

**Untitled**  
**Paola Christy**

“Do It To It” featuring Cherish, Alexa at full tilt, you bust your moves, casting poses at the hallway mirror, and crack me up. Never too tired or too serious to put a dance party in motion, even if it’s a party of one. You help me get off my “I’m almost 50 disclaimer”, and have me out of breath, laughing to the floor. I picture you, Phoenix rising, rebuilding the Statues of Buddha in Baiman by your very being, like you were poised to move across the earth in strides, embodying all the loose ends, the ones that show up when peace and humanity is fraying, and leaping with all of those strands, over the chasm, propelling yourself to outer realms.

Kori Price recently had an exhibit “You Can’t Compromise My Joy”, and spoke of the conscious act of choosing joy, in the face of what isn’t. From the ceiling of New City Arts, Breonna Taylor’s police report dangled like a torrent of confusion and brutal clarity, bullet holes where lives ripped apart. The weight of surviving rippling, but with each opening of the lens, Kori reaches out, as if we were asked to look at a stable spot in the room to keep ourselves grounded in mountain pose, in warrior pose, and uplifts deftly towards the celebration of living.

The choice comes minutes before you come out of your film class at Light House, excited to tell me that you got to try on all the hats: director and camera operator. And I had to swallow back the word “nigger” reverberating and circling the inside of the car, hovering over your seat like a gunshot. I parked in the lot 30 minutes early, so I could listen to part of the artist talk with Marley Nichelle, while I waited for you, hoping we could sit and catch the last half together. Wanting us to pick up where we left off in the Dove Gallery on First Friday, you sharing excitedly how earlier the same day you had learned about the Gullah Islands from your history teacher Ms. Duncan. It is real, right there in front of you on the walls. How Ms. Duncan had explained the land is virtually being stolen after being handed down for generations from former enslaved peoples, and the lack of protection for “heirs property”. It matters, and it is here alive, with lots of other people interested. Choose Joy, I repeat to myself. You are what I cherish. You are what my gaze returns to each and every time.

Everything else is like sand, the hardened pavement will crumble, and this eventuality serves as the only real concrete. Your classroom at Light House, to learn, to document, to film reels of footage, to narrate a story, in what used to be Vinegar Hill. A Black legacy cropped and spliced into tragedy. The air stifled, and stale, like cancerous cigarette smoke filling the car. Whichever cyber racist entered the Zoom, repeating the word over and over, documented another hate crime, another reminder that black bodies, black souls, black minds, and emotions have an endless list of reparations. My mixed race daughter is made to feel unsafe in her body.

I refocus on being in Second Street Gallery with so many faces, like your own, enmeshed, black is beautiful, is glimmering. No bronze statues. Only a vibrant collection, metal remnants of hardness reimagined, softening into odes of love, and gratitude. Stuart Robertson called his show “A suh we dweet”. Swords into Plowshares. A bronze Robert E. Lee statue can be melted down, and the African American Heritage Center is inviting the community to envision something better. Choose Joy. You open the door, and what I breathe in is you, every atom, every nanosecond, from the moment I birthed and nursed you, a miracle in my arms. This is how we do it. Cherish. Your joy. You are what remains. A universe of you, Zaharra.