning their role in continuing this work. "Corporate partners have a huge role to play, but they need to move beyond performative gestures," Reese says. "It's no longer about checking a box during Pride Month or holding a one-off DEI training. It's about embedding these values into how they do business."

For allies, the role is just as critical. "We need allies to speak up in spaces where we may not be heard. If you're in a boardroom and someone makes a dismissive remark about pronouns or diversity hiring, challenge it. The responsibility of dismantling discrimination shouldn't fall solely on marginalized groups. True allyship means calling out injustice even when it's uncomfortable."

She also highlights the power of economic pressure. "Consumers have power. If companies are dropping DEI because of backlash, then support the businesses that are standing firm in their values. Money talks."

Looking Ahead: The Future of DEI

From Trend to Standard Practice

"For DEI to truly be effective, we need to shift it from an 'initiative' to a standard of care," Reese explains. "That means moving away from reactionary compliance and instead embedding inclusion into the DNA of an organization. It's about fostering workplaces and communities that are equitable by design, not as an afterthought."

She sees the current backlash as an opportunity to reimagine DEI. "If we strip away the buzzwords and focus on the essence—creating fair, ethical, and inclusive environments—we can bypass the politics and focus on making real change."

A Call to Action

Reese leaves us with a clear takeaway: "Organizations, businesses, and individuals must commit to the work, not just the language. Inclusion isn't a trend—it's a necessary foundation for a just society. We don't move forward by abandoning these principles. We move forward by refining them, adapting, and ensuring that inclusion, fairness, and dignity remain at the core of everything we do."

In a time where DEI is being challenged more than ever, it's not about fighting to keep the acronym alive—it's about keeping its spirit alive in every action we take.

DEI AND THE ROAD AHEAD

AN EXCLUSIVE SERIES
BY QVEGAS

DEI and the Road Ahead is a new editorial series that will spotlight influential leaders across the Las Vegas community, exploring the evolving impact of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in their industries and lives. Through these conversations, we will highlight how these changemakers have championed DEI initiatives, the challenges they've faced, and why they remain committed to fostering inclusive spaces. From corporate executives and nonprofit advocates to entertainers and policymakers, this series will shed light on the lasting importance of DEI in shaping the future of Las Vegas—ensuring that progress isn't just a trend but a sustained movement.

Presidential Actions Against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In the past 30 days, President Donald Trump has implemented several measures aimed at dismantling Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives across various sectors:

Executive Order 14151: On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14151, titled "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing." This order mandated the elimination of all DEI programs within the federal government, including the dissolution of "Chief Diversity Officer" positions and the termination of equity-related grants and contracts.

Rescission of Executive Order 11246: On January 21, 2025, President Trump rescinded Executive Order 11246, originally signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, which had prohibited federal contractors from engaging in employment discrimination and mandated affirmative action programs to promote equal employment opportunities.

Department of Education Directives:

Elimination of DEI Initiatives in Educational Institutions: The Department of Education issued a directive giving schools and universities a two-week deadline to eliminate diversity initiatives or risk losing federal funding. This move has caused confusion and concern among educational institutions as they scramble to comply.

Confirmation of Linda McMahon: The Senate confirmed Linda McMahon as the head of the Education Department. McMahon, a former wrestling executive with limited educational leadership experience, is tasked with winding down the department while advancing

President Trump's educational agenda, which includes eliminating diversity programs and accommodations for transgender students.

Department of Justice Actions:

Abandonment of Anti-Discrimination Cases: The Department of Justice has decided to drop several cases that sought to end discriminatory hiring practices in police and fire departments. This includes halting enforcement of consent decrees aimed at changing practices that discriminated against Black candidates and women, reflecting a broader effort to reduce initiatives promoting DEI in hiring.

Corporate Sector Influence:

Pressure on Corporations: President Trump has publicly urged major corporations, including Apple, to eliminate their DEI policies. Following an Apple shareholder vote in favor of retaining these initiatives, Trump criticized DEI efforts as discriminatory and hinted at potential Department of Justice investigations regarding their legality.

Legal Challenges:

Federal Court Injunctions: On February 21, 2025, a federal district court in Maryland temporarily blocked the enforcement of key provisions of President Trump's executive orders aimed at eliminating DEI initiatives. The court's injunction pauses the implementation of these orders, pending further legal review.

These actions reflect a concerted effort by the Trump administration to roll back DEI initiatives, prompting significant legal challenges and debates about the future of diversity and inclusion efforts in the United States.



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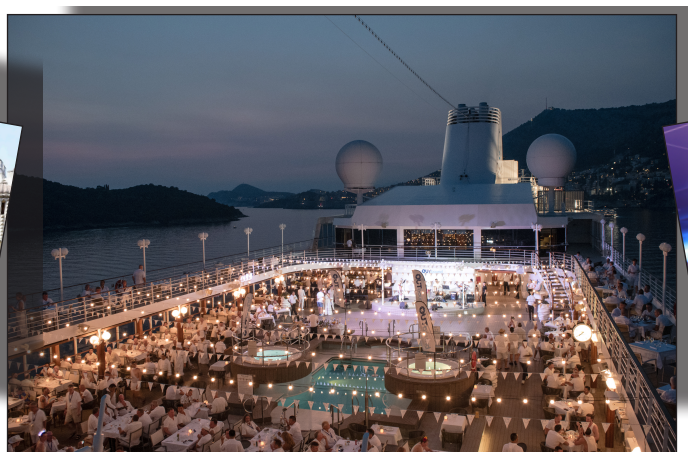


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ALCOHOLICS TOGETHER
alcoholicstogetherlasvegas.com

BEARS LAS VEGAS
bears.lv.org

COMMUNITY COUNSELING CENTER OF SOUTHERN NEVADA
cccfsn.org

HENDERSON PRIDE
hhendersonpride.org

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
hrc.org

IMPERIAL ROYALE SOVEREIGN COURT OF THE DESERT EMPIRE
irscdei.org

LAMBDA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION
lambdalv.com

LAS VEGAS MEN'S CHORUS
lvmenschorus.org

LAS VEGAS PRIME TIMERS
lasvegasprimetimers.com

LEATHER UNIFORM CLUB OF LAS VEGAS (LUC OF LV)
lucoflv.com

LEGACY COUNSELING
legacycounselingandworkforceconnections.com

MAMA DRAGONS
mamadragons.org

NEVADA GAY RODEO ASSOCIATION
ngra.com

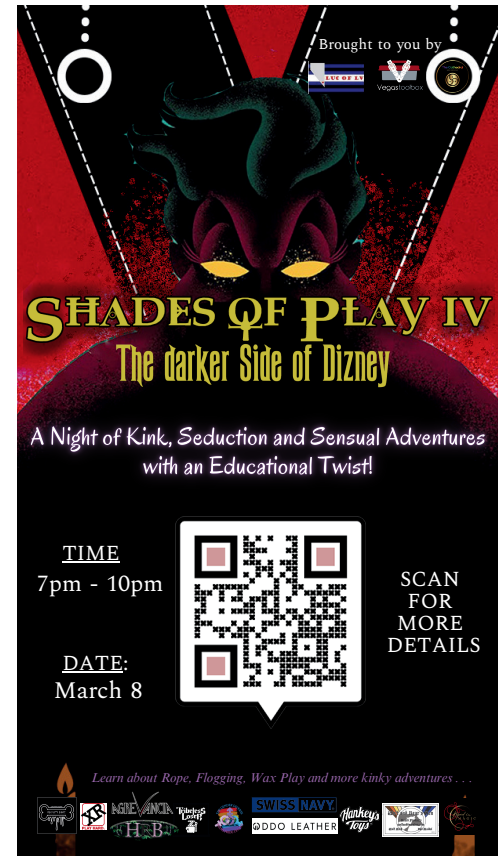
THE PRIDE TREE
thepridetree.lv.com

SILVER STATE EQUALITY
silverstateequality.org

SOUTHERN NEVADA ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER QUEER SOCIETY
snapiqs.org

YOUNG: EQUAL
youngequal.org

COMMUNITY EVENTS



Email info@qvegas.com to add your organization to our directory.

HIV Resources

AID FOR AIDS OF NEVADA (AFAN)
afanlv.org

AIDS HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION (AHF)
aidshealth.org

FARABI WELLNESS CENTER
hplv.com

GOLDEN RAINBOW
goldenrainbow.org

HORIZON RIDGE WELLNESS CLINIC
hrc.lv.org

SIN CITY SISTERS OF PERPETUAL INDULGENCE
sinsitysisters.org

STI Testing

THE ARLENE COOPER COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER
thecenterlv.org

AIDS HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION (AHF)
aidshealth.org

HUNTRIDGE FAMILY CLINIC
huntridgfamilyclinic.org

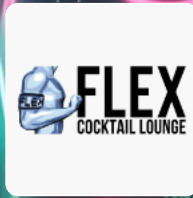
SOUTHERN NEVADA HEALTH DISTRICT
southernnevadahealthdistrict.org

UMC
umcsn.com



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