



DAVID LACHAPELLE 'AMERICAN JESUS' EXHIBIT INCLUDES NAOMI CAMPBELL, MICHAEL JACKSON

BY BEN WIDDICOMBE (SUBSCRIBE TO BEN WIDDICOMBE'S POSTS), POSTED JUL 16TH 2010 AT 9:00AM

LEGENDARY FASHION PHOTOGRAPHER DAVID LACHAPELLE ATTENDED THE NEW YORK CITY DEBUT OF HIS LATEST SERIES OF WORK, "AMERICAN JESUS," FEATURING THIS IMAGE OF MICHAEL JACKSON (LEFT).

ALSO ON DISPLAY AT THE PAUL KASMIN GALLERY IS LACHAPELLE'S RECENT LARGE-SCALE WORK, "THE RAPE OF AFRICA," FEATURING SUPERMODEL NAOMI CAMPBELL, A LONG-TIME MUSE OF THE ARTIST.

ALTHOUGH LACHAPELLE HAS WORKED WITH THE JACKSON FAMILY MANY TIMES OVER THE YEARS, THE "AMERICAN JESUS" SERIES WAS CONCEIVED AFTER THE SINGER'S DEATH AND EXECUTED WITH THE USE OF A LOOK-ALIKE.

"THE FIRST TIME I EVER WORKED WITH THE JACKSONS WAS IN THE '80S, TO DO A SINGLE-COVER FOR JANET'S 'LET'S WAIT AWHILE,'" LACHAPELLE TELLS STYLELIST.

"THEN WHEN I WORKED ON THE MILLENNIUM-ISSUE COVER OF ROLLING STONE, IT WAS A FOLD-OUT COVER WITH A LOT OF PEOPLE WEARING MASKS AND A MICHAEL JACKSON IMITATOR IN THE CENTER. THAT'S WHEN MICHAEL REALIZED I WAS A FRIEND AND NOT A FOE."

THE PHOTOGRAPHER RELIED ON EXTENSIVE DIGITAL MANIPULATION OF THE IMAGES TO CREATE AN UNCANNY LIKENESS OF JACKSON IN A SERIES OF POSES INSPIRED BY CHRISTIAN IMAGERY.

HIS NAOMI CAMPBELL WORK WAS INSPIRED BY BOTTICELLI'S PAINTING "THE RAPE OF EUROPA," AND REFLECTS THE DEGRADATION OF AFRICA.

"I'VE TRAVELED IN AFRICA OVER THE YEARS, SPENT SOME TIME THERE, AND IT'S HEART-BREAKING TO SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING," LACHAPELLE SAID. "BOTTICELI WAS INSPIRED [TO USE AS A MODEL] IN HIS PAINTING A WOMAN HE WAS IN LOVE WITH, AND FOR ME I WENT FROM THERE TO NAOMI CAMPBELL TO REPRESENT AFRICA."

THE LENS MAN WAS SWARMED AT THE GALLERY OPENING BY A DOWNTOWN CROWD OF DRAG QUEENS IN POLKA-DOT WIGS AND YOUTHFUL ART STUDENTS SPORTING ASYMMETRICAL HAIRCUTS.

LACHAPELLE WAS WEARING A WHITE TRUCKER HAT AND WHITE VINTAGE LOAFERS WITH A WHITE AFRICAN-LOOKING SHIRT-DRESS, AND STYLELIST ASKED HIM WHERE HE FOUND THE DISTINCTIVE OUTFIT.

"OH, JUST IN MY CLOSET," HE SAID, AS HE SIGNED A POSTER FOR A 7-FOOT-TALL MAN IN HIGH HEELS.

IN OTHER ART-WORLD NEWS, CHECK OUT THE KEDS, WHITNEY MUSEUM, BLOOMINGDALE'S COLLABORATION.