Quinn Moreland, "Come Alive," *Family Style*, October 26, 2026.

FAMILY STYLE

ART

Come Alive

Tschabalala Self's figures have always moved on their own. As the artist expands her practice with new materials, she leans into the in-between gestures that make us human.

Words by Quinn Moreland Photography by Christina Holmes

October 26, 2026

In her bright, peaceful Catskill studio in upstate New York, Tschabalala Self is surrounded by a sea of fabric scraps. Textiles spill from a laundry basket onto a large plywood worktable, and the artist sifts through them in search of just the right swatch of brown. Neither the glossy chocolate silk nor the shred of oatmeal linen will do. Then, *aha*—a milky latte strip of canvas does the trick. Self is in the process of collaging these disparate parts into a portrait. In time, a female figure emerges from this patchwork, reflecting the complexity of the human experience.

Many of the works in her studio will soon be sent off to Manhattan's Petzel gallery for an exhibition this fall. The show is a significant milestone for the artist, 36, marking just over a decade since her New York solo debut. The occasion has inspired some contemplation. She's been thinking about what has changed in her approach since that 2015 show on the Lower East Side: "I'm trying to come to some resolution about the next phase of my painting practice," she says.

Petzel

Quinn Moreland, "Come Alive," *Family Style*, October 26, 2026.



520 W 25th Street New York NY 10001
Tel 212 680 9467 Fax 212 680 9473 info@petzel.com www.petzel.com

Petzel

Quinn Moreland, “Come Alive,” Family Style, October 26, 2026.



520 W 25th Street New York NY 10001
Tel 212 680 9467 Fax 212 680 9473 info@petzel.com www.petzel.com

Quinn Moreland, "Come Alive," Family Style, October 26, 2026.

Self's work has always been connected to the body in action. "Movement speaks to agency," she says, noting that motion conveys the idea that viewers are catching a glimpse of the subject going about their life. This applies to her process, too: "I'm very aware of my own physicality while making a painting," she explains (in the past, she has worn kneepads to navigate around larger works). After drawing an initial figure, Self begins constructing the piece with textiles sourced from the scavenged remains of old paintings, nostalgic souvenirs from travels, and treasures from her late mother's robust fabric collection. She then cuts the different materials into shapes, arranging and adjusting the composition according to intuition. Up until she finally pieces everything together at the sewing machine, the subject is completely modular. "Each part can be shifted or changed, almost like a paper doll, until this moment when it all becomes fixed," she says.

"I am so invested in what is tangible—texture, material, and color—but I'm equally interested in what's on the flip side," Self adds. The artist applies this lens to the sewing machine: "It's this meta relationship, me controlling the machine, an extension of my intentions, my hand," she says. This carries through to how she sees the body as a vessel for a greater consciousness. "That's why humans are obsessed with machines," she offers, "because they're already in one."

In conversation, the artist is thoughtful and focused, prone to metaphysical musings. Born in Harlem, she is the youngest of five children. Her parents, both educators, encouraged their daughter's creativity from a young age. Drawn to printmaking as an undergraduate at Bard College, Self went on to receive her MFA from the Yale School of Art. During that time, she taught herself how to sew after the sudden death of her mother, an ingenious home seamstress, in 2013. Two years later, she emerged from the graduate program with colorful depictions of Black women, created using a combination of sewn, printed, and painted materials. These figurative works, which Self calls paintings, examine what it means to be embodied, specifically in a racialized or gendered form. Fictional yet familiar, her characters were inspired by observations and encounters in her native Harlem. After initially posing her figures in liminal space against washes of color, in 2017, she chose her first environmental backdrop: a neighborhood convenience store.

In recent years Self has explored identity and interiority through large-scale sculptures of Black bodies in repose. Her first large-scale installation in New York on the Lower East Side, an exaggerated relief titled *Art Lovers*, currently adorns the façade of the New Museum. And this month marks the London arrival of *Lady in Blue*, 2026, atop Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth. Made primarily of bronze and painted with bright blue pigment, the subject is modern and mid-stride, stepping into her future. A monument to the everyday Londoner, the work commemorates the collective while existing within it. "I wanted people to look at the sculpture and think that she could be any individual beside them," Self says. "The sculptures can do what I've always wanted my work to do, which is to quite literally live out in the world."

Quinn Moreland, "Come Alive," Family Style, October 26, 2026.



https://www.family.style/articles/tschabalala-self-artist-interview