



By EvelynKim

David LaChapelle is featuring his mind blowing show at the Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York this week. Works featured entail "Rape of Africa" and Martyred Jackson which are glaringly critical interpretations of mainstream culture. The late legendary pop star Michael Jackson is posed as the American Jesus. LaChapelle's works are bound to evoke potent reactions but the intent is to suggest contemplation rather than offense. Religious allusions are carefully borrowed and appropriated in his rendition of the Boticelli painting with Naomi Campbell posing with her breast exposed accompanied by a small African boy holding a machine gun. Blaxploitation is nothing new but David LaChapelle's visual language speaks louder through the distortion of similar imageries.

Michael Jackson's influence is undoubtedly as magnetic as that of a religious God in mainstream culture. By projecting Michael Jackson as Jesus we are forced to ponder his persecution. Michael Jackson is a pop culture martyr, although he was castigated for his transgressions, he was still a victim of the ills of society that afflict all of us. In the rest of the pieces in the "Rape of Africa", LaChapelle reveals the black blood in laboring for the production of opulent goods such as diamonds. LaChapelle geniusly exposes filth behind luster in artistically striking ways. His interpretation of the diamond industry in one of his studies for "Rape of Africa" scrutinizes the amount of black labor bled toiling for such goods.

LaChapelle strips down the sugar coating on things that we take for granted to give us a raw look at the debris of mainstream society today through creative montage.