

‘It Creates Layers’: Watch Artist Kalup Linzy Explain Why He Plays Multiple Roles in His Madcap Performances

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

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Multimedia artist Kalup Linzy has made a career out of observing distinct identities, creating videos, photographs, collages, and

performances that riff on—and skewer—popular culture.

His solo exhibition, “Not Ready to Say Goodbye (Green Country Edition)” at the Price Tower Art Center in Bartlesville, Oklahoma is curated by Dan Cameron and (in the artist’s own words) “will explore trauma, discord, and melodrama within self, romantic relationships, family dynamics, race relations, and COVID-19 (to name a few).”

Linzy uses the tropes of Hollywood as a starting point for his madcap and satirical works, performing as dozens of characters in his acts. His encyclopedic knowledge of film and television history afford him a wide range of roles to inhabit, and he uses different modes of staging, from drag performances to old-time radio shows, soap operas, and budget films.



Kalup Linzy at Webster Hall in New York City. (Photo by Roger Kisby/Getty Images)

In an exclusive interview filmed with Art21 back in 2012, Linzy described working on *Keys To Our Heart*, a 2008 video inspired by black-and-white films and music that was censored in the 1930s. Linzy recalls growing up in a “really small trailer” and “singing my heart out, singing my lungs out.”

From an early performance belting out Tina Turner to stunned family members, Linzy learned to modulate and voice a slew of characters, modeled after actors like Betty Davidson and John Coffey. The voices and characters don’t need to match up, according to Linzy.

“When things are a little off, it gives us a certain type of texture, a certain type of feel” the artist says. “It creates layers and tension.”

Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21’s series New York Close Up, below. “Kalup Linzy: Not Ready to Say Goodbye (Green Country Edition)” is on view at the Price Tower through September 3.