Since the orange warlock was elected in 2016, we charmed ones, the othered, have been on the verge: of radical and outward protest, of retaliation to this violent and highly visible era of toxic white masculinity. His win was a display of white male rage taking no prisoners, reminding us of the multifaceted oppression embedded in this country’s soil. Rage affects us all, but the orange warlock and his minions’ roars have chilled the skins of all who are not white cis men: women, people of color, members of the GLBTQI community. As our nervous and spirit systems alert us, all who can muster the strength have chosen to not hide in the shadows of rage, but instead have been in the trenches, battling for liberation.

One of the ways I choose to fight back is to use my body as a performative music vessel to deliver messages of empowerment and solidarity to people like me. I realize the power in using my body as a weapon in my practice, but I’m still learning what it really means to carry a black queer body in the midst of a toxic social political climate. So I interviewed three emerging artists, Tschabalala Self, Jonathan Lyndon Chase, and Aurel Haize Odogbo, whose practices stand in their own respective spaces, but whose solidarity lies in the role of the body in their art and performance—work that confronts, reinterprets, and dismantles dominant perceptions and politics of the body; that reclaims, empowers, and represents it; and that brings visibility to bodies outside the mainstream.

**I have never met Harlem-born painter Tschabalala Self in real life, but for several years I have stalked her work on the Internet. I am obsessed with Tschabalala’s work. I believe I am in love with her art because it reminds me of the love and beauty of my mother, sister, grandmother, and any black women who anointed me in love and appreciation. Her works for me are liberating astral projections of black women’s bodies (and sometimes black men’s bodies) that exist within their own space, a place that they have created where they can truly be as they are. Tschabalala’s paintings take on the negative and positive tropes of black identity to reveal the ampleness of the black female body and find a way to black-wash a reality where whiteness often overpowers and oppresses black beings. Like emerging icon and director Issa Rae, creator of the HBO series Insecure, Tschabalala illustrates the multifacetedness of black identity that racism and anti-blackness often try to deny.**

**AA: What does the American black woman’s body carry?**
**TS:** The black woman’s body is the first body. The black woman’s body has given life to all human bodies that exist today. It’s a point of reference for all of us. Within the American context, the black woman’s body is married to trauma and the horrors that relate to the black experience, which is a highly politicized experience that involves a lot of historical exploitation. But the black body in general I would consider to be almost primordial, and our history can’t begin with America. Our bodies can’t always be related to that history. I would encourage people like me or like us to remember our whole history, which predates the American experience. Outside of the American context, the black female body for me also is generous and full of abundance. If the black woman’s body were a physical place, I would see it as Eden. That’s how I would like to imagine it.

**AA: Why do a lot of your figures live in colorless spaces?**
**TS:** In the past I had the figures exist in these formally neutral spaces because of my interest in this bulk idea of a liminal space that’s more of a psychological or emotional space, that’s not in any particular environment. That formal decision lends the work to the perception that the figures are outside of reality, which leads people to think about the metaphysical or supernatural elements of the figures—because they are not surrounded by the same physical context we are in.

**AA: What do you think liberation looks like for marginalized bodies?**
**TS:** I think that this is a time for black people and people of color to reclaim our power. For us to truly inhabit our power we would really have to be introspective to define ourselves. We will have to find new terms and new language to empower ourselves. We have to recreate a whole new rhetoric around our identities. Also, that rhetoric can’t include any allusion to whiteness because by doing that you are inherently marrying our conversation to trauma.

**AA: Can you talk about the importance of internal liberation versus physical liberation?**
**TS:** Physical and internal liberation have to be in tandem with another. If you can imagine the development of community as the development of a body, ideally the physical development of that body would be in tandem with the spiritual and mental development. So our communities need to develop in the physical realm as much as that needs to happen in the spiritual or emotional realm. It needs to happen at the same time; one cannot be prioritized over the other. Otherwise, we can’t truly function in the society we are living in. We have to function like we are a world, because we are living in the real world.
I first experienced the magic of performance artist, writer, and model Aurel Haize Odogbo at Cooper Union, at a multimedia exhibition titled VERGING in 2015. As the doors opened for the event you could see Haize presenting herself naked as she sat in a bathtub filled with water. As the viewer you couldn’t help but get excited, waiting to see what was about to happen. As more people flooded into the space, Haize sat in meditation, fiercely in focus. You could guess that the water was getting cold, because her body began to respond in shivers. Her performance forced the audience to be attentive to her body’s swings and engulfed us in a vicarious visceral experience. Within an hour, industrial sci-fi music abruptly started to play, along with Haize’s voice reciting texts. That ignited the artist, who started conjuring body movements and began to make her way out of the tub. As the music got more intense, she crawled out of the room. Haize empowered me not just through her music or poetry, but also through her body. As she puts her body through suffering, she exposes her humility and courage, but also reveals the power of her body’s voice. Recently, Haize has attracted the eyes of many fashion designers and photographers, and her participation in the fashion world has made her an emerging figure of the trans visibility movement.

Jonathan Lyndon Chase: The bodies in the paintings are me, and then they’re not me at the same time. They’re people I see every day, [plus] my friends and family. I am interested in the complexity of black and queer bodies—in our tenderness, beauty, and everyday experiences. The bodies that I talk about are often in a safe place—places like homes and bedrooms, things like that. In this place, the body is vulnerable and just “being.” I think of the body as a landscape and as fluid; it changes based on the space that it’s in psychologically, emotionally, [through] all sorts of senses and lenses. The bodies are political: I think about white spaces and heteronormative spaces, and how our bodies and identities wade and wrestle through them.

Jonathan Lyndon Chase: work?
Abdu Ali: Why do you draw bodies in specific environments, and how do the environments and bodies affect one another?
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above: Jonathan Lyndon Chase, *Puffy Jacket*, 2016, acrylic, glitter, spray paint, graphite on canvas, 84 x 72 inches [courtesy of the artist]

left: Aurel Haize Odogbo [courtesy of the artist]
