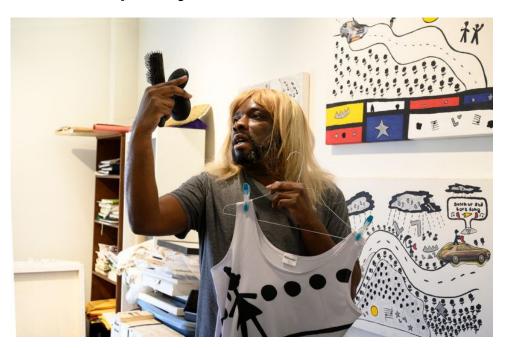
art21

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