



David LaChapelle: Land Landscape at the Robilant + Voena Gallery | Exhibition review

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Land Landscape by David LaChapelle is the famous commercial photographer's latest series of images that are, as always, characterised by his trademark bright, kitschy palate of neon hues and references to modern pop culture.

The artist has found inspiration in the act of recycling, creating small models of oil refineries using all kinds of discarded packaging and rubbish – egg cartons, drink cans, soup tins, drinking straws, cut-up cardboard – photographed in the studio or before real life backdrops, such as a skyline in California. The results are relatively convincing, and it takes a moment before one begins to notice the artificiality. The models themselves, lit up with miniature lights and shining like a fairground at dusk, look almost like theme park rides in their exaggerated, fantastical "Sleeping Beauty's castle" designs. From their towering chimneys shoot flames that explode like fireworks in the evening sky. One piece – *Emerald City* – shows a spectacular energy plant that sits atop a black, rocky island. Looking akin to a mad professor's chemistry set, its wonky towers spray out smoke across the pink and blue fairytale clouds above. Another – *Anaheim* – features large spherical "tanks" that draw thoughts to Disney World's Epcot Center. The collection, exhibited on two floors at the Robilant + Voena gallery in Mayfair, also features four pieces that depict brightly lit gas stations (miniatures) amid dense vegetation; the ferns and tall blades of grass impeding the entrance for any vehicle.



LaChapelle is known above all for his fine art photos of celebrities that often decorate the pages of *Vogue*, *Rolling Stone*, and other high-profile print journals. His work is an ironic blend of baroque high drama and kitschy pop culture, often – as is the case here – permeated with a fashion-conscious social message or satirical reflection. With his images of glamorous, Hollywood-style nuclear facilities, he quite effectively draws attention to our dependence on petroleum and the recycling of energy. Although, given his history as a photographer of celebrity, one might also interpret them as images of producers of "15-minute fame" pop culture itself. However the viewer decides to read them, the images are highly entertaining in their zany, cartoon colourfulness, attesting to LaChapelle's talent and broad appeal.

★★★★☆

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