

# FRED TORRES COLLABORATIONS

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<http://www.fashionweekdaily.com/the-fix/article/catching-up-withdavid-lachapelle>

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## Catching Up With...David LaChapelle By Alexandra Ilyashov



(NEW YORK) Last week, artist David LaChapelle unveiled “Earth Laughs In Flowers,” a vibrant, vanitas-inspired spate of photos masquerading, sort of, as paintings. The series debuted at Hanover’s Kestner-Gesellschaft museum before going on a tour of Europe, and finally landing in NYC until March 24 at Fred Torres Collaborations. The Daily rang LaChapelle for the dish on his artistic process—which included decayed flowers, balloons, and burning cigarettes—and some touching tidbits from LaChapelle’s teenhood stint at *Interview*.

### **What’s the story behind your latest exhibit?**

The series is inspired by vanitas works by the old masters; all the objects had symbolic value and told a story, whether it was a fish, a knife, or a quill pen. Everyone’s done their flower series, whether it’s early [Irving] Penn, Mapplethorpe, Caravaggio, or Warhol. Vanitas reminds us of our connection to nature, and that life doesn’t go on forever. We have seasons, just like flowers. Spring

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is about youth and beauty; we age, ripen, and mature in summer and autumn, and then we decline and die in the winter of our lives. The title, "Earth Laughs In Flowers," is taken from a line in an Emerson poem that I came across when I was halfway done with the series.

## **Cool concept! So what's the format?**

They're large photographs that I tried to make feel painterly. Photorealism was an art movement in the late sixties and early seventies; artists tried to make paintings look like photographs. Now I'm trying to make a photograph feel like a painting, by using low light and diffusion smoke.

## **How did you devise a contemporary mishmash of random items?**

The objects I used are much more disposable than what the old masters used; they don't have the same importance, because people used to keep things forever. But I tried to channel their symbolic objects; in paintings of antiquity, a snuffed candle or candle smoke would represent the end of life; I used a cigarette, and the smoke represents the same thing. There's everything from an artichoke to a cell phone in these works!

## **And plenty of flowers—what's your favorite kind?**

I love all flowers, but I think my favorite is lilac. There's a great song sung by Jeff Buckley, "Lilac Wine." Lilac is a beautiful flower, but the leaves are poisonous if you eat them; people would use it to poison each other during the Middle Ages. But it's such a beautiful flower! It kind of reminds me of bunches of grapes.

## **Speaking of grapes—do you have a beloved fruit?**

I have so many favorites! I suppose the lilikoi, or the passion fruit. They're sour and sweet at the same time. I grow them on my Maui property; they grow for four or five months out of the year, and they're all over the place. You can just walk around and pick them up! But when you go to stores here, they cost \$3.99 apiece.

## **What's the deal with the less-than-robust flora in your work?**

We used a lot of decaying flowers, actually. We made a deal with this florist to pick up flowers when they were no longer able to sell, but weren't really dead yet. There are also fake silk or plastic flowers; I'd put a perfect silk flower next to a rotting rose. It kind of reminds me of when I was really broke, just a kid, and someone invited me to Thanksgiving. I bought some flowers from the deli—a bunch of carnations, I think. It was all I could afford at the time. You do what you can do!

## **OK, time for a brief foray down memory lane: What were your years under Andy Warhol's tutelage at *Interview* like?**

I was a kid! I started working for him when I was 18 or 19 years old. I worked for *Interview* from 1984 to 1987. Andy was this hero of mine. I couldn't imagine the wealth of his world and empire. It was beyond my comprehension! *Interview* was the most important public culture magazine at that time. Everyone wanted to either be in *Interview* or work at *Interview*. It was the magazine, and Andy had a strong team around him.

## **What's the biggest misconception you encounter about *Interview*?**

People often ask me what Edie [Sedgwick] was like, especially my young interns. Well, I was, like, three years old when Edie was at The Factory, so I don't know! To anyone born in the eighties,

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everything prior to their birth is ancient history.

## **Any assumptions about Andy?**

Young people, especially young art students, think Andy was sort of this Picasso figure in terms of popularity and success in the art world. That certainly was not true in America; critics during the last two decades of Andy's life were really brutal to him. Many of the final pieces Andy presented didn't sell at all back then—now, they're breaking auction records. Pieces like *The Last Supper*, a series Andy was working on before he died—that was commissioned in Europe where they'd always loved him. Even my friends in art school at the time were like, "Oh, Andy's such a has-been, he's washed up..." They were always very dismissive, whether of his work or about the fact that he went out a lot. Critics didn't think he was serious. He had a rough time in the art world, although *Interview* magazine kept him relevant and in the mix. All Andy ever wanted was a show at the MoMA, and he didn't get that until two years after he died—and it was the biggest one-man show in their history, and people just walked around with their mouths open. In hindsight, people have come to realize how essential and genius Andy was.

## **How about a memorable vignette?**

Every day Andy would host these fabulous lunches with all these glamorous people, from New York City Ballet dancers to advertisers, at one big long table. Once in a while I'd get to go—I was broke and living in an East Village squat, and they'd let me eat the leftovers in the kitchen. Once I was making myself a plate and Andy was the only other person there. He was going through the garbage, and he picked up this can of Folgers coffee with just a few granules of coffee left in the bottom. Andy made himself a cup, from the coffee from the garbage, and started yelling, "Who left this? Who threw this away? This is so wasteful! I want to know who did this." He was having this major fit, with one hand in the trash. It was really touching to see this multimillionaire digging through the garbage; it reminded me of how my mom and grandmother saved every little thing. It was really endearing.

## **Do any other characters stand out from your Interview days?**

Paige Powell, who sold advertising space at *Interview* and was Andy's right hand. They called her the 'Warhol Widow' when he died; Paige really was with him 24/7. She was a great person from Oregon, and her only experience prior to *Interview* was selling fertilizer. Andy said, "Well, I guess if you can sell horse shit, you can sell advertising space." Then he gave her a job as advertising director, and they became very close. She'd arrange, invite, and make the guest lists for his lunches, dinners, social schedule and stuff like that. They were really great together. Andy had a lot of nice people around him, but Paige really stood out.

## **Back to the present! Vice also seems to be a theme in "Earth Laughs In Flowers." What's one of your vices?**

Ha! There are many people that would look at my life, and think it's a very sinful way to live. There was a time in my life where vice—drugs and those types of things that one associates with it—were definitely around. Today, I don't even know anyone who does drugs. That definitely wasn't the case 15 years ago. I lead a fairly wholesome existence now. I've been pretty much a vegetarian my whole life and not very self-destructive. Ultimately, I strive to better myself. The number one thing is to treat yourself and the people around you well.

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**There's also this concept of "torturous disorderliness," and orderly chaos—is that what your closet or studio looks like?**

No! My spaces, from New York to L.A. to Hawaii, are pretty neat. I can't focus when things are all over the place! It's always a big mess at shoots, and that's just the nature of creativity. It's pretty much a circus when we're shooting; there's a lot of activity and noise and music. But I'm not distracted at all; it's just this loose, easy, happy atmosphere I like to surround myself with.

**What's in your (presumably clean) closet nowadays?**

I get lots of buttondown shirts at flea markets. And I always have a leather jacket or two by this very reclusive French designer. He's very anti-press and he doesn't advertise.

**What's your earliest fashion memory?**

I loved Fiorucci when I was growing up—they did these amazing, outrageous posters. The store felt like a nightclub with a DJ spinning and everything. It was just super glam, and you felt it. Before the word branding was everywhere, there was this really cool lifestyle where everyone wanted to live in a brand.

**Who are some of your favorite designers, beyond the confines of your closet?**

Definitely Yves Saint Laurent—the designs were just so genius, and so beyond the epitome of all things couture and unattainable. It captured the idea of French glamour, even if you'd never been there. Also, Alexander McQueen. I worked really closely with Isabella Blow—she styled a lot of shoots for me, and we were close friends. [McQueen's] clothes were so amazing to photograph, you almost didn't have to do anything, they were just so incredible. Izzy Blow and I always had fun—she was constantly coming up with new designers that she'd found in some basement in, like, Antwerp. She had such a great eye.