

A major new exhibition from David LaChapelle—the artist’s largest-ever U.S. exhibition; first New York museum solo show; and most comprehensive exhibition to date—will feature more than 150 works created between 1984 and 2022

Starting in 1980s-NYC with existential religious explorations LaChapelle made as the AIDS crisis ravaged his close circle, the exhibition spans the thematic and technical breadth of the artist’s diverse 40-year career of narrative social commentary, with a “full circle” effect in his newer work’s matured revisitation of his early practice’s religious themes

In *Make Believe*, poignant visual explorations including rare and never-seen images dialogue with iconic, intergenerationally significant staples of visual culture: the last-ever portraits of **Andy Warhol** (1986) and **Michael Jackson** (2009); intimate 1990s photos of **Tupac**, **David Bowie**, **Madonna**, and **Britney Spears**; illustrious fashion campaigns featuring **Naomi Campbell** (and a rare 1996 portrait of **Alexander McQueen** in a ballgown); and electrifying portraiture of today’s most talked-about names, like **Lizzo**, **Travis Scott**, and **Kim Kardashian**

Filling all six floors of the landmarked museum building’s masterful 1894 neo-Gothic architecture, Make Believe—Fotografiska New York’s first building-wide takeover dedicated to a single artist, in a space that typically accommodates four to five separate shows—stages LaChapelle’s work in a captivating interplay with the museum’s stunningly churchlike interior



Kim Kardashian: *Abiding Lamentation* (2018), 24 x 19 • Andy Warhol: *Last Sitting, November 22* (1986) featuring background of antique bibles, 24 x 18 in. • 1 Samuel 18:1: ... the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (2021), 24 x 18 in. • Archangel Michael: *And No Message Could Have Been Any Clearer* (2009), 40 x 30 in. • Kanye West: *Passion of the Christ* (2006), 24 x 18 in.

NEW YORK, NY – FALL 2022 – Fotografiska New York is pleased to present its first full-building takeover: *Make Believe*, the largest U.S. exhibition and first New York museum solo show of the interdisciplinary artist and photographer David LaChapelle, ten years after LaChapelle’s takeover of Fotografiska’s Stockholm flagship. The collection of 150 works on view surveys 11 thematic bodies of fine artwork, some never-exhibited, and is also interspersed with iconic, intergenerationally resonant staples of visual culture that David LaChapelle was behind, from the last-ever portraits of **Andy Warhol** and **Michael Jackson** to dozens of household-name album covers (listed on page 3 of this document) across all genres. In addition to its thematic breadth, *Make Believe* demonstrates the evolution of LaChapelle’s visionary technical approach to the photography medium, with manual compositional manipulation including hand-painted negatives and proprietary analog splicing methods.

The earliest works in the exhibition were created amid the AIDS epidemic, which tragically affected the gay community in New York City, of which LaChapelle was a part. In 1986, LaChapelle met Warhol, a fellow Catholic who was similarly affected by the

toll of AIDS on his close circle of friends (and at the time, was working on his series based on Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*). LaChapelle's works of the era were also made in this context of existential despair, using his camera and experimental post-production manipulation processes as a way to make sense of things.

With an overarching thread of art-historical references, ***Make Believe* thematically focuses on the cultural interplay of five themes:** religion, the environment (and the duality of man and the natural world / artificiality and nature), gender identity, body image and societal ideals of beauty, and layered explorations around the construct of celebrity.



Gas: Chevron (2012), 50 x 76 in.

the absurdity of man's attempts to harness nature, depicting archetypal retro gas stations in an on-location shoot in the rainforest of Maui. In 2017, LaChapelle shot the artist **David Hockney** standing on the edge of a swimming pool over a nude male swimming and another nude male frozen mid-jump, a direct conceptual nod to—but distinct, LaChapelle-esque reimagination of—Hockney's iconic 1972 painting, *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)*.

In addition to frequent stylistic nods to early religious art, the numerous art historical references across LaChapelle's oeuvre include *My Own Marilyn* (2002), which depicts LaChapelle's close friend and muse **Amanda Lepore** in the style of Andy Warhol's *Shot Sage Blue Marilyn* (1964), a 1997 reimagination of **Robert Smithson's** 1970 earthwork *Spiral Jetty*, and the 2018-2020 series *Sculpture Garden*, which pays homage to **Georgia O'Keeffe**, a lifelong inspiration of LaChapelle's, by emulating the compositions of artworks O'Keeffe painted in Hawaii between 1939 and 1940. Another series, *Gas* (2012), is inspired by **Edward Hopper's** *Gas* (1940), though in an updated commentary on



My Own Marilyn (2002), 53 x 50 in.

The influence of David LaChapelle's art practice spans four decades; his first solo exhibition was in 1984 (at 303 Gallery, which at the time was located just one block from Fotografiska New York) and his first large-scale public art commission, by the venerable MTA Arts program for display in the New York City public transit system, was in 1988. Alongside his art practice, LaChapelle's in-demand status as a high-end editorial photographer at the confluence of art and fashion skyrocketed in the early-1990s due to the sublime signature effect with which he imbued dozens of commissions for the world's top fashion magazines. His diverse repertoire of cultural impact also includes **19 Rolling Stone covers**, as well as having shot fellow visual artists **Cecily Brown, David Hockney, Jeff Koons, and Kehinde Wiley**.



Light Within (1986), 40 x 32 in.

On the topic of LaChapelle's early work, describes Nathalie Deitschy, an expert in religious iconography and contemporary figures of Jesus, who authored one of the exhibition's texts: "In the 1980s, LaChapelle began photographing his entourage [all part of the community heavily affected by the AIDS epidemic] as saints, martyrs, or angels, expressing the feeling of mourning while exploring possible paths of a soul that persists beyond the corporeal. He questions both the possibility of picturing the unphotographable (how to give body to the soul?) and the capacity of the photographic medium to address supernatural subjects. ... His early works are marked by an attachment to the materiality of analogue photography, with LaChapelle working on his negatives using various techniques (collage, ink additions, color highlights). However, through his eminently pictorial approach, LaChapelle adds an aesthetic and spiritual deepness to his photographs, which free themselves from direct contact with reality to propose an imaginary afterlife. His recent photographs echo the first experiments of the 1980s. The contemporary sophistication of digital tools enables a supernatural dimension to the pictures."

Said LaChapelle: "My earliest works from the 1980s were motivated by a search to represent a loving God, the nature of the soul and heaven during a devastating period when I lost many friends. My profession led to working in popular culture and secular themes. Over time, I began to notice how my faith in God was keeping me grounded through my personal struggles, and meanwhile the world of pop culture was turning away from religion and focusing more on fame, wealth, and individualism. It became apparent that I could not separate my personal life and professional work. I feel the responsibility to bring light into the world and make imagery that can elevate and serve humanity, even while sometimes employing drama and humor. Whether secular or religious, my images are part of the same experience and evolving perspective."

Distinct bodies of LaChapelle's fine artwork surveyed in *make Believe* include, in chronological order: *Good News for Modern Man* (1984), *Miracles* (1985-2021), *Jesus is my Homeboy* (2003), *After the Deluge* (2005-2009), *Recollections in America* (2006),

Awakened (2007), *Earth Laughs in Flowers* (2008-2011), *Gas* (2012), *Land Scene* (2013), *Aristocracy* (2014), and *Sculpture Garden* (2018-2020). The exhibition also includes selections from major fashion campaigns and editorial shoots dating back to 1994, and celebrity portraiture dating back to 1986.



Fly on My Sweet Angel Fly on to the Sky (1988). As the AIDS epidemic gripped the New York City gay community in the 1980s, LaChapelle shot his friends as angels, saints, and martyrs, with ethereal poses featuring a set of angel wings that LaChapelle had spent nearly all his money on at the time; he felt that wings were the strongest tool for metaphysical spiritual exploration



Heliconia No. 2 (2019), from the series *Sculpture Garden*, an homage to Georgia O'Keeffe that directly references the compositions she created when living there from 1939-1940 (similarly to how LaChapelle moved to Hawaii for respite and rejuvenation)



Earth Laughs in Flowers: Wilting Gossip (2008), which on first glance evokes Dutch still life but on closer observation reveals flowers in varying states of decay, exploring ephemerality of the natural world; that flowers only fulfill man's ideal of "beauty" for a finite time before they expire



Detail of *Recollections II: Double Date* (2006), from the series *Recollections in America*—featuring 1970s photos purchased on eBay, which LaChapelle scanned and digitally manipulated to add details and figures that alter the image's meaning

LaChapelle's position on the pulse of the pop cultural zeitgeist has unwaveringly flourished across five decades: A 1983 shoot of **Eartha Kitt**; **Andy Warhol's** last-ever portrait sitting in 1986; 1990s shoots of cultural icons **Pee-Wee Herman**, **Elizabeth Taylor**, and **John Waters**; the 2013 **Kardashian** Christmas card. His impact on visual culture is undeniable across all creative industries but is particularly pronounced in music. LaChapelle is the visionary behind countless household-name album covers, each unified by a signature visual polish that finely oscillates between bold and ethereal. His compelling ability to establish a unique interpersonal connection with his celebrity subjects translates to a palpable sense of vulnerability and intimacy – like a shoot of **Tupac** in the shower, or **Britney Spears** in her childhood bedroom (an image from which shoot famously graced the cover of *Rolling Stone* in 1997—one of LaChapelle's 19 *Rolling Stone* covers). His legendary status in the music industry is even recognized in a **Jay-Z** verse in which the musician describes his daughter as resembling one of LaChapelle's portrait series of Tupac: "Blue lookin' like Pac in the tub / David LaChapelle levels of not giving a fuck." Including **Fleetwood Mac's** *The Dance* (1997) and **Mariah Carey's** *Rainbow* (1999), a non-exhaustive list of LaChapelle's influential music-industry shoots from 1983 to 2022 is as follows; those with an asterisk are included in *Make Believe*:



Travis Scott's 2018 album, *Astroworld*

ALBUM COVERS

Aaliyah	Liza Minnelli	Elton John*	Björk	Eminem*	Justin Timberlake	Miley Cyrus*	Rob Zombie
Christina Aguilera	Macy Gray	David Guetta	Camila Cabello	Eve	Kanye West*	Missy Elliott	Sade
Dolly Parton	Smashing Pumpkins	Mariah Carey	Cher	Flaming Lips	Katy Perry	N*SYNC	Sean Combs
Fleetwood Mac	Travis Scott*	Moby	Coolio	George Clinton	Kylie Minogue	Nicki Minaj	Shaggy
Gwen Stefani	Whitney Houston	No Doubt	Courtney Love'	Good Charlotte	Lady Gaga*	OutKast	Shakira
Gene Simmons	MUSIC VIDEOS +/-	OTHER SHOOTS	Debbie Harry	Hanson	Lana Del Rey*	Paris Hilton	Shawn Mendes
Janet Jackson	ALBUM COVERS	Alicia Keys	David Bowie*	Ice Cube	Lizzo*	Pharrell Williams	Sheryl Crow
Jennifer Lopez	Avril Lavigne	Andre 3000	Demi Lovato	Jamie Foxx	Madonna*	Pink	Shirley Manson
Keith Richards	Amy Winehouse	Avicii	Dua Lipa*	Jay-Z	Marilyn Manson*	Red Hot Chili Peppers	Snoop Dogg
Lil' Kim*	Blink-182	Backstreet Boys	Duran Duran	Jewel	Mary J. Blige	Ricky Martin	Stevie Wonder
	Britney Spears*	Beastie Boys	Eartha Kitt	John Mayer	Michael Jackson*	Rihanna	The Weeknd



Detail of *Vox Populi*, 1995-2021 (NOTE: the installation features four stacked panels of this detail-shot 'ribbon')

Included in *Make Believe*—featuring several of these musicians but also figures across other sectors of the entertainment industry—is a never-exhibited large-scale wheatpaste collage installation (approximately 8 feet tall by 22 feet wide) titled

Vox Populi, 1995-2021, which exemplifies in mega-scale the magnitude of LaChapelle's vibrant visual contributions to the 1990s-to-present pop culture zeitgeist. Featured in Vox Populi, 1995-2021 are:

- Pamela Anderson: Over Easy (1998)
- Doja Cat: Canterbury Gale (2021)
- Dua Lipa: Future Nostalgia (2020)
- Uma Thurman: Beauties Bloom (1997)
- Eminem: About to Blow (1999)
- Tupac Shakur: Becoming Clean (1996)
- Lady Gaga: Could You Fix Me if I Broke? (2009)
- David Bowie: Self Preservation (1995)
- Marilyn Manson: Raggedy Ann (1997)
- Lizzo: Ottoman Empire (2019)
- Madonna: Ray of Light (1998)
- Travis Scott: Tears (2020)
- Lil' Kim: Luxury Item (1999)
- Britney Spears: I'm Not Your Toy (1999)



Fotografiska New York, 281 Park Avenue South at 22nd St.

Also noteworthy about *Make Believe* is the site specificity and architectural responsiveness of the show's physical layout: the journey-like exhibition flow, with an emphasis on experiential immersion and thoughtful thematic transitions, was designed and executed in close collaboration with the artist and his studio. Most prominent is the interplay of Fotografiska New York's churchlike neo-Gothic 1894 architecture with David LaChapelle's immaculately stylized work centered around Jesus and other religious iconography. Every nook, cranny, hallway, and stairwell of the landmarked architectural gem was factored into this true full-building takeover devoted to David LaChapelle's transcendental world, in a six-floor, 7,500-square-foot space that typically accommodates up to five separate exhibitions.

A foundational work of the show is the mega-scale triptych *Deluge* (2006), which encapsulates multiple aspects of LaChapelle's core practice (religion, existentialism, and art historical references) and directly informed multiple subsequent bodies of work: the *After the Deluge* series (2005-2009) as well as the 2018 work *Staircase to Paradise*, the latter of which LaChapelle considers to be a "companion" to *Deluge* "because it expresses the mysteries of faith." LaChapelle describes *Deluge*—which is inspired by Michelangelo's 1512 painting of the same name which adorns the Sistine Chapel—as "a criticism of the consumer race, the decline of such universal values as kindness and empathy, and the growing attachment to material goods." He continues, providing personal context: "*Deluge* came from a state of deep reflection after I relocated from Los Angeles to Hawaii. The idea is that life is eminently coming to an end, but you're there helping one another amidst chaos. This is my way of trying to show human nature at its highest. The work is a great metaphor for losing everything materialistic, your health, your body—and to be on your deathbed with last chance for enlightenment."



Deluge (2006), 71 x 276 inches • *After the Deluge: Museum* (2007), 50 x 66 inches • *Staircase to Paradise* (2018), 86 x 71 inches

Make Believe at Fotografiska New York is curated by the artist and David LaChapelle Studio, and is organized by Amanda Hajjar (Director of Exhibitions, Fotografiska New York); Meredith Breech (Exhibitions Manager, Fotografiska New York); and Phoebe Weinstein (Exhibitions Manager, Fotografiska New York), as well as Johan Vikner (Director of Global Exhibitions, Fotografiska). This exhibition is presented with Lead Exhibition Partner support from American Express Platinum®.

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