

# FRED TORRES COLLABORATIONS

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## David LaChapelle Talks Old Masters, Quitting the Fashion Game and Newt Gingrich at His Opening Last Night

BY ABBY SCHREIBER



Gerard Kouwenhoven, David LaChapelle



Last night, the art crowd gathered at the **Fred Torres Collaborations** gallery for ***Earth Laughs In Flowers***, a new exhibit of still life photographs by famed photographer, **David LaChapelle**. At first glance, the photos feature expansive and lush flowers reminiscent of paintings by the Dutch Masters but, upon closer inspection, elements of LaChapelle's signature blend of wealthy excess and the grotesque are present: phallic doll parts, Cheetos, pill bottles and toilet paper peek out from fancy floral arrangements and mingle amid ripe fruit.

LaChapelle, who famously quit shooting fashion for magazines and moved to Hawaii in 2006 at what some might say was the peak of his influence, has clearly not lost any admirers. The packed gallery had people spilling down the stairs and into the street where a long line waited to get in PAPERMAG had the chance to talk to LaChapelle about his exhibit, about his decision to move off the grid and buy a farm in Hawaii and what he'd do if he got a call to photograph **Newt Gingrich**.



*The Lovers*, 2011 by David LaChapelle

### **What can you tell us about your show?**

It's a group of still lifes, the **vanitas**, which is this idea that the **Old Masters** had about the brevity of life and to remind us of life's seasons and our connection with nature. That really intrigued me. The use of the objects in all the Old Master paintings had a great significance or symbolism that told a narrative about the piece. I love this idea of doing flowers.

### **Are you turning more to paintings and Old Masters for your influences nowadays rather than contemporary subjects or profiles?**

Prior to television, people would look at these paintings and try to figure out what they meant by the symbolism and how the objects were together to tell a story. I love story telling. I have a strong love of the history of art especially when you can make it relevant today. Art in antiquity was once contemporary art and a reflection of that society. We look at it now in a decorative sense--it

doesn't have the same power as contemporary art--so in some ways, [this exhibit] is rescuing the ideas of the Old Masters and reclaiming them in a contemporary context. That fascinates me and really excites me because as much as we've progressed with technology, we haven't progressed spiritually and morally as humanity. We would hope we'd have been more enlightened than we are but the reason why **Boticelli's Venus and Mars** or the Greek myths are still valid is because we're still dealing with the same issues of greed and love versus war and all those ideas. We haven't really gone beyond that or evolved from that. I think right now there's a real hunger for artwork that speaks to people, that they can decipher, that they can understand.



*Deathless Winter, 2011 by David LaChapelle*

**A few years ago you quit doing fashion shoots but now you've recently gotten back into that with the M.A.C. campaign starring Nicki Minaj and Ricky Martin. What can you tell us about that?**

I quit [shooting fashion] to change my life and start a farm [in Hawaii] where I live now. The farm is great--it saved my life. You need balance. It was time to quit working for magazines. My pictures weren't fitting with their needs and their publications weren't fitting my needs and what I wanted to express so I knew I had to stop. My life was so out of balance at that time that I had this whole revelation with this farm and got the farm and started working there. After that, months later, I got a call to show in a gallery, which is where I started in the East Village in the '80s. I started showing in galleries way before magazines so I was surprised to do that. At first I was very adamant that I wouldn't do anything commercial but then when **Gaga**, who is a friend, asked me to shoot her first cover of **Rolling Stone**, I said, "Well, yeah, I'll do that." I just don't want to have rules for myself. I want to be free and do what I want to do.

### **How were Nicki and Ricky?**

They were fun. We had a really fun day and it's really great for my staff to mix it up. I like the variety of every once in a while doing a job. It was something I couldn't say "no" to.

### **Is there anyone you'd still like to shoot but haven't already?**

Um, no. People come to me but I've photographed everybody [I've wanted to]. I can love **Adele** without having to photograph her. I can just appreciate her.

### **I hear you're a huge Adele fan?**

Yeah. I've been a really big fan [*laughs*].

### **I liked that they were playing "Rolling in the Deep" when I walked in.**

They should only be playing Adele. I told them that.

### **You've photographed Hillary Clinton before--would you ever shoot any other politicians? What would you do if you got a request to shoot someone like Sarah Palin or Newt Gingrich?**

I don't really care for **Newt Gingrich**. It wouldn't excite me very much to do that. I really don't think that that scenario would ever happen because of my photographic history so as much as I love fantasy, I don't want to indulge in that. I like to indulge in fantasies that are in some way plausible or at least erotic or sexually exciting but Newt Gingrich is none of the above! [*laughs*]



*Flaccid Passion*, 2011 by David LaChapelle


*Earth Laughs in Flowers* runs from February 23-March 24 at Fred Torres Collaborations, 527 W. 29th St., New York

Event photos courtesy of Matteo Prandoni/*Billy Farrell Agency*

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