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## Fashion Insider: *Bazaar* meets David LaChapelle

Helena Lee talks to the renowned photographer about his life

Photographer David LaChapelle, most famous for his striking and surreal celebrity images, is now exhibiting a stunning collection of ten large-scale photographs 'Earth Laughs in Flowers' in Dover Street, London. *Bazaar* speaks to the creator of these meticulous still lifes about sexuality in springtime and why he's now happier than ever before.

### What was your inspiration for this collection?

I was inspired by a great love for Old Master paintings and still life - of vanitas - reminders that we're here for a short time. The title [of the collection] comes from a line of a Waldo Emerson poem. It's about the idea that man owns and feels control of the earth, lives on it, and then is buried in it. The earth gives back in flowers. Back when there were paintings and no television or radio, people would look at all these objects - which had symbolic meaning that told a narrative and stories - and that's what I wanted to capture.

### Was it a personal collection?

Yes. The more personal it is, the more it touches people. As you get older, you think about things differently from when you do in your twenties, when you think you'll live forever. There are years when you're productive and then there are years where you really slow down and decline. Like flowers we have that age when we're in the perfect bloom - with all that joy and beauty of our youth - and you're enjoying your sexuality, enjoying your youth. The springtime is really about hormones bursting with very much a sort of youthful energy - but we will age and decay. It's really important to stay connected to nature, and not to disconnect from this in our busy lives.



### Did you want the photographs to look like paintings?

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I thought I'd create still life by using techniques that I learnt through the years of photography and wanted to achieve that painterly effect from using a slow shutter speed. It took so long to arrange these flowers - luckily we made a deal with this florist here in LA.

## **What do you want people to feel when they see them?**

I never want people to be repulsed with my pictures, I always want to attract people. There's enough repulsive stuff in the world. For this collection, I took a genre of history and revived it with photography - I used a mixture of modern symbols and historic things like pomegranates to represent things from the past.

## **Such as the skull?**

Exactly. The skull's a classic symbol. And the cell-phone is the symbolism of vanitas for the modern age.

Are you capturing the obsessions of our time? Yes, and the disposability of things.

Which is your personal favourite? 'Wilting Gossip' [pictured above]. I love that one. It has the burning cigarette, snuffed out candle and smoke - like life is extinguished. I like little things like that - they're quite antique ideas.

## **What do you find personally fulfilling at the moment?**

The variety in my life. There are a bunch of facets to my working life: the collaborative nature of photography, the solo aspect of drawing, figuring things out, or putting things together quietly. Balance [between them] is the most important thing. There was a time when I was really unbalanced; I was a workaholic and I couldn't say no to work. By coming back full circle to where I started [as an artist] both professionally and personally, I'm happier.

## **Would you have been an artist if Andy Warhol hadn't discovered you?**

Yes. I was always painting when I was a kid. But then when I handled a camera when I was 17, that was it for me. I loved photography. I would work 4 or 5 hours a day. It was like a calling.

Interview by Helena Lee