

# FRED TORRES COLLABORATIONS

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## Kestnergesellschaft Presents a Solo Exhibition of Works by Photographer David LaChapelle



Irish designer Daphne Guinness sits at the new exhibition of US photographer David LaChapelle at the Kestnergesellschaft. The exhibition 'Earth Laughs in Flowers' is on display until 08 May 2011. EPA/JOCHEN LUEBKE

HANOVER. – In the first institutional solo exhibition in Germany of works by the American photographer David LaChapelle (\*1964), the [kestnergesellschaft](#) presents a series of new, not yet shown photographs. The series Earth Laughs in Flowers, which was created this year, refers to art-historical visual traditions but never loses sight of LaChapelle's own artistic language.

The large-format still lifes in this series, with titles such as The Lovers, Concerning the Soul, Risk or America, seamlessly take up the principle of exaggeration that characterized the portraits of celebrities like Madonna, Pamela Anderson, Michael Jackson, Björk or David Bowie through which LaChapelle himself has become famous since the 1990s. The portraits always contained art-

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historical references, along with a fear of emptiness, a love of bad taste, an ugly beauty, but David LaChapelle's recent works now show an explicit compositional affinity to Baroque floral still lifes. Plants, fruits and objects, in place of human bodies, now bear witness to human pride, to the finiteness of life with its obsessions and compulsions, to pleasure and suffering. The title of the exhibition can also be read in the sense of the vanitas portrayals of impermanence and futility: the quotation 'Earth laughs in flowers' comes from the poem 'Hamatreya' by Ralph Waldo Emerson in which flowers are the earth's laughter at the arrogant attitude of human beings who believe they can own the earth, although they themselves are transient and must return to it. But the title also speaks of an affirmative and all-encompassing attitude, as LaChapelle himself puts it and seeks to translate into his pop visual language. His works are intended to be inclusive and easy to understand, and they address a wide audience. This is achieved through strategies of heightened media staging – as in the portraits – but also through universal motifs that are culturally rooted – as in *Jesus is My Homeboy* (2003), which is also shown in the exhibition. In this series LaChapelle worked with people from the street to stage scenes from the life of Jesus that are astonishing in their true-to-life, contemporary realization. This series is complemented by two paintings from the State Gallery of the Lower Saxony State Museum. These two works, *Christuskopf* [Head of Christ] (1904) by Erich Brunkal and *The Entombment of Christ*, a copy after Raffael by Casabene, enable the new works by David LaChapelle to be compared with and referred to traditional Christian iconography.

David LaChapelle studied visual art at the North Carolina School of the Arts before moving to New York. There he studied at the Art Students League and the School of Visual Arts, and while still a student was invited by Andy Warhol to work for the magazine *Interview*. David LaChapelle has had solo exhibitions at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Kunst Haus Wien, the Fotografiska Museet Stockholm and elsewhere. His work has appeared in numerous group shows, for example at the Brooklyn Museum and the Helmut Newton Foundation.