

Brooklyn-born and based experimentalist and multi-instrumentalist Taja Cheek, aka L’Rain, is mapping the enormity of how to change. Her forthcoming second album, *Fatigue*, demands introspection from ready ears with an array of keyboards, synths, and hauntingly delicate vocals that create a genre entirely her own. Cheek has dipped her toes in every corner of the arts, through her work at some of the most prestigious art institutions in NYC and collaborations with the likes of Naama Tsabar, Kevin Beasley, Justin Allen, and others in contemporary arts.

How do we think through, express for, attest to, commit within and embody a substantive change for ourselves? How do we enact change in the company of others? What does it mean to internally engage with an abolition politic? These questions compose and propel the sonic energy of *Fatigue*. Over the course of 15 tracks, L’Rain continues her careful plotting of where we travel when cruising along the side alleys and major roads of an emotional city. *Fatigue* progresses the psychic collage assembled from her self-titled debut. *Fatigue*, while still cycling the wheel of grief, veers into the self-reckoning of holding emotional multiplicities that do not and cannot remain static. Cheek knows how we feel, and who we feel, expanding ever outward.

In the closing moments of the opening track, “Fly, Die”, we are asked, ‘*What have you done to change?*’ This question is both invitation and invocation. Change and changing is not something done alone; it is a group process. L’Rain is clear in her desire for the collective to reflect and feel, admit and deny, balance and discard, consider and implement with her.

With a release date in 2021, the timing of *Fatigue* is not coincidental. Collectively, we are navigating the immense and looming figure of unremitting fatigue brought on by the ongoing pandemic, mass death, continued violence against Black people at the hands of the state, and the mountain range systemic problems obstructing safety and security for the people that need it most. This quick succession of events wears our resilience to weariness. To question the nature of change with the awareness of weariness is to question the nature of exhaust: what are we putting out?

*Fatigue* puts out slippery sonics that Cheek describes as “approaching songness.” This “approaching songness” highlights L’Rain’s commitment to the experimental value of process as her practice. Heavily blending genres (thus making new unnameable space for herself) including but not limited to gospel, jazz, and neo-soul, *Fatigue* fractures and mends

our expectations of what musicians, especially Black women musicians, are categorized to do versus what they need to do (and actually do).

In many ways, *Fatigue* is a sonic meditation on finding balance through the obliteration of binary logic. Refusing the finitude of either/or, L’Rain readily embraces the flexibility both/ and provides. “This album is an exploration of the simultaneity of human emotions...the audacity of joy in the wake of grief, disappointment in the face of accomplishment. The pervasiveness of this layering of emotions can be surprising, empowering, and discouraging; these overlaps happen every single moment, all the time,” L’Rain expresses. “I might be trying to be heard more on this record. You can hear more of the words, my vocals are louder.” This sentiment is most clearly, though subtly, expressed in the titles of the tracks. The titles can be read as a poem of 30 words and 15 lines, potentially divided into 3 stanzas. The presentation of poetic intervention brilliantly subverts our expectations of what lyrics do, where they present, the summarization of ideas, where and how marginalized people can be read or misread. “Black people, who, in the face of violence and discrimination, are often given little time to process.” The poetics of *Fatigue* gains even more radical momentum when we make clear how much of Black process and processing are forcibly rendered into abbreviation.

*Fatigue* encourages us to listen, laugh, mourn, hum, linger, realize, know, accept and release who we are, who and what we can be when we allow movements of change to be a necessary component of, not an antithesis to, rest.