

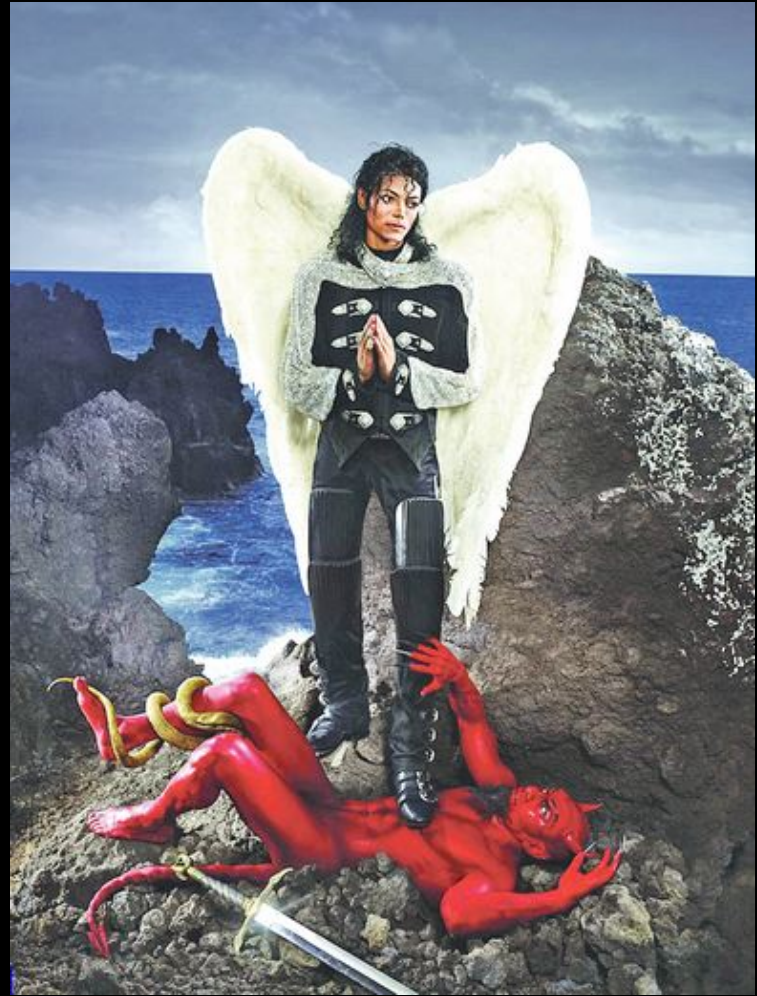
Philip Bonneau
PHOTO 501
JALBERT



**There is a history of the world and then there is
David LaChapelle's interpretation of it .**



Eminem: About a Boy, 1999



American Jesus: Archangel Michael Jackson, 2009

His works are often cited as hyper-real and slyly subversive. ¹
He is known as a photographer and a director. As an artist and a photographer,
but don't ask him to differentiate between the two titles.
They go hand in hand and he allows history to decide. ²



Cameron Diaz: Dollhouse Disaster, Home Invasion, 1997

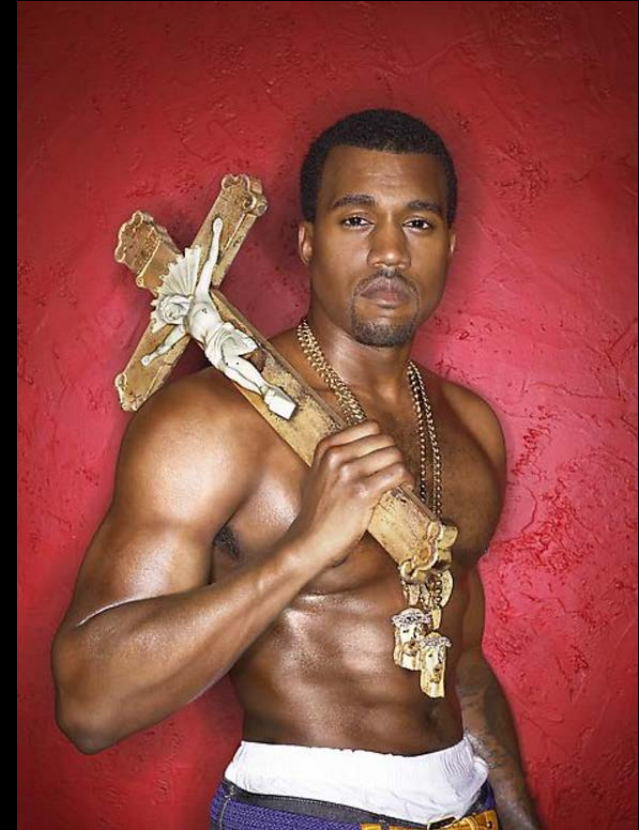


Tupac Shakur for Details Magazine, April 1, 1996

“LaChapelle is without a doubt one of today’s most respected artists, whose style can be compared to no one. He has evolved his photography into an idiosyncratic and highly personal combination of reportage and surrealism.”³



Kanye West: Riot, 2006



Kanye West: The Cross I Bear, 2006

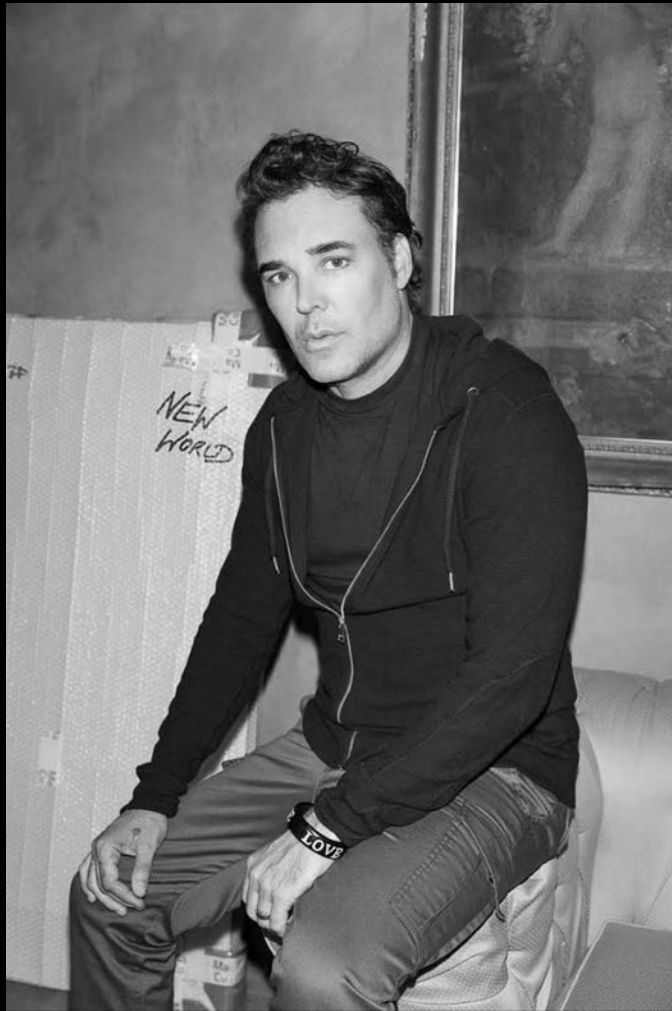
His work is considered “The highly polished, saturated and intricately composed photographs possess the surreal wildness of fever dreams, concocted as they are out of the imagery of celebrity, eroticism and modern Americana, and spiked with religious allegory and forebodings of doom.”⁵



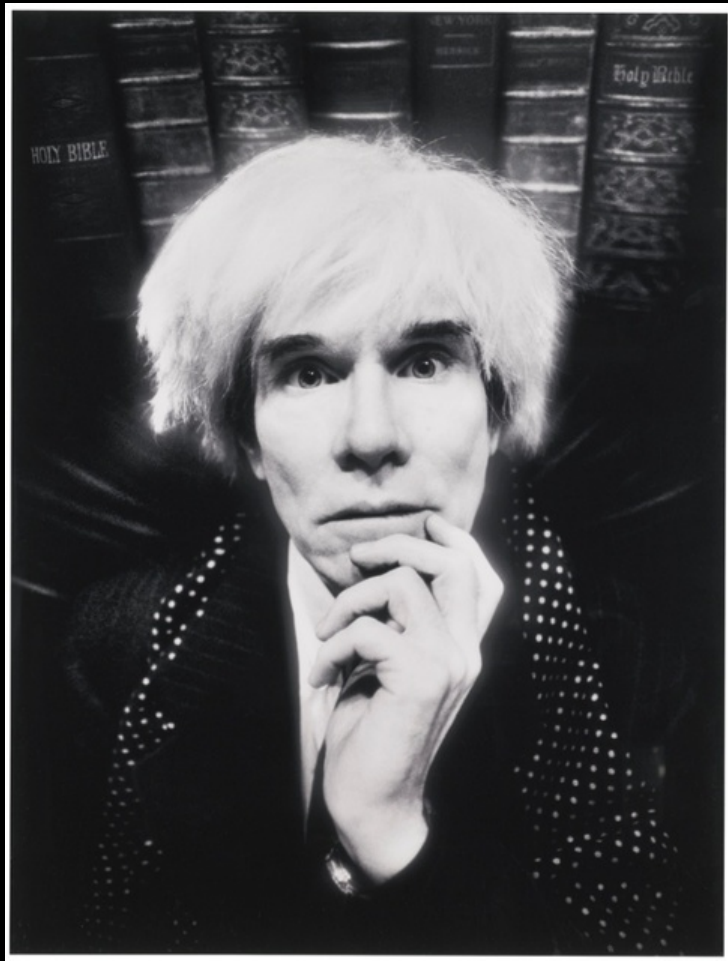
He has been dubbed “The Fellini of Photography”. A title in honor of one of Italy’s most famous movie directors who “developed his own distinctive methods that superimposed dreamlike or hallucinatory imagery upon ordinary situations.”⁸



Helga LaChapelle, David LaChapelle



He first began photography as a child where his mother often staged portraits for him to photograph with dogs that were not theirs and at homes they didn't own. When he was 15 years old, he ran away from home to become a busboy at Studio 54 in New York City. Eventually his father went to New York to retrieve him where he returned to North Carolina to enroll in the North Carolina School of Arts.¹



Andy Warhol: Last Sitting, 1986



Britney Spears: World She Once Knew, Mississippi, 1999

It was at Studio 54 that LaChapelle met Andy Warhol when he was 17 who subsequently got him hired as a photographer for Interview Magazine. From *Interview*, he went on to get a job for *Details* magazine. ⁶ LaChapelle's images subsequently appeared on the covers and pages of magazines such as *Details*, *GQ*, *i-D*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Face*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue Italia*, and *Paris Vogue*.



Elizabeth Taylor, Andy Warhol, 1965



My Liz Taylor(Amanda Lepore). David LaChapelle

There is a heavy influence of Warhol in LaChapelle's work, including the recreation of some of his most famous works with ideas the Warhol started and then were flipped and twisted to have a second or even 3rd layer of pop and art culture added to them.

Take for instance this depiction of Amanda Lepore who would go on to be one of LaChapelle's greatest muses and friends.



Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, 1962



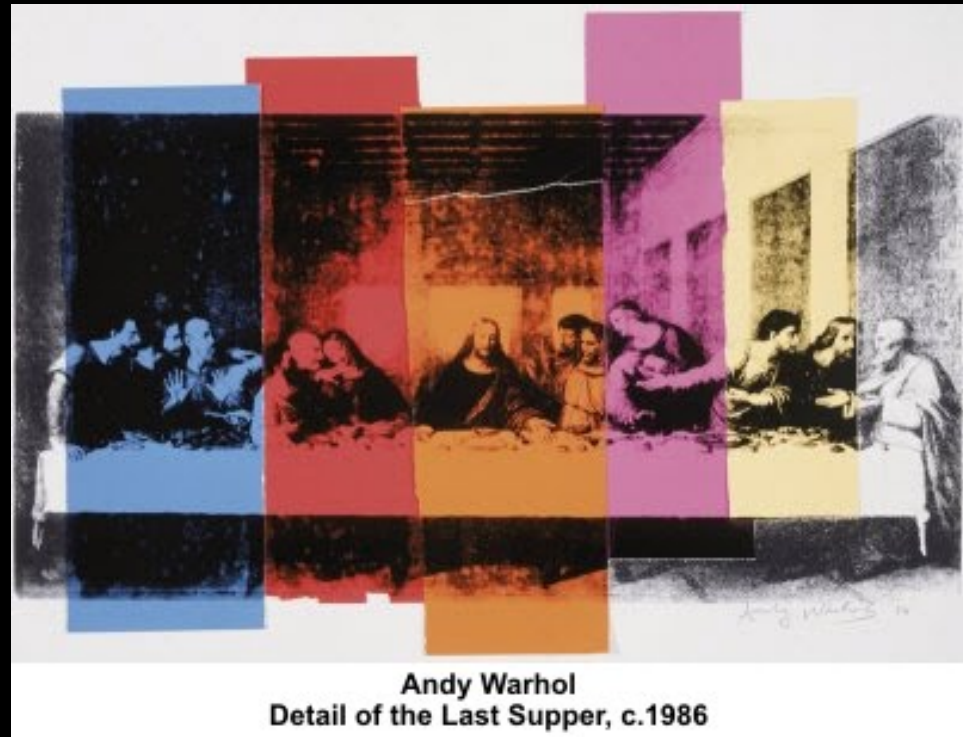
My Marilyn Monroe (Amanda Lepore), David LaChapelle

LaChapelle's first museum exhibition that really made an impression on him was in the 3rd grade where he was introduced to Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe. He often cites that it was fate that he and Warhol would meet and work together. ⁹



But it was these images from LaChapelle's first show "Angels, Saints and Martyrs" in 1984 that won over Warhol and convinced him to hire David.

His works heavily fell on religious iconography. You can probably say that he proceeded to tackle Pop Culture from a Religious lens.



Hand picked by Warhol, LaChapelle was also the last artist to photograph him. LaChapelle mentions that this was around the time of Warhol's Last Supper Paintings and to him was the first time to see Andy hold a brushstroke.

LaChapelle got his chance from Warhol stating,
"Do whatever you want, just make everyone look good."

I think from that outcome everything LaChapelle did thereafter was in the vein of Andy Warhol until he too got tired of looking at fame as a muse. But religion, if from this image or his own, would stay intact later in life and take precedence over famous portraiture.



One thing that stuck with LaChapelle about Andy Warhol was how towards the end of his life that society had kind of washed their hands of Andy and wanted nothing to do with him socially or artistically anymore.

One of the things Andy always wanted was an exhibit at MoMA. Something he was not granted until after his death where he received the largest exhibition of any artist at the museum prior.

It's from that standpoint of losing a mentor and seeing that interaction from society that would stay with LaChapelle for the rest of his life.



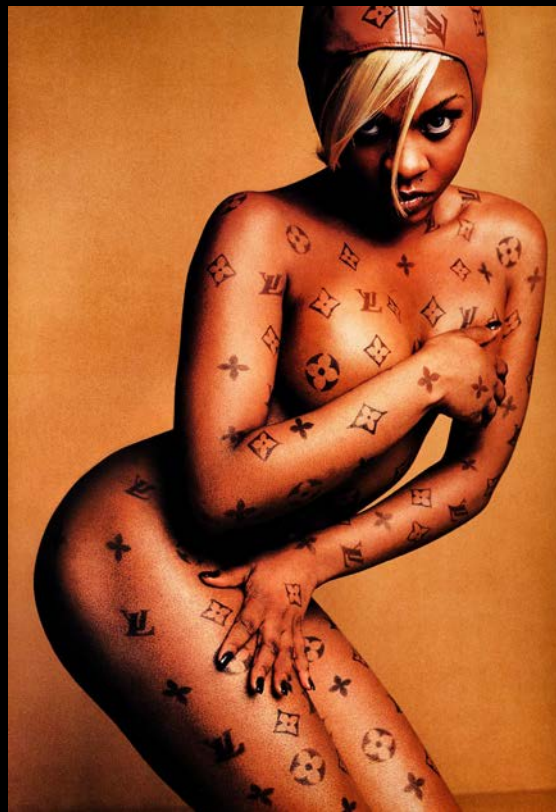
I was first introduced to the artist David LaChapelle as a child obsessed with music and popular culture through the issues of Rolling Stone Magazine from the 1990s – 2000s.

There was always something different about LaChapelle's images that spoke to me as a child. It was not the same as other magazine images or cover shots. There seemed to be a history lesson on sexuality and presentation that was always apparent in his images. I collected each issue like I was collecting works of art.



Nobody in the industry was doing the work on the same level as LaChapelle. He was known for taking what the artists were known for and exasperated that to levels that became surreal, yet still true to the character each celebrity plays for the camera.





“Sometimes when I worked for magazines I was just being an escapist, sometimes it got deeper and I was playing the themes that were in my head. I was shooting every day. You don’t want to take the same picture every day. On some days you feel like Oh, I want to make something funny, just escapism, especially during the dark times when the climate change started happening and when you sort of hear about it, you become very conscious about what’s happening with the nature. This was on my mind and I thought I needed to talk about it.and we were shopping and shopping, like that’s our salvation, that’s gonna buy us happiness.”³





LaChapelle channeled his photography into music videos starting in 1997 with Sugar Cane by Space Monkeys. It's in music videos that he was able to transform his static images into an interactive space to be seen in movement for the first time.



His most iconic beginning videos were for 2002 Christina Aguilera's "Dirty" video along with 2000 Moby's "Natural Blues" but he has a credit to over 25 music videos to his name including artists like Whitney Houston, Elton John, Mariah Carey, Jennifer Lopez, Gwen Stefani and Blink-182 to name a few.



One of his more current music video directoral effort was in 2014 with “Evening in Space” by Daphne Guinness. It was apparent as early as 2012, with Florence and the Machine’s “Spectrum” video that his art direction had a tonality distinct only to him. It was around this time that the introduction to the videos was reformatted as being stated to be directed by David LaChapelle. He had become a name director. There seems to be a confidence at this point of instead of depicting stars that he had actually become one himself in the process. Even though he never wanted to be one.

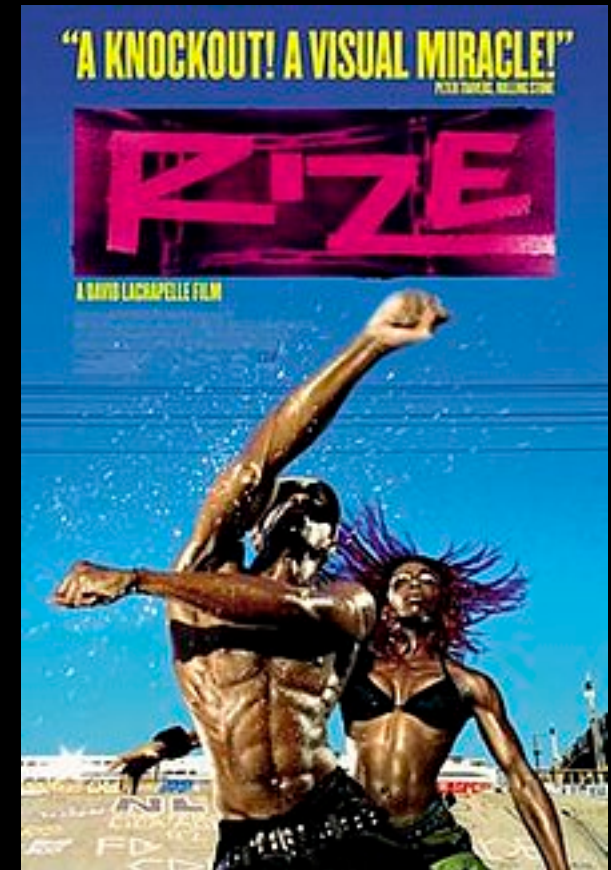


In 2003, he created the exhibit “Jesus is my Homeboy”.

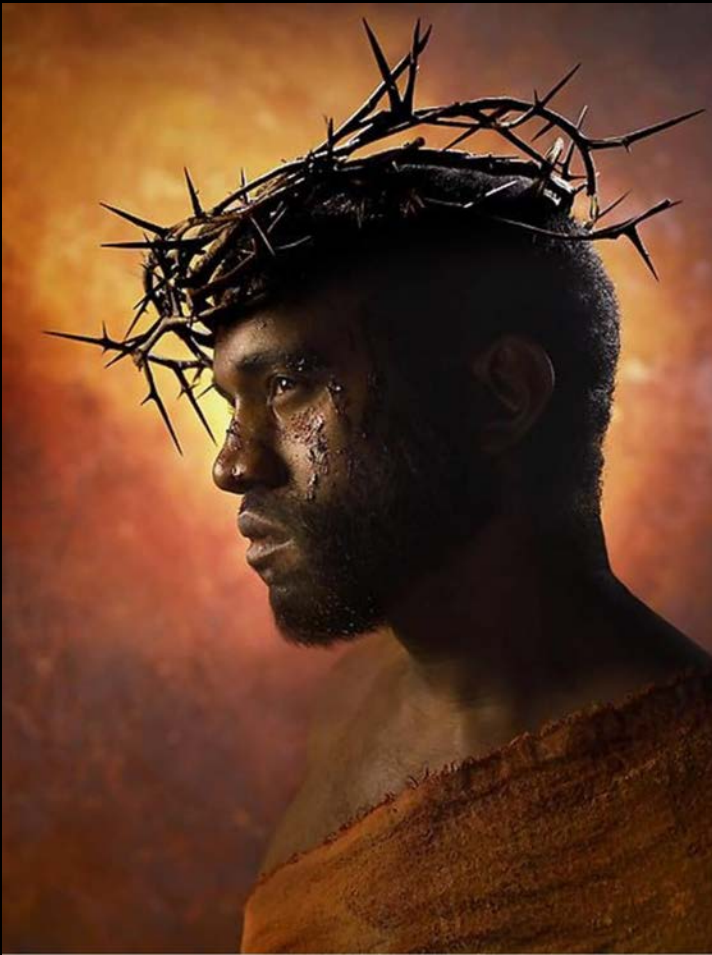
Probably at the height of his career he wove together a series of images masterfully blending his affinity for spirituality, fine art paintings and celebrity status offering up a world where Jesus lives in contemporary times.



It's like *Where's Waldo* in a blender with pop culture and art history.⁷ when looking at the work of LaChapelle. Such as this image of "The Last Supper" where he has thought about what type of people would Jesus surround himself with in contemporary times. His desire for tackling this image was probably not only for his connection to religion but his affinity to what Warhol taught him during his tenure at Interview Magazine.



In 2006, LaChapelle released the Documentary, "Rize" a story about 2 different street dancing cultures. Dubbed "Clowning" and "Krumping", both styles are born from breakdancing of the 80s. It's main message was about "making art, not war" and channeling energy into something positive. It was met with positive reviews and is the only movie outside of short videos that LaChapelle has produced. ¹¹



Kayne West: Passion of the Christ, 2006



Gas Shell, 2012



Edward Hopper, Gas, 1940

In 2006, LaChapelle broke from the fashion celebrity world and relocated to Maui. He was burnt out. One of his assistants even noted that they went 11 months without a day off. It was there where he replaced images of Madonna and Kayne with images of gas stations and abandoned buildings. There was a hard reboot in life from being a part of the celebrity run, but still came from an influence of the past.



Speaking about the end of his pop culture celebrity circuit, he spoke, “I love glamour and fashion and beauty – that has been with civilisations for ever, but I needed to get away from the propaganda of that. When I quit everything, I never wanted to shoot another pop star as long as I lived, I was tortured by them.”¹⁰

Once tasked with directing Madonna’s “Hung Up” music video, he found the artist to be so demanding that he quit and literally “Hung Up” on her on his phone. Madonna would still go on to include LaChapelle’s documented “Krumping” into her video with a new director.



The other deciding factor for his shift from pop culture came about with the publication of his hurricane series, taken 3 months before Katrina hit New Orleans in 2006 but hitting newsstands just days after the catastrophic event.

“ The very last series I have done was about the hurricanes with girls posing in front of the destroyed houses. They were taken in June, before Katrina hit, and were about to be published in Time and Vogue. People were complaining, making negative comments.... They didn't know that it takes a long time for pictures to be published. So I shot them and then the editor called and said: 'They think it's about Katrina, they think it's about hurricanes.' And I said: 'It is about hurricanes! I didn't know that Katrina is gonna happen.'³



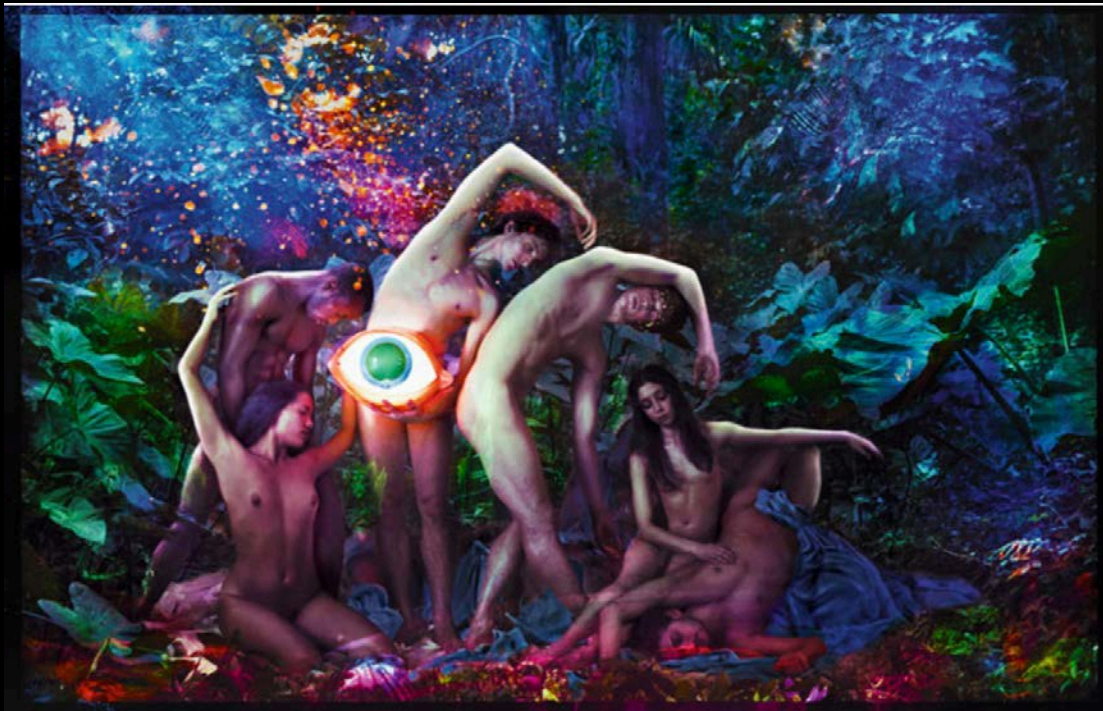
"The editor rang me up and said, 'David, why have you done this? Please, it's too much. Just show the dress! People think the photos are about the hurricane.' She'd had letters and calls complaining about how we were exploiting Katrina, but I'd shot them two months before. I knew then that it was the last editorial I'd shoot."⁶



So in 2006, LaChapelle basically said “OK, I’m a farmer now”

LaChapelle bought and moved to a nudist colony in a “very isolated part of Hawaii in this forest”. “It’s off the grid, biodiesel cars, solar-powered, growing our own food, completely sustainable. I thought ‘OK, I’m a farmer now’,” he describes.

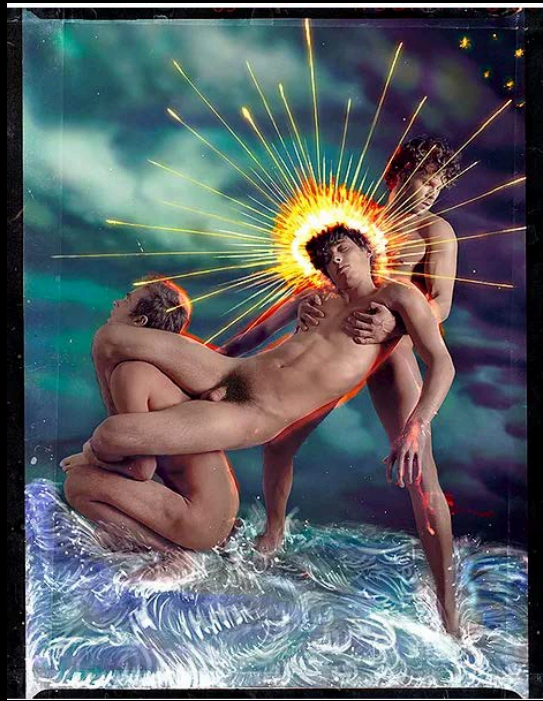
It sounds a little New Age kooky—and maybe it is—but it allowed LaChapelle to explore a different side to his art. Living ‘off the land’, as it might seem, gave the photographer a chance to see things “intuitively instead of intellectually”, he explains.¹⁶



Now free from the binds of pop culture, LaChapelle spent his time pursuing other areas that could be seen in his earlier works. Predominately in the form of religion.

Namely it was a return to nature and spirituality using locations on his property to create something that is like a Baroque reinvention with the color schemes he has always been known for. He called the series "New World."





It was in that initial series where he went back to his roots seen in his first exhibition. Using experimental techniques he basically did a do-over of his life and recreated Angels, Saints and Martyrs with everything that he learned prior from the fashion and editorial world mixing and matching all forms of religious iconography together.





“In the recent years after, he has shot a series of floral portraits based on Dutch still lifes; created metaphysical and religious allegories in response to masterworks by Botticelli, Michelangelo, Rubens and others; and, perhaps most fascinating, looked to the mournful loneliness of Edward Hopper when creating a series of hyperreal nocturnal images of gas stations in the jungles of Maui.”⁵



The Rape of Africa, LaChapelle

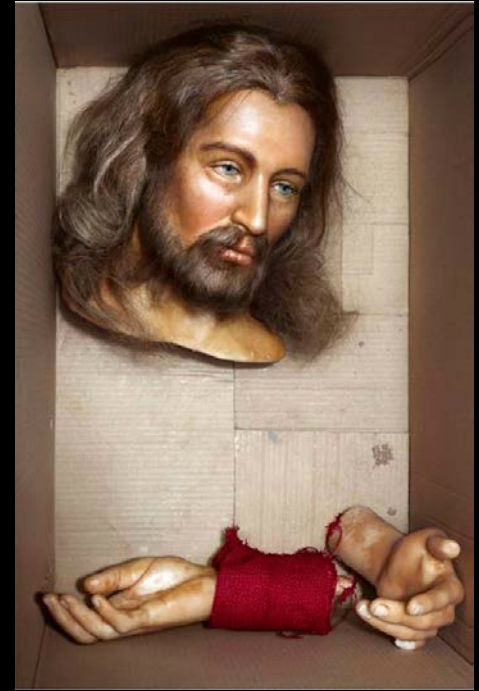
He began diving deeper into exploration of fine art references for his photographs, LaChapelle continued to mine old masters works for inspiration down to every compositional little detail to find modern topics of discussions within them.¹³



Venus and Mars, Botticelli



While although vowing not to photograph celebrities again in his career, it was by chance that in 2009 he was able to reconnect to pop culture during the vandalization of a wax Museum in Dublin Ireland. He would later go on to visit 2 more wax museums to complete His new exhibition, "Still Life" in 2012 with new commentary on celebrity culture.



“Much as our usefulness to society devalues us when we retire, our efforts to stay relevant, beautiful, young- surprisingly. The wax skin also seemed to age and decay as well. In these figures, I always loved how popular culture and those beautiful faces on our cinema screens gives us pleasure, what I question is the way in which we seem to enjoy our once beloved idols fall from grace and even be destroyed. Proof in tabloid dominance in publications today. Photographs of famous beauties who now, older being publically mocked and persecuted for aging, perhaps gaining weight or having cellulite or obvious plastic surgeries are the content of these magazines.”¹²



LaChapelle in retrospective always gives clues to where he is going to go next at some point later on in his life. I use this shoot of David Bowie in 1995 which makes not only his wax figure "Still Life" exhibit understandable, but a concept the wax figure as celebrity and commentary that was brewing in his head years prior to execution. There is without a doubt his previous experience with Warhol and society ousting him brought about this show.



One of LaChapelle's biggest muses has been the transgender American Model Amanda Lepore. He has considered her not only a close personal friend, but as a living breathing work of art. She appears in more of his photos than any other model he has ever photographed.



His other muse that appears in numerous of his works is Pamela Anderson. Their relationship has grown over the years to where he was even the maid of honor at her wedding to Kid Rock.

Like Lepore, he admires her augmentation towards perfection of an idealized image.





Which comes as no surprise on why there would be interest when LaChapelle photographed Carmen Carrera in what might be one of his most controversial images to date when photographing her as both Adam and Eve.

“Gender lines are blurred and every person is unique in how they see themselves,” LaChapelle explained in a statement. “For me the body is more than something to be looked at as an object of sexual gratification. The body is a beautiful housing for the soul that we are celebrating in this picture.”⁴ Again this is another example of LaChapelle referencing fine art with this time being Hieronymus Bosch’s “The Garden of Earthly Delights” The headline, “I am Adam. I am Eve. I am me strikes hard towards the message of self acceptance that is prevalent in his works.



The First Supper, David LaChapelle 2017

I had this idea of the new goddess, who is both male and female and who possesses both energies. But the female was a bit more prominent. The female is dominant. The matriarchal society 1300 years ago in Egypt was a peaceful society; that's where you had no war for thousands of years! When they switched to patriarchal society, when the male energy ruled, we became obsessed with the greed. Now we are in this time of intense greed! For me this beautiful figure of Carmen in the garden is the male and female together, with the female being a bit more dominant. So to me Carmen is the goddess and a beautiful person who is very special; like a unicorn or a mythical figure. I want to rescue the human body from just being looked at as a sexual or an ideal pornography object, especially in photography.”³



Venus of Willendorf (Pink) (2016)



Venus of Willendorf, 30,000 – 25,000 BCE

“With this image, LaChapelle reimagines the Venus of Willendorf, the limestone figurine considered to be one of the earliest depictions of female fertility ever made. She was found in Austria in 1908, and believed to have been sculpted around 25,000 years ago. The figure, possibly a depiction of a maternal goddess, was said to be covered in a rose tint, which LaChapelle’s version exaggerates in shiny, bright magenta.”¹⁴

It seems as a fair assessment that throughout his entire, LaChapelle has been giving the world a fresh perspective on art history while creating something new to say about the modern world. Does religious attention of detail honor the original or take away?



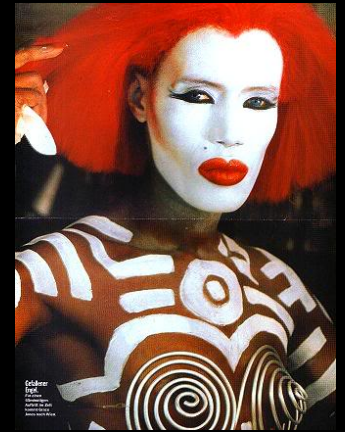
The Nativity, LaChapelle 2012

“By three methods we may learn wisdom,” Confucius observed. “First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.”¹⁵

Not all references are instant in LaChapelle’s works, but rest assured there is always a connection to something that has already occurred in art or within his past works. In his mind, he has taken everything that has ever done and put it in a blender to create something unifying and common about art of the world to possibly his own detriment at times.



Sculpture by Jorge Marin



Grace Jones painted by Keith Haring



Barque de naiades et faune blessé, Picasso



Nowadays, LaChapelle has reentered back into the celebrity world, but on his terms. He is very picky about who he photographs and why. But it is prevalent that he is not going to continue to reference not only what came before him, but what became because of him.

To this day, his style of photography is copied and considered the standard of what pop culture is meant to be.

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