

David LaChapelle

"If I see it in my head, I can make it happen"

David LaChapelle is in **Milan** for little more than a day to present his exhibition "**Earth Laughs in Flowers**" in Italy at **Robilant+Voena** Gallery. The **Milan gallery** is also the location for the interview.

Having agreed to meet at 3 p.m.; Marco Morona, the cameraman, and I arrived at 2.15 p.m. so as to have enough time to film the photos on display. David arrived at 4 p.m., an hour later which gave me the time to wonder what to expect from this **enfant prodige et terrible**, to whom, when still very young, **Andy Warhol** offered his first professional job as a photographer for **Interview** and that now, at only 48 has already gone through all the typical phases of a long career, including fame and his retirement from the business. Except that in his case retiring was his own decision, one that was taken at the peak of his game.

David has met and photographed the biggest names in pop music of the last 20 years or so, from **Madonna** to **Michael Jackson** and **Lady Gaga**, has collaborated with the most prestigious magazines in the world and shot **ad campaigns** for major international fashion houses to then decide, in 2006, that he had accomplished whatever he wished to convey through those means of communication, and that was it. He was going to live in a farm in Hawaii to recover that bond with nature which he needs and feels "*we lost in our modern society*".

As soon as he starts answering my questions, the enfant terrible attitude that he seemed to have until a few moments ago disappears; he is a **mature man with an astonishing alert mind, clever and willing to put himself on the line**. I ask him what the references behind this series of still life are and whether the absence of human beings is to be read as a way of distancing himself from his past work.

David explains that he was **inspired by the Masters of Baroque painting** which he made contemporary by including in the tableaux every day objects related to our **consumerist society**. They are **objects that emphasize the fleeting nature of life** already underscored by the symbolism conveyed by the flowers, a metaphor of the seasons of life. "*Objects are designed to go out of fashion, they are designed to brake, to become obsolete*".

LaChapelle stresses how important it is to him that **his photos are simple to understand and accessible to anybody**, and not just experts and art critics, **hence the choice of symbols drawn from pop culture**. He tells us how **deciding to have his work displayed in galleries was like a circle that closes** because, back in the 80's, his career started exactly like that, by showing his pictures in galleries across **New York** before being offered the job for **Interview** by Warhol.

Undoubtedly, the experience with **Warhol** for **Interview** opened up a **wealth of opportunities** but talent did everything else and in a short time David became a celebrity on par with the celebrities he was photographing. David has always been a visionary artist, "*back in the 80's before digital even existed I was painting on negatives*".

"*Art was a call for me, I always knew I was going to be an artist*". I ask him about his creative process to which he explains that images "*just pop up into my head, I work and leave very intuitively, I don't think about it; I follow the images that pop up into my head and I create them*" "*I create sets, I create scenarios and magic, and always have*". What the untrained

eye could perceive as a massive use of post-production editing is, in fact, the result of the work of a large team of people, of complex and very elaborate settings where everything is life-size and original. **The use of digital re-touching in LaChapelle's work is kept to minimum.**

"*Trying to photograph the unfotographable*", David LaChapelle reminds of a fantasy character, a mix between Peter Pan and Edward Scissorhands. **His deliberately elaborate, playful and cartoonish style is, in fact, an open critique of the consumerism and shallowness characterizing our modern society;** moreover, LaChapelle's is a well-read photography, rich with references to ancient and renaissance art.

LaChapelle is a young wise man, witty and genius who **uses the language of contemporaneity** to ponder - while also encouraging us - the meaning of life. As soon as we finish with the interview, David goes back to playing the part of the enfant terrible and I'm a little sad that our time is over and I have to say goodbye.

*Video interview and text Alessia Glaviano
Filmed and edited by Marco Morona
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