

art21

*Big Question*

# When Do You Feel the Most Like You?

Kalup Linzy finds freedom in character





*Kalup Linzy in the studio at the Tulsa Artist Fellowship, Oklahoma, 2019, Photo: Melissa Lukenbaugh. Courtesy of the Tulsa Artist Fellowship.*

One time, MoMA asked me to perform at one of their mini conferences. I left the room and put on my character, Taiwan. Then I sat in the meeting because there wasn't enough time to change [out of character]. Once I had made the shift [to Taiwan], Marina Abramović commented that I looked more comfortable as a character than I did as myself. And I realized I was totally



comfortable because, on some level, I'm there but I'm not there. Then I started wondering which one was the mask: Taiwan or Kalup?

Once I put on the costumes, something happens that I connect with; I become more alive. Something else comes out of this that isn't there during day-to-day life. I feel better about my existence in the world when I'm performing and playing these characters. I feel like I have some purpose other than just lying around. It motivates me, and it creates new aspirations—or maybe old aspirations.

### Kalup Linzy



These characters represent aspects of my coming of age, as far as reclaiming certain things about myself. I did want to become a filmmaker and make movies; I did want to be on a soap opera; I did want to be a recording artist. And for whatever reason [in society], you're only allowed to just choose one [thing to do].

It's possible that I could have done all of that in the industry. But in the late nineties, I was also deciding whether I was going to be openly gay, and it didn't seem like there was space for me back then. Now I know a lot has

shifted. The characters give me empowerment and a platform to speak on things and explore different artistic mediums.

- Kalup Linzy





*Kalup Linzy. "As Da Art World Might Turn," 2019. Video Still. Courtesy of the Artist. Kalup Linzy*