

Petzel

Folasade Ologundudu, "Tschabalala Self Presents the Beauty of Black Women in Her Own Terms,"  
*Cultured*, April 12, 2021.

## CULTURED

ART

# Tschabalala Self Presents the Beauty of Black Women in Her Own Terms

The artist doesn't shy away from depictions of sensuality and sexuality in her unique figurative paintings of Black women, on view now at the Baltimore Museum of Art.



Tschabalala Self, By My Self at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

### WORDS

**Folasade Ologundudu**

### PHOTOGRAPHY

**Mitro Hood**

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520 W 25th Street New York NY 10001

Tel 212 680 9467 Fax 212 680 9473 [info@petzel.com](mailto:info@petzel.com) [www.petzel.com](http://www.petzel.com)

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"I have an eye for aesthetics and I love to beautify women," says artist Tschabalala Self. Over the past five years, Self has emerged as one of the most exciting and inventive figurative painters working today, particularly for her expressive, sensual and self-actualizing representations of Black women. She often employs mixed media, modeling the human form in the same visual language as her art in paint on canvas while expanding her oeuvre to incorporate sculptures and larger 3D pieces.

Her latest body of work, however, marks a new venture for the artist. For the first time, Self has worked directly with the archive collection of a museum as a source of reference. On view now at the Baltimore Museum of Art, her solo show "By My Self" presents new paintings and sculptures with an artwork that inspired them: Henri Matisse's 1907-08 statue *Two Women*, originally titled *Two Negresses*.



Installation view of Tschabalala Self, "By My Self."

For her show at the Baltimore Museum of Art, which holds the largest collection of works by Matisse of any museum in the world, Self presents, for the first time, works that respond to the work of another artist. Developing pieces around a specific canon of art was an especially illuminating experience. "I think it pushed me to work in a way I

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wouldn't have otherwise and the works that I produced under that restraint are interesting," she reveals. The challenge presented by the constraints of working within a boundary formed new, unusual and exciting outcomes even within her regular art practice.



Installation view of Tschabalala Self, "By My Self."

Though not overt, this new body of work, too, deftly explores themes of sexuality. Ownership over one's own sexuality is not traditionally bestowed upon Black women in American society. Historically, her sexuality has been weaponized against her, debasing her into an overly promiscuous and sexually objectified shadow of her full self. Self's figures take control over their bodies, stripping away prejudice, racism and ideologies of Black inferiority through defiant acts of self-love.

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Installation view of Tschabalala Self, "By My Self."

The artist proclaims that her own identity as a Black woman defines her experiences, not only in how she interacts with the world but through a deeper awareness of her creativity, as well. "My subject is my muse," she explains. "There are an infinite number of stories I can tell." As seen in this museum show, Self is continuing to develop her practice, a safe space to discover and create new renditions of Black women figures in the fullness of their bodily agency.

<https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2021/04/12/tschabalala-self-presents-the-beauty-of-black-women-in-her-own-terms>