

CULTURED

MUSIC ART

Usher and Lauren Halsey on Cradling History, Workout Regimens, and Going for Your Funk

Last year, the R&B star asked the artist to create a barbershop-inspired work for his Atlanta home. Halsey's latest commission? An outfit for Usher's stadium tour with Chris Brown.

By Ella Martin-Gachot

August 25, 2026



Usher and Lauren Halsey. Photography by Eddie Salinas.

It's not every artist who can count an eight-time Grammy winner among their patrons. Even fewer are the ones who can claim to have developed a friendship with said star. But, Lauren Halsey and Usher have reached yet *another* echelon of this bond: artistic collaboration.

The R&B behemoth first encountered Halsey's work, rooted in the aesthetics of Afro-futurism and her home of South Central Los Angeles more than any one medium, through gallerist Easy Otabor. A studio visit ensued in the fall of 2024, then last year Usher commissioned a piece—an engraved ode to the barbershop poster—from Halsey for his Atlanta home. (Recently photographed in *Architectural Digest*, the abode, which he shares with his wife Jennifer Goicoechea Raymond and their four children, also features art by the likes of Gordon Parks, Rick Lowe, and Richard Prince.) As he prepared to go on a six-month-long stadium tour with Chris Brown in June, Usher asked Halsey if she'd work on a custom tour outfit for him with his stylist, Yashua Simmons.

With the R&B tour now in full swing, the pair reunited to unpack Halsey's vision for the look, where they each make their best work, and what form their next collab might take.



Lauren Halsey, *sister dreamer*, 2026.

Usher, how did you first become aware of Lauren's work? Lauren, were you a longtime fan of Usher's?

Lauren Halsey: Core Usher memories—I could remember my cousins being seniors at Crenshaw High School. There would be this tradition at the time called Sunday Funday, when everyone would bring out their pink cars with, like, Gucci seats. And the *Confessions* album came out. It was *the* soundtrack, all we listened to. So all these years later to be in context artistically in my practice with Usher is just so meaningful. What I find really cool about getting to know you is that you want me to be me. You came to my studio with Jennifer, and we were working on what would become my sculpture park, *sister dreamer*. I was walking you through all of the production and fabrication.

Usher: It goes without saying that I am a fan of your artistic expression and always encourage artists to authentically be who they are. Art is an opportunity and a mastery of storytelling. And Lauren has managed to do something that I think is encouraging to not only her community, but also to young artists who have some ambition to express themselves. When I was introduced to Lauren, I think I was at Anthony in Chicago with Easy [Otabor, the founder of Anthony]. He had shown me some of these impressions that she'd done. I wanted to find something specifically

for my home in Atlanta.

We found something that was part of a previous [series] of hers. Then I ended up speaking with my interior decorator, [Nicole Fuller,] who innately is kind of an art curator at the same time. As you know, my home isn't just about a blue-chip collection; there has to be some deeper storytelling in the process of how we use it and how it's used and what it's used for and if it speaks to history.

What I love, even in this conversation is that the story is always following us. Then we created this incredible piece for the tour with Chris Brown. This was Lauren's opportunity to pay tribute to how we were introduced and the honor and respect that we have for each other. I'm very, very happy with whatever she does and am one of her main supporters.



Lauren Halsey's artwork in Usher's Atlanta home.

Halsey: Thank you. I can't wait to see the work [*Usher commissioned for*] the barbershop [*in his Atlanta home*]. It's a riff on the classic Black barbershop poster that usually is just this really cool visual archive of these architectural forms as hairstyles—the fade, the afro, the taper. I did a custom one of Usher superimposed into the tableau, as one of the protruded engravings.

How is it to live with it in your home, Usher?

Usher: The art is the majority of the piece. But, for Black men, those barbershops are a sanctuary. There's a connection between your barber and you. There's conversation and male interaction and brotherhood that happens in that moment. I wanted to capture that. That story tells far more than [its expression as art].



Usher's R&B tour outfit, made up of an Atlanta Braves hat, Gucci leather jacket and denim pants, airbrushed by Lauren Halsey. Photography by Mike Oberlies.

Lauren, tell me how the process of putting together Usher's tour look and translating your visual art practice into clothing was like for you.

Halsey: I have a multidisciplinary practice, so like literally every day, I'm sampling clothes, I'm making clothes, I'm in and out of factories downtown. I'm trying to figure out how I can be as ambitious with my palette with an outfit as I would be in my sculpture, for it to be a total image or a composition. So I texted Usher and I was like, "You know, I dress like a highlighter on purpose," and he was like, "Yeah, for sure, go for your funk." I've been following the show online and just the femininity involved, people just love it. So I thought, with the look, *What if I had these muses and this cosmos in my palette, not women we recognize, but just paying homage to the everyday woman and her beauty as a wearable art piece.* So there are hints of neons because I wanted to of course incorporate color because I'm obsessed with a certain level of saturation and the energy that could communicate.

Usher: These pieces become archive, an expression that far exceeds wardrobe. I think that Yashua is telling a story about where R&B comes from, the power of it, the fact that this power has brought four generations of people together. That to me is what this collaboration was about. As I said, I love Lauren's art and the authenticity of who she is. You can't be out there with me every night, but through this piece, you're there.

Lauren, music is such a backbone in your practice. Lauryn Hill recently unveiled a video commission by you in London, you have this big moment with Usher. What does working with musicians bring out of your world-building?

Halsey: I have a show coming up at the Hollywood Bowl on September 29. And what's so cool about it and me taking over the campus and presenting a stage with Erykah Badu, Flea, Anderson .Paak, and Charles Gaines, is I get to think about the total art experience. What's so exciting about getting granular like that is I can, for a costume fee that I'm going to pay, dress the stagehands, think about concepts that might not fit in a gallery or a museum... I get to be more free-spirited; music allows for that. We're doing a lot of pre-event activations, all in my sculptural language. I'm building a mini-golf course that kids can actually play in. How fun is that? There's a boundary between what you can touch as an *art object* and the conceit of it being an art object that's meant to last forever and something ephemeral. It's exciting.



Lauren Halsey. Photography by Eddie Salinas.

Would you two want to work together again in the future? Is there anything else that you'd be excited about cooking up together?

Halsey: I would love to throw my ring in a hat for a stage concept or a small show, unannounced. I've learned the language of exclusivity clauses!

Usher: What I love about Lauren is that she immerses you in her experience. So in the event that we ever decide to do something, you know, it's going to be leveled all the way up. As a storyteller, you're always looking for ways to be unique and find ways to cradle history, to remind people of how important our history is specifically. And there's Black history inside of all of Lauren's art; she's telling a story that's a necessity.

Where and when, respectively, do you make the art that excites you the most?

Halsey: I deeply believe in God, so I pray every morning to be in flow and to have an abundant flow. I think every day is perfect because it's a blessing to be able to even do it, so I do it with no fear.

Usher: I too believe in a universal intelligence and God and expression. But my place of creativity is at home. Home is a place that captures and holds the things most sacred to you. And it gives you the opportunity to be vulnerable, honest, and clear and to speak to history and express yourself.

Lastly, do you have any burning questions you'd want to ask each other on the record?

Halsey: What's your workout plan? How do you have this sort of stamina? Are you working out every day?

Usher: I work out every day, sis. Every day. What's crazy is that halfway through the show, while Chris is on the stage, I'm backstage actually working out. That's my regimen.

Halsey: That's so impressive. Goals.



Usher's R&B tour outfit, made up of an Atlanta Braves hat, Gucci leather jacket and denim pants, airbrushed by Lauren Halsey. Photography by Mike Oberlies.
