

KALUP LINZY AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF PERFORMANCE

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VIDEO STILL FROM *TANGLED UP (VISUAL ALBUM)*, 2017. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID CASTILLO GALLERY.

Artist Kalup Linzy has a vast repertoire of characters with unique backstories that appear in his video works and live performances. This weekend, Linzy performed as Kaye at Faena's Noche de Brujas "anti-concert," described by Alan Faena as "[transforming] the Faena Forum into a portal for spiritual elevation." *Cultured* caught up with the artist to see how assuming a role can be a spiritual experience.

How did this project, performing at Noche de Brujas, come about? I basically did a performance at David Castillo for the opening of my exhibition that's up now. Zoe [Lukov]

was there and she contacted me about doing a performance. I actually had been talking to Zoe—since 2006 I believe when I met her at the Fountainhead Residence—about doing something at Faena. So when she saw my performance she said she wanted me to perform. And so that's how this particular project happened.

What do you have planned for your performance? As far as the performance, I'm doing three songs, one cover and then two originals. The cover is "Love Ballad" by LTD, which is like a love song and it's just sort of two of my characters getting married in the backdrop, but it's also intercut with footage from a workshop I did with teenagers in New Orleans for profit in New Orleans where they actually reenacted scenes from my video. They lip-sync the parts and I recorded them so now I use it as a backdrop in my live performances. I'm performing as a character Kaye, I'm going to do the song "Asshole" which is a song I used to do as the character Taiwan. I perform a number of songs that I did as Taiwan as a tribute to the character.



KALUP LINZY PERFORMING AS KAYE FOR THE OPENING OF HIS SHOW "TANGLED UP" AT DAVID CASTILLO GALLERY. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALLERY.

What's the story behind the video projections in your performance? I shot this video at the Vermont Studio Center, I was working on the album "Art Jobs and Lullabies" and I shot this video and then I slipped the water, you know thought I was going to drown and they had to come get me out and the ambulance came and they said I was fine but I had to warm myself because of hypothermia, that sort of thing. But when I was looking at the footage, I saw this entity in the video that I hadn't noticed, not even when I was editing. I did an interview with New York Magazine and they put the video in it and one day I was looking at it--then I noticed this orb in the video. And then I thought it might have been a camera but there wasn't any camera because it was moving close. It was moving with me, in sync with me. I would show it to my family and zoom in on it--everybody thought it was probably a ghost or a spirit looking out for me, but I never made a huge point to talk about it. Every now and then my video picks up on that stuff. I started researching it. I'm going to include the raw footage from a recent shoot I did for my new video "Tangled Up." I was shooting by the ocean, by the Gulf of Mexico, shooting at a fort, and again this stuff started happening in the raw footage. I slowed the footage down and started adding text like "bugs" and "spirits" and "orbs" so the audience could decide. I don't know what people are seeing with that stuff. I do believe in the spiritual realm but I don't want to claim that every time something's moving around in my video that it's a ghost, but I don't want to say it isn't either. I'm from the south, from the country, rural area so we grew up being taught about spirits and stuff being around.

How do you relate to the concept of bruja? I'm not going to say I'm some sort of witch or anything like that in the traditional sense, but I do believe my art practice is a spiritual practice, a spiritual ritual. I do believe that, and I do believe that sometimes there are higher entities at work when I'm creating my work, because I just believe in spiritual practice. A lot of times I feel a oneness when I'm actually making my work or performing. I see that energies build, and I think that spirits and those sort of things are energy fields. I believe in energy. Sometimes I connect with people and I feel that there's a strong connection, and I notice that there's something magnetic that's moving.



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You have all these different characters and personas that you take on in your performance, do you see this as a type of possession?

Yes, I always say that early on, that oftentimes even when I'm writing it feels sort of like possession but not in a negative sense. But the reason why I felt like I had to not do Taiwan anymore for a long time because I felt like was in this masochistic place and I felt like at one point—probably when I created the character—probably I was into that type of energy more in my real life than not. Once I moved to another place in my life I felt like I had to go back and pick up, conjure up the same type of emotions and feelings but it was a space I no longer wanted to exist in when I was off stage, but sometimes there's still a lingering energy there. I thought the character Kaye was lighter and if I want to actually intentionally attract lighter things to me, I feel like I have to put that sort of thing into my artwork and focus on those things. If I want that sort of thing to show up.

Was having a memorial for this character a kind of ritualistic way of closing that? In a soap opera the characters are dead, but they may come back. It was a tribute to the character but I just felt that the character was heavy. I didn't want to talk to people sometimes after I was done performing. For me it was a deep, deep, deep level, what the

character was born out of. It was born out of growing up and being voiceless and how you know people viewed gays in our society, in our country, in our world, so the character sort of just came out of that space. I kind of have moved beyond that, while accepting myself—I didn't really care what people thought anymore, so much.