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LaChapelle's 'Chaos of Biblical Proportions' at The Benton



His latest fine art piece, a debut for The Benton, is a story of lament.

tower shatters like an over-stuffed waffle cone, spewing out chunks from its apex. Hot cherry clouds drift overhead. It's this wall-sized photograph that opens the exhibit.

In Tower of Babel (2024), a pile of livid human figures writhes in distress. These distressed people

gesture and call out. They point angrily. One covers her ears. Rising out of them, an ancient domed

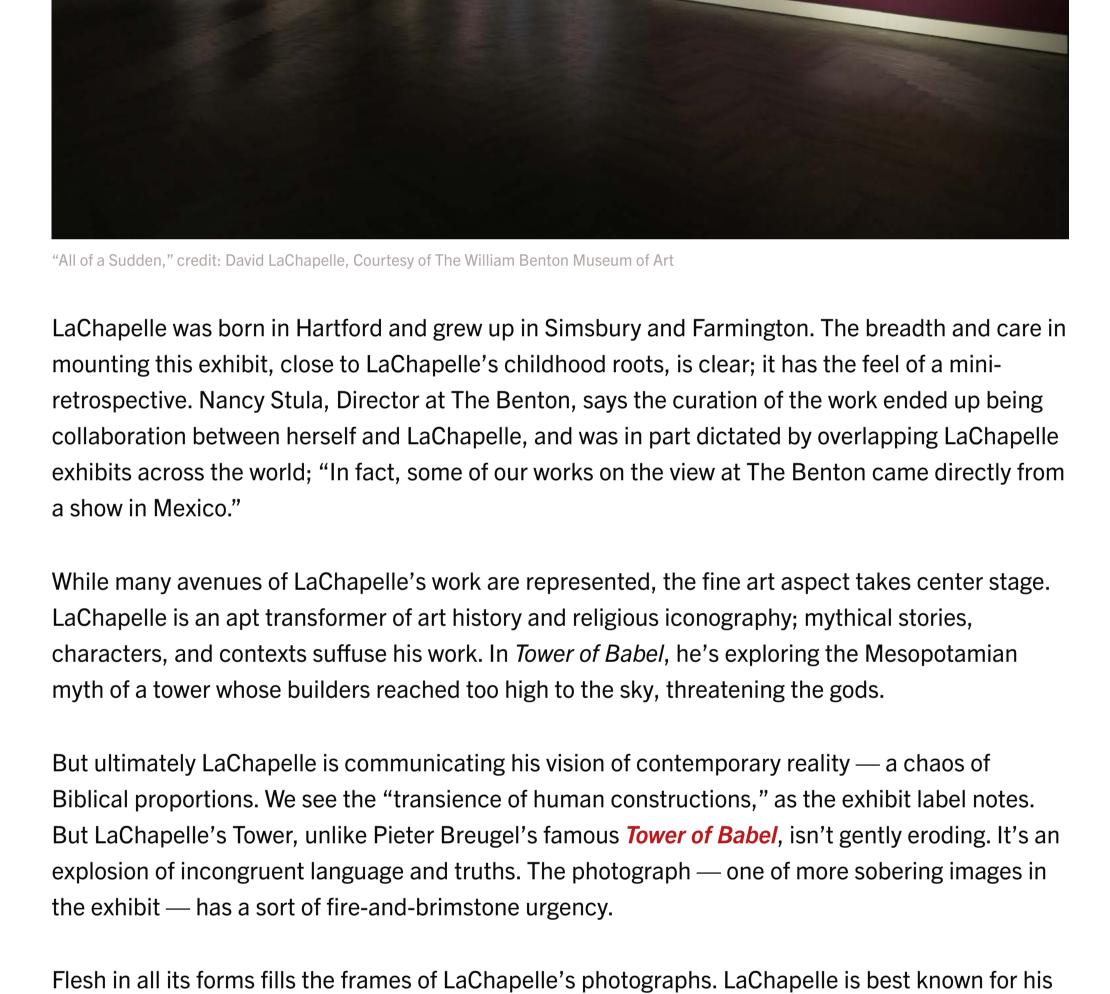
The images are larger-than-life, especially in person. They cover whole walls in ultra-clear pigment

prints at The William Benton Museum of Art, where *David LaChapelle: All of a Sudden* is on display

through December 15th. The technically astounding photographs nearly pop off the wall,

celebrating sensuality, vulnerability and power. Each one is a story.

ALL OF A SUDDEN



celebrity work. The exhibit gathers these images in a colorful checkerboard, "Vox Populi, Rainbow"

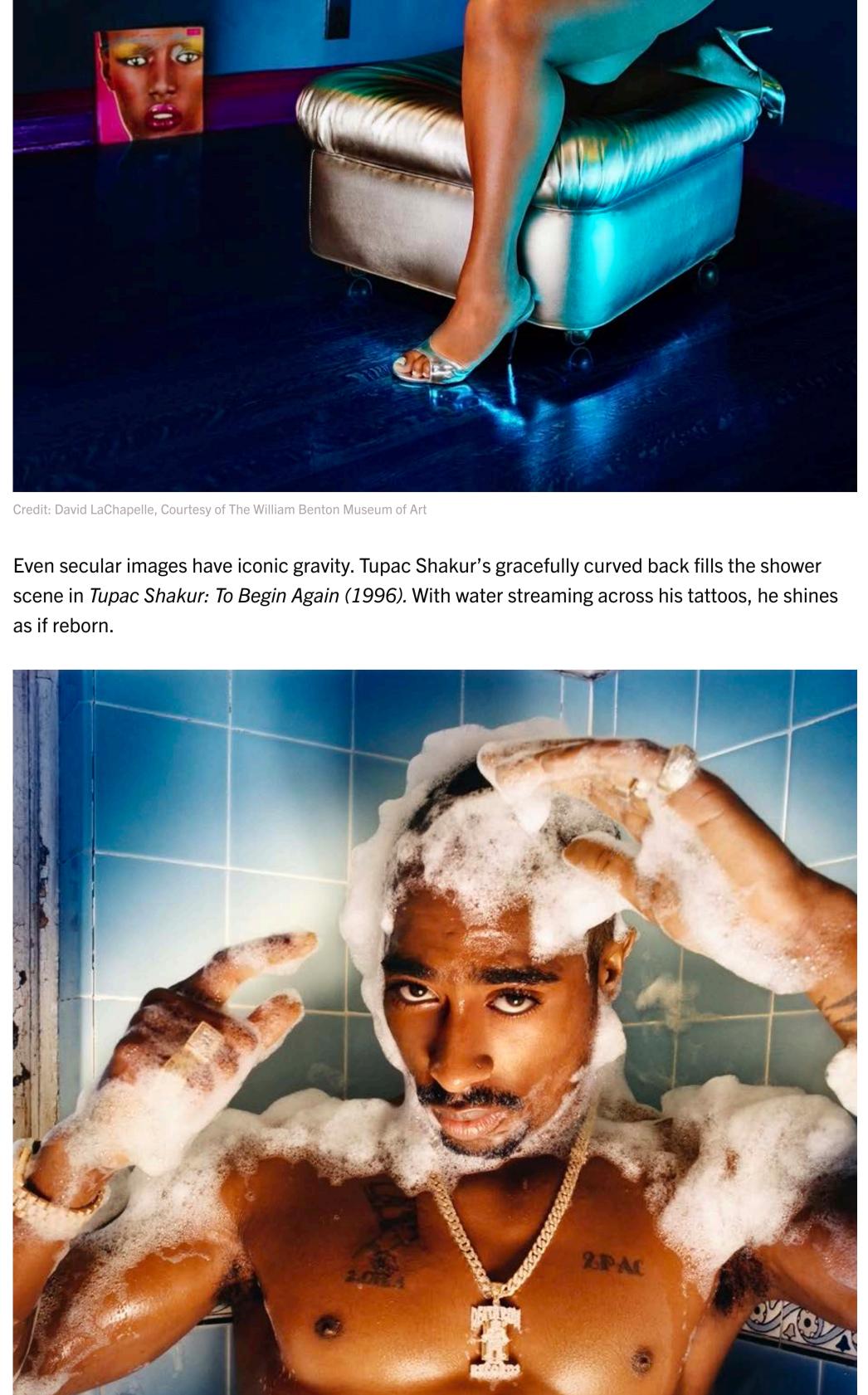
appears as the Goddess Venus. Eminem appears cross-dressed (and completely undressed) as the

LaChapelle often situates his subjects in religiosity. Think Christian icons, Roman gods, Hindu

deities, Buddhist Bodhisattvas. Michael Jackson appears as an Archangel. Naomi Campbell

Goddess Kali. Lizzo appears as a Japanese flute-playing Tennin.

(2024).



Credit: David LaChapelle, Courtesy of The William Benton Museum of Art

tell all about his explosive lyrical genius.

important it is to have a really good team, when you are doing the type of conceptual work that I do." Set builders, painters, makeup artists, hair stylists are all part of creating the story. There are tattoos, fake breasts, glittering headdresses, coifs of hair, piercings, false eyelashes, painted eyebrows. Even some prosthetics factor in: Eminem's dynamite-as-dildo in *About to Blow (1999)* 

LaChapelle creates whole worlds in his portraits. He delights in exquisitely executed details of

adornment. He said in a recent interview for The Benton exhibit, "I can't stress enough how

Not all LaChapelle's flesh is human, however. Two of the most beautiful images in the exhibit are

photographs of single flowers, inspired by his current home of Hawaii: Helconia (2019) and

And LaChapelle's Earth Laughs in Flowers, a seasonal series of flower portraits, teases hidden

communication going on, not only in the flowers but in the detritus crowding the base of the vases,

Winter's bouquet sits at a hospital bedside, with pills and intravenous tubes jostling at its base.

Springtime's bouquet is a teenager's bedroom, with cut-outs of teen idols pasted on the wall, an

open can of Vienna Sausages and packs of Trojans littering the foreground. These dense flower

stories out of flower bouquets of drooping fringed tulips, peonies, roses, and stargazer lilies.

Referencing 17th and 18th century Dutch still life paintings, there is a kind of secret

Credit: David LaChapelle, Courtesy of The William Benton Museum of Art

with subtle intimations of death, or "memento mori."

Magenta Torch Ginger No. 1 (2020).

scenes are gorgeous and disquieting.

Credit: David LaChapelle, Courtesy of The William Benton Museum of Art But some of the most bracing images in All of a Sudden are tucked into the upstairs balcony. Recollections in American (2006) is a series of photographs crafted by LaChapelle to look like family photo albums from the 60s and 70s. In party scenes and at family gatherings, all generations join in the revelry. At first glance, it looks just like good clean fun. But looking closer, the fun has an undercurrent: mixed drinks are mixed with a gun-in-hand, here or there. Beers splatter over body parts. Kahlua finds its way into the milk in a child's bottle, as the toddler looks on half-dazed. A passed-out young man is propped up by his campmates with a rifle

laid across his body, his pants half-pulled down. Blue-haired older women smile benevolently on.

Recollections in America subtly "recollects" violent chapters in American history, in slow

happening in these photographs. But when it sinks in, the impact is profound.

accumulation. It takes the whole round of The Benton's balcony to really understand what is

The stories LaChapelle tells in his photographs, whether they are "all of a sudden" or gradual, live

David LaChapelle: All of a Sudden is on display at The Benton through December 15th. Note: the

museum is closed for UConn's Thanksgiving break from Saturday November 23rd through Tuesday December 3rd. Clare Byrne 

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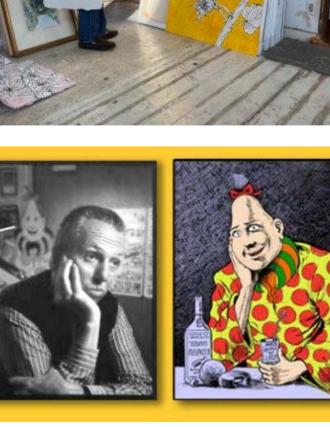
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on in your imagination a long time.



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