



Kanye West + Vincent Desiderio



On June 24, 2016, Kanye West premiered the new music video for his song “Famous” off the album *The Life of Pablo* at a live screening at the Forum in Los Angeles. The video took as its inspiration the painting “Sleep” by New York Academy of Art faculty member Vincent Desiderio. “Sleep” was exhibited in 2004 at Marlborough Gallery, and is currently in a private collection.

Desiderio was invited by West to preview the video before its release and was impressed with the result. In West’s vision, the anonymous models of Desiderio’s work are replaced by modern cultural icons of notoriety and fame, including Donald Trump, Anna Wintour, Taylor Swift, Caitlyn Jenner, Bill Cosby, George W. Bush, Kim Kardashian and West himself.

Desiderio, who joined the Academy two decades ago, is a figurative painter. Previous to becoming a Senior Critic, he served as a full-time faculty member in painting. His works are included in the collections of the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), the [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden](#) in Washington, DC, and the [Denver Art Museum](#). Other Senior Critics at the Academy include other major figurative artists of our era, including Jenny Saville, Kurt Kauper, Eric Fischl, Steven Assael and Will Cotton.

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Artist Who Inspired Kanye West's 'Famous' Video: 'I Was Really Speechless'



By JOE COSCARELLI JUNE 28, 2016

Since his early days as a Chicago beat maker, Kanye West has been a master of sampling — only the scale and the canvases have changed.

In the new music video for “Famous,” which depicts a row of nude celebrities, including Taylor Swift and Donald J. Trump, asleep in bed with the rapper and his wife, Kim Kardashian, the references are to contemporary art: The video was inspired most directly by Vincent Desiderio’s painting “Sleep,” a fact the artist did not learn until Friday, the morning of the video’s premiere.

The evening before, Mr. Desiderio, 60, was told cryptically that he was wanted in Los Angeles immediately. “I couldn’t hear properly when my gallery called, and when they said ‘Kanye West,’ I thought they said ‘Condé Nast,’” he said.

Despite not being told exactly why, and though he had only a passing familiarity with Mr. West’s music, Mr. Desiderio made the trip from New York — the flight was paid for — and without even stopping at his hotel, was whisked to meet the rapper.

“It was almost as if they were throwing a small surprise party for me,” he said of Mr. West and his team. “They were all smiling like the cat who ate the canary. Then they sat me down and asked if I’d like to see what they’d been working on.”

What followed was a voyeur’s view of some of the most recognizable (and notorious) figures in American pop culture and politics — Bill Cosby, George W. Bush, Chris Brown and others — arranged in a tableau borrowed from Mr. Desiderio’s work (itself inspired by a Jackson Pollock mural commissioned for Peggy Guggenheim). He was elated.

“I was almost in tears,” Mr. Desiderio said. “We just hugged each other.”

Back at his studio in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., the artist, who is also a senior critic at the New York Academy of Art, discussed his impressions of Mr. West and the bridge between the art world and hip-hop. Below are edited excerpts from the conversation.

What was your initial reaction to the video?

As I’m watching the thing, they’re smiling and filming my response, and all of a sudden, I realized that it is my “Sleep” painting: “Holy [expletive]! Oh my God!” I was really speechless. Kanye saw things in it that I don’t know how he could’ve seen. Kanye is truly an artist. Talking to him was like speaking to any of my peers in the art world — actually, more like talking to the brightest art students that have their eyes wide open.

Were you familiar with his work?

My children would talk about him. The craziest thing that’s happened so far is that all of a sudden, I’ve achieved the status of a demigod among them and their friends.

Did you give legal permission for Kanye to refer to your painting?

As far as I’m concerned, it has nothing to do with copyright. A work of art goes out there, and there’s a stream that activates and widens the communal imagination. It was an honor that I was being quoted. There was no money involved at all.

Did he offer?

It wasn’t offered, but I wouldn’t have taken it. That would’ve cheapened the whole thing — this building of an amazing bridge between aesthetic realms that are feeding off of the same information.

Recently we’ve seen rap interact with contemporary art more, as in Drake’s using James Turrell-inspired visuals for “Hotline Bling,” and Jay Z working with Marina Abramovic for “Picasso Baby.” Is there any part of you that feels icky for being sucked into this world of celebrity?

First of all, a lot of art that makes the crossover into hip-hop is not interesting to me in the least — and not so interesting to Kanye, at this point. For Kanye, who lives in this world of celebrity and fame, the way I understand him now is that he’s much more like Andy Warhol. He said one time, “I am Warhol” out of frustration. But he’s like an exploded internet version of Warhol allowing these celebs to hang themselves with their own words while he sits there and says, “That’s fabulous.” Warhol was a mirror for the times. When Kanye goes through all these shenanigans, he’s mirroring the times. He said it himself: It’s performance art. His whole life is performance art.

Did you recognize everyone portrayed in the video?

I did, except for some of the hip-hop people. That seems to be the thing people are focusing on more — I’m sure he did it to be incendiary — but the real subject of the video is that many of these people in the bed are repulsive. But everything about the video kept me at bay in regard to making a judgment on them. Every time I would think a thought like that, I would see them sleeping and vulnerable, like babies. We’re all the same. They’re just famous.

Lena Dunham wrote that the video “feels informed and inspired by the aspects of our culture that make women feel unsafe even in their own beds, in their own bodies.” What do you make of that?

Artists are not saints. They’re not people whose first obligation is moral correctness.

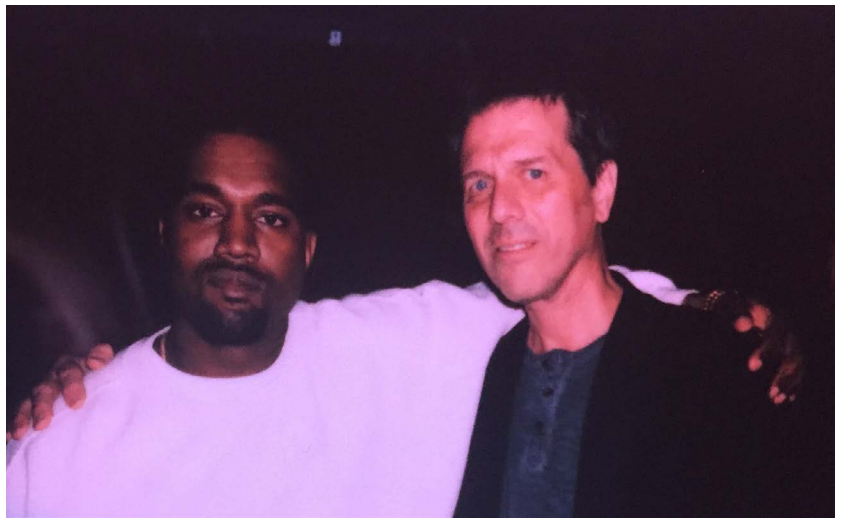
As much as I like Dunham and appreciate her, art goes to dangerous places. And this is not to sound like Donald Trump, whom I loathe, but if you want to make it amenable to a certain political class or agenda, what a disaster that would be. It’s like saying, ‘Hitchcock, that guy must’ve really loved killing women.’ Or Dostoyevsky — ‘I don’t like that guy very much.’ It’s horrible to look at, horrible to hear, but there’s also the kernel of salvation. That tension between those two things is where art functions.



A Chat With The Painter Whose Work Inspired Kanye West's 'Famous'

July 3, 2016 6:31 AM ET

A day after getting a phone call from Kanye West's camp, Vincent Desiderio was in Los Angeles for the premiere of the rapper's video "Famous," which Desiderio's painting *Sleep* partly inspired. Courtesy of the artist



"It was very cryptic, and quite mysterious. I received a phone call and I was told that Kanye was an enormous fan of my work, and he would like to meet me."

That's how it started for painter Vincent Desiderio. The next day, he flew from New York to Los Angeles to meet Kanye West. When he arrived, he says, "It was as if I'd entered into a surprise party for me."

Desiderio sat down and was shown the music video for West's song "Famous," which was premiering that day. In the 10-minute, very NSFW visual, grainy close-ups move across what appear to be the naked bodies of Donald Trump, Bill Cosby, Taylor Swift and other celebrities. Then, a wide shot from above: those 12 figures, lying side by side in a pile of rumpled sheets. Desiderio says it took him a few minutes to catch on.

"I said to them, 'You must have seen my painting? This looks an awful lot like a painting I did,'" he says. "And they were smiling, because this was the big buildup."

West's video is an homage to a painting by Desiderio called *Sleep*: a 24-foot wide, hyper-realistic image of a group of people lying in mostly nude slumber. NPR's Rachel Martin spoke to the artist to find out what he makes of "Famous" and of West's new album, *The Life of Pablo*. Hear the radio version at the audio link, and read more of their conversation below.

Rachel Martin: If you don't mind, since we are in the world of radio, how would you describe your painting?

Vincent Desiderio: The painting that I made is a kind of homage to Jackson Pollock's painting *Mural* that he painted for the apartment of Peggy Guggenheim, which involves a continuous and repetitive set of marks that calligraphically sort of move across a very wide canvas.

It's been described as an orgy, which is wrong. It represents a communal sleep — which in a larger sense might represent the sleep of our culture, the sleep of reason.

Let's talk about what I imagine has been a crazy few days for you. You got a call last week, asking if you could come attend an event that Kanye was holding the next day.

You know, when I got the first phone call they said "Kanye West," and I heard "Conde Nast." I thought, "Maybe they want to write an article?" It was very weird. Of course, when I told my children that Kanye West's office had just called me, they were freaking out. They said, "Dad, you gotta go!" So off I went.

So you get there and are ushered into a room. You meet Kanye West and he says, "Take a look at this?"

Kind of. I was welcomed with smiles, as if they had been

waiting for me to arrive, and we exchanged a few words. "Pablo" refers to both Pablo Picasso and Pablo Escobar jointly, and so we talked about the criminality of art; I mentioned Degas' quote that the painting should be constructed like the perfect crime. And he smiled and said, "It's Saint Paul as well."

The minute he said that, I saw his face and I realized the depth that really was behind so much of what he has been attempting to do as an artist. And then he said, "Would you like to see what we've been working on?"

And you sit down and watch it for the first time. What was your reaction?

I was gobstruck, is the word. I was absolutely floored and honored, and I almost felt like crying. I think that Kanye and I embraced each other, and everyone else was sort of like that — they were all high-fiving me and hugging me. There are experiences like that in the arts where somebody actually gets what you're doing. Not that your goal is to communicate — it's more self-enlightenment. But at that moment I realized that Kanye and I were on the same page completely. He was an art student, and speaking to him was like speaking to the brightest of my peers.

Tell me what you mean when you say that he got you. The video he's made, while it more than echoes your painting with the imagery, he's saying something different: These are not anonymous people, these are famous people. And in his lyrics, he is taking aim at each of those individuals. He's saying something specific that I don't think your painting is saying, though you can tell me if I'm wrong.

One of the big similarities is that, as I was doing my painting, I wasn't feeling a tremendous amount of empathy for the people; I actually thought of them as slumbering idiots who really need to wake up to what's going on, to a different world. And yet, every time I worked on it, rather than taking the image to a highly critical point that's typical in the art world, jaded and cynical, I kept holding back. It was almost as if I began falling in love with the characters, even though at the beginning of my endeavor they were supposed to be people I didn't quite care for.

And so when I saw Kanye's video, I was also struck by [that]. A few these people are certainly repulsive to me, and everything in the habit of my intuitions would steer me to seeing this as a vicious attack on them. And yet, there was something in the execution of the piece that kept all of those thoughts at bay. I felt a spark of empathy — not really for them, it was for the world.

We should also just point out that Kanye himself is in the image, as is his wife, Kim Kardashian.

An incredibly important detail. An image like that is a

mirror of the ridiculous cult of celebrity. I think Kanye, who I believe is very much like Andy Warhol in that he does not let his guard down about who he is, presents a mirror to people rather than he telling them how to think.

It sounds, to put it in very simple terms, like you were moved by the video.

What I like about it is, it's not a reproduction of my painting: It's a conversation with my painting. The discursive element of that is far more important than the simple idea of he stole the idea, he co-opted the idea, he did this to the idea. He quoted the idea and then brought something different to it, embedded in the strange thinking that went on in my head as I worked on the picture.

I probably don't have to tell you that Kanye West is a controversial guy. Part of his art is to be provocative, and he's married to a woman who made her name based on fame and the idea of garnering more fame — which some would say has led to this kind of "sleeping" of our larger culture. Are you at all uncomfortable that it has taken someone from the cultural mainstream to give you an amount of notoriety that you might not otherwise have garnered?

I think the people around me are a lot more excited about the notoriety — my kids, my wife, my friends — than I am. I saw this as a meeting of two artists. It represented a kind of tearing down of walls and an indication that even coming from both worlds, the world of the ultra-celebrity hip-hop scene, which I'm not part of, and the ultra-celebrity fine art scene. There's something going on beneath the surface of these things — a kind of undercurrent that is slowly, deliberately, and very consciously and undermining the obnoxiousness of those worlds.

You weren't a collaborator on this project, although it sounds like you're completely flattered by it. But can you imagine any actual collaboration with Kanye West in the future?

Yes, I can. As a matter of fact, we spoke of that.

Did he offer any kind of compensation?

No, I wouldn't have taken it. That would have cheapened the entire endeavor. Believe me, when I saw him, when they revealed this to me, it was a gift. The gift was not the gift of celebrity; the gift was that what I did had strains of ideas, of information in it, that he was able to access and redevelop and realize into a different kind of image. It was a communication of artists. Believe me, I get so many questions now — "Did he pay for you? He'd better be buying a painting" — and I'm saying, this is ridiculous. If art is always created in the service of the almighty dollar, we're really in trouble.



On Kanye West's "Famous" Video, From the Artist Who Inspired It

Vincent Desiderio, the artist behind the painting that inspired Kanye's infamous "Famous" video—with its nude depictions of Taylor Swift, Bill Cosby, Donald Trump, and other celebs—on encountering the man who sampled him.

June 27, 2016 5:02 PM | by Vincent Desiderio

The remarkable debut this weekend of Kanye West's video, "Famous," was a feat of magic. It held its audience in suspension over a tableau that was disturbingly familiar, rapturously beautiful, and frighteningly uncanny.

The strange collision of worlds is the hallmark of our society in rapid transition. To this we can credit the cynicism of the now academic high-low compression in the visual arts, and the endless demonstrations by elitists and anti-intellectuals alike, each camp utterly convinced of its firm grasp of history's inevitable trajectory.

Occasionally, however, the perpetual static that forms public opinion clears, and for a brief moment a deep and intimate understanding is reached, unimpeded by the ever-present difficulties of translation. The recent presentation of Kanye West's video, "Famous," based to a large extent on my 2008 painting, "Sleep," underscored one of these precious moments.

It began with a random phone call: "Kanye West is trying to get in touch with Vincent Desiderio. It is extremely important that he return our call." After a series of missed calls and frantic text messaging I came to learn that I was being invited to fly out to Los Angeles the next morning to meet the acclaimed artist, and that Kanye, "being a tremendous fan" of my work—I'm using quotes, because one hears that phrase so often in the art world that it might as well mean, "I have no idea who you are and please don't call me out on this"—wanted me to be present at an event the Forum in L.A. No other information was given.

When I arrived the next day, I was told not to go to the hotel but instead directly to the Forum. The mystery redoubled as I was lead through a system of corridors and security checks to a room whose door was streaked with wild Abstract Expressionist marks. Inside was a small gathering of men and women seated around a laptop. Kanye stood up and greeted me warmly. We spoke about his new album, "The Life of Pablo," and about a particular quote by Edgar Degas, about how a painting should be constructed "like the perfect crime." I ventured that the Pablo referred to in the title was a dual reference to Pablo Picasso and Pablo Escobar. Kanye smiled and said, "St. Paul, too." His eyes glistened. We were on the same page.

"Would you like to see something we have been working on?" he asked.

I sat down in front of the computer screen as the play button was pushed. Within seconds, the disturbingly familiar faces of a range of celebrities became clear. What was not clear was what in fact they were doing sleeping in the same bed. Had there been some agreement to pose together naked? That aside, why was every impulse to ridicule these people, some of whom (I won't name names) made my skin crawl, being tempered by a rising sense of empathy? Slumbering gods, they were, but also like babies or small children at the height of vulnerability.

Then an even stranger feeling overtook me. I began to recognize that the naked bodies floating past the camera lens were in positions identical to the figures in my painting, "Sleep." Could Kanye have seen my painting? There were so many similarities. Yes, it was my painting. It had been sampled, or "spliced," into a new format and taken to a brilliant and daring extreme!

As I looked around the room at the smiling faces, it became apparent that, unbeknownst to me, a remarkable collaboration had occurred, one that brought together artistic expressions that, at least on the surface of it all, couldn't seem further apart. I felt as if I had been presented with the most extraordinary gift: Kanye and his crew had spent the past months producing a video of tremendous power and beauty, and at its core was a painting. My painting.

But how could it be that Kanye could make a parallel version of "Sleep," while charging it with the same kind of intrinsic strangeness that haunted my thoughts as I made the original painting. Stranger still was that he knew nothing of a video I have wanted to make as a site-specific installation on the ceiling of Grand Central Station. It would have involved a frame projection of figures sleeping in real time, like slumbering gods, around the green zodiac vault. We concluded that our minds were clearly operating on the same wavelength, albeit from different transmitters.

What was demonstrated was the power of the artistic imagination to transcend categorical expectations, and the fluidity of the transfer of codes deeply embedded within the apparatus of our preferred mediums. Kanye West's video demonstrates how art speaks the language of art, how visual codes people the artistic imagination, enlivening the matrix of possibilities that are always and everywhere about us, but barely perceptible to those who focus only on the surface.



‘Sleep’ Artist Talks Kanye West’s ‘Brilliant and Daring’ ‘Famous’ Video

Rapper’s “video demonstrates how art speaks the language of art, how visual codes people the artistic imagination,” Vincent Desiderio writes



Artist Vincent Desiderio, whose painting “Sleep” inspired Kanye West’s “Famous” video, has penned a first-person account about meeting the rapper. Mike Windle/Getty Images Entertainment

By Daniel Kreps June 28, 2016

Artist Vincent Desiderio, whose 2008 painting “Sleep” was the primary inspiration behind Kanye West’s provocative new video for “Famous,” penned a first-person accounting detailing his experience meeting the rapper just hours before the video’s arena debut, which Desiderio called “a feat of magic.”

“Kanye West’s video demonstrates how art speaks the language of art, how visual codes people the artistic imagination, enlivening the matrix of possibilities that are always and everywhere about us, but barely perceptible to those who focus only on the surface,” Desiderio wrote for W.

West’s team made to ensure that the artist would be in attendance for the “Famous” premiere at Los Angeles’ Forum. After being guided through the labyrinthine corridors inside the arena, Desiderio came face to face with West, who he was told as a “tremendous fan” of the artist’s work.

After speaking about *The Life of Pablo*, Desiderio was still unclear why he was brought to Los Angeles to meet West, but then the rapper hit play on his laptop to unveil the “Famous” video.

“Within seconds, the disturbingly familiar faces of a range of celebrities became clear. What was not clear was what in fact they were doing sleeping in the same bed,” Desiderio wrote. “Had there been some agreement to pose together naked? That aside, why was every impulse to ridicule these people, some of whom (I won’t name names) made my skin crawl, being tempered by a rising sense of empathy? Slumbering gods, they were, but also like babies or small children at the height of vulnerability.”

Only then did it dawn on Desiderio that the “Famous” visual was a near-replica of the artist’s “Sleep.” “Could Kanye have seen my painting? There were so many similarities,” he wrote. “Yes, it was my painting. It had been sampled, or ‘spliced,’ into a new format and taken to a brilliant and daring extreme!”

While Desiderio applauded West’s vision, others weren’t as impressed by the voyeuristic visual. Girls star Lena Dunham condemned the clip, writing that “it feels informed and inspired by the aspects of our culture that make women feel unsafe even in their own beds, in their own bodies.”

Chris Brown, whose doppelganger also features in the video, complained about his double’s “plumber’s butt,” while a spokesperson for George W. Bush similarly commented that the former president “is in much better shape” than his synthetic double. West himself was just surprised no one had sued him yet over the video.

NEW YORK

When Kanye Met the Artist Who Inspired ‘Famous’ They Had a Genius Mind Meld

June 28, 2016 10:10 a.m. By E. Alex Jung Follow @e_alexjung



Geniuses: They do think alike! When Kanye West dropped his music video for “Famous,” he drew largely from painter Vincent Desiderio’s *Sleep*, positioning wax figures of famous people in similar states of repose as the bodies in the painting. But what does Desiderio think about Kanye’s homage? In an essay for *W Magazine*, Desiderio called the video “disturbingly familiar, rapturously beautiful, and frighteningly uncanny.” He loves it! More important, he writes about meeting Kanye, who greeted him “warmly” in Los Angeles to show him the video before its debut at the Forum.

The best moment comes when Desiderio realizes the similarities between his work and Kanye’s: “Could Kanye have seen my painting? There were so many similarities. Yes, it was my painting. It had been sampled, or ‘spliced,’ into a new format and taken to a brilliant and daring extreme!” After he looked “around the room at the smiling faces,” Desiderio writes, “It became apparent that, unbeknownst to me, a remarkable collaboration had occurred.” They had had a genius mind meld without his knowing about it! Desiderio writes, “We concluded that our minds were clearly operating on the same wavelength, albeit from different transmitters.”

THE HUFFINGTON POST

When Kanye West And Vincent Desiderio Meet: Some Thoughts On The Recycling And Repurposing Of Images

06/27/2016 02:29 pm ET | Updated Jun 28, 2016

John Seed Professor of Art History

I think of painter Vincent Desiderio as a living master and one hell of a hard worker. His epic 24-foot-wide canvas, *Sleep*, which depicts a dozen fitfully sleeping nudes in rumpled sheets, is a haunting, hard-won painting that reflects the many insomniac months that Desiderio spent laying in bed while being treated for cancer. It's a ambitious, monumental image that you wouldn't normally expect to see cropping up in altered form in a popular context.

But it just did.

Last Saturday I looked at my Facebook and the news was everywhere: Hip-hop artist Kanye West had just premiered his new video *Famous* at the Forum, and it had been directly inspired by Desiderio's *Sleep*. With some changes of course: the original figures in the painting had been replaced by Kanye, his wife Kim Kardashian, Ray J, Chris Brown, Rihanna, Amber Rose, Taylor Swift, Donald Trump, Anna Wintour, George Bush, Bill Cosby, and Caitlyn Jenner. In other words, Desiderio's image and it's very personal meanings had been recycled, re-peopled and projected on a 100-foot screen.

Among other things, a setting and scenario that Desiderio painted with personal and metaphorical intentions, has been magnetized with celebrity images and erotic connotations. And yes, Kim Kardashian's naked ass is there: "product placement," as one of my friends commented...

As the story and the imagery spread out on social media, West's re-do of Desiderio was called many things: "genius click-bait," and "disgusting" were just two of the wildly divergent points of view that I came across on Twitter. Of course, what I really wanted to hear was what Vincent Desiderio thought, and a reply he made on my personal Facebook status made his feelings more than clear:

"Artists quote other artists. That is what keeps the ball in constant motion. Kanye deserves his due for producing a beautiful and compelling video. You all might be surprised, but Kanye West is a consummate artist."

- Vincent Desiderio

It's a very generous statement on Desiderio's part and it also reflects what more and more—but certainly not all—visual artists are doing these days: quoting, borrowing from and/or repurposing images. Of course, this has been going on a long time, and many Modernists made their careers doing it. One notable was Pablo Picasso who once said: "Good artists copy, great artists steal."

One of Picasso's great "thefts," his set of some 15 variations on the *Women of Algiers* by Delacroix, has paid a huge rate of interest over time. The Picasso painting on the right—Picasso's *Femmes D'Algiers, Variation O*—was sold in May of 2015 for \$179 million, becoming the most expensive work of art ever sold. So much for the current art market having any reservations about the recycling and revising of images, right?

And to be fair, when Picasso stole, he subjected what he borrowed to his brilliant powers of transformation and revision, making it in many senses, completely new. There was real effort involved and skill with paint and brushes was required. In recent times, the quoting and re-configuring of visual images has become easier and more prevalent, to say the least. Many of these images live outside the museum, easily shared and easily reproduced.

A photo recently shared by Madonna on Instagram to support Gay Pride celebrations in New York is based on an historic and instantly recognizable image: Joe Rosenthal's photo of the flag being raised after the battle of Iwo Jima. In a media society where famous images are themselves "celebrities" their drawing power makes shifts in imagery especially noticeable. Any image that becomes famous is going

to appear in all kinds of contexts and mediums, endlessly cloned and re-purposed.

Sometimes the reconfiguring/re-purposing will be done with skill and taste—even brilliance—and sometimes not. It might be used for personal or political agendas that the individual who created the image had no interest in. The painter Mark Rothko once said that sending his paintings out into the world was "risky" and that was long before the internet put any image posted on at artist's site "at risk."

Are you wondering, why isn't copyright more of an issue when recent works of art or other images are re-purposed? The answer is that fair use copyright law, which governs the use of recent, copyrighted materials, is helpfully broad:

In its most general sense, a fair use is any copying of copyrighted material done for a limited and "transformative" purpose, such as to comment upon, criticize, or parody a copyrighted work. Such uses can be done without permission from the copyright owner. In other words, fair use is a defense against a claim of copyright infringement. If your use qualifies as a fair use, then it would not be considered an illegal infringement.

- What is Fair Use?

Practically speaking, if you get rich using and transforming the images of others, you might be sued, but there is a fair amount of latitude. In the case of Kanye West's *Famous* video, it remains to be seen where he will face lawsuits for violating what is called the "Right of Privacy or Publicity" that protects public figures from the use of their recognizable likenesses in works of art. Clearly, Vincent Desiderio is supportive of the fact that *Sleep* was an inspiration for the video, but Taylor Swift may not be quite so happy to see herself—or at least a 3-D image of herself—in the rumpled sheets of the imagery.

When thinking about just how complicated situations involving art and copyrighted art can be, consider

the painting by Suzy Smith seen above. It is an original painting of a nude model which uses another painting as its background. The "painting" is of course a photo-based silkscreen image made by the late Andy Warhol, which includes an altered image of Mickey Mouse, who is technically still under copyright. Anyone want to take that one to court? I hope not...

I have been making digital mashups myself this past year, posting them on Instagram and even on t-shirts. The image above combines an 1863 photo of Lincoln taken by Alexander Gardner with a recent news photo of Barack Obama. The internet is a tsunami of photoshopped images: mashups, appropriations, plagiarized images, morphs, homages and memes and my images have joined the flood. It takes the power of a celebrity like Kanye West to "boost" an image or set of images into the public discourse where it will compete for attention with everything else including the news.

The English writer and cleric Charles Caleb Colton once famously said that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." In the field of visual art, where all kinds of imitation, copying and cloning is happening in every medium, the imitations aren't always sincere, but I think Vincent Desiderio has the right attitude: be flattered, participate and be open. There are certainly powerful arguments to be made that the purposes of "art" are being diluted by the prevalence of altered digital imagery being widely shared, but I'll save those for another discussion.

If Kanye West or Madonna or any other celebrity "shares" what you do in the form of an Instagram post or any other type of image, whether its a hard-won painting that took years to create or a quick "mashup" that took 20 minutes to make in Photoshop, you are going to find yourself and what you do "liked."

If you are a visual artist today, that is part of your reality, for better and for worse.

FADER

The Artist Who Inspired Kanye West's "Famous" Video Explains How The Collaboration Came About



Vincent Desiderio

"We concluded we were operating on the same wavelength, albeit from different transmitters."

By Ben Dandridge-Lemco

In a final scene of Kanye West's voyeuristic "Famous" video, the camera expands into a panoramic birds-eye-view of all the celebrities, sleeping side by side in the same bed. After the video's premiere at The Forum in L.A., Kanye gave a short speech, mentioning that a huge inspiration for the video was a painting by an American artist named Vincent Desiderio.

Today, Desiderio penned an essay for W Magazine, explaining how the collaboration came about, and how he feels about Kanye's interpretation of his work:

"It began with a random phone call: 'Kanye West is trying to get in touch with Vincent Desiderio. It is extremely important that he return our call.' After a series of missed calls and frantic text messaging I came to learn that I was being invited to fly out to Los Angeles the next morning to meet the acclaimed artist, and that Kanye, 'being a tremendous fan' of my work—I'm using quotes, because one hears that phrase so often in the art world that it might as well mean, 'I have no idea who you are and please don't call me out on this'—wanted me to be present at an event the Forum in L.A. No other information was given."

Desiderio says that he and Kanye were "on the same page," writing, "I felt as if I had been presented with the most extraordinary gift: Kanye and his crew had spent the past months producing a video of tremendous power and beauty, and at its core was a painting."

June 27, 2016

Entertainment
WEEKLY

Kanye West's 'Famous' homage is 'extraordinary gift,' says 'Sleep' artist

by Will Robinson • @Will_Robinson_ Posted June 27 2016 — 10:20 PM EDT

Kanye West's new video for "Famous," which depicts a dozen celebrities sleeping together in the nude, has raised eyebrows and sparked controversy. But for Vincent Desiderio, whose art influenced Kanye's video, the homage inspired joy.



RAY MUÑOZ
@raymunoz94

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Kanye took Vincent Desiderio's "Sleep" & brought it to life with a modern twist.. if that isn't genius idk what is.

11:51 PM - 24 Jun 2016

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In a personal essay for W magazine, the artist opened up about meeting West and first seeing the video for "Famous." West's camp called Desiderio multiple times and invited him to The Forum event in Los Angeles without any explanation, Desiderio wrote. There, Desiderio met West and was seated in front of a laptop. The "Famous" video rolled, the camera slowly panning across the slumbering celebrities until revealing the final tableau — a direct nod to the artist's 2008 painting, "Sleep."

"As I looked around the room at the smiling faces, it became apparent that, unbeknownst to me, a remarkable collaboration had occurred, one that brought together artistic expressions that, at least on the surface of it all, couldn't seem further apart," he wrote for W. "I felt as if I had been presented with the most extraordinary gift: Kanye and his crew had spent the past months producing a video of tremendous power and beauty, and at its core was a painting. My painting."

TIME

The Artist Who Inspired Kanye West's 'Famous' Thinks the Video Is 'Extraordinary and Bold'

Cady Lang @cadylang June 27, 2016

Meet Vincent Desiderio

Kanye West's controversial video for "Famous" has been making headlines for its nude depiction of celebrities like Taylor Swift, Rihanna, George W. Bush, Donald Trump, Amber Rose, and Ray J tangled up in bed together, in a bizarre but intriguing tableaux of his oft-dramatic relationships with other celebrities. See the NSFW comparison [here](#).

However, West, the self-proclaimed "greatest artist of all time" pulled major visual inspiration from another artist — realist painter Vincent Desiderio, whose 2004 piece, "Sleep" debuted at New York's Marlborough Gallery and was later completed in 2008.

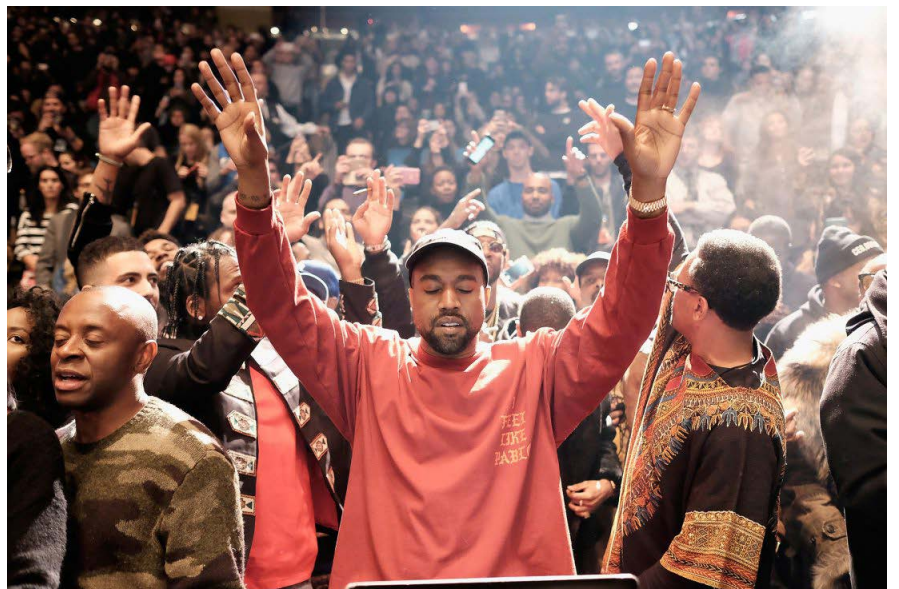
In an interview with *Cosmopolitan*, Desiderio — who is also a visiting critic at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts — reveals that he was not only supportive of the rapper's artistic vision, but that he was happy with the end result.

"It's an extraordinary and bold and different move for Kanye West," he said. "And what I would say is that it is the clearest indication of his overall intentions as a person utilizing the media and working within it. I was absolutely floored and incredibly flattered and incredibly happy to see the video, which I think is really beautiful."

Desiderio also disclosed that he found a kindred creative spirit with West, whom he respects as an artist in his own right.

"I think he and I are on the same page and he knows that, I know that. We both acknowledge that we are one brain, two bodies. He's quite a remarkable man, notwithstanding all the nonsense that accompanies a man strapped to a rocket, who sometimes is either misquoted or is compelled into a position that can frustrate someone."

Think of how Andy Warhol was intentionally misconstrued because he put himself out there to be misconstrued. Think about how his whole life was a performance piece and then you understand why Kanye at one point said, 'I'm Andy Warhol.' The way we're thinking about Kanye West and the way he's portrayed, there's an orchestration to it, but social media is so large right now that it spins wildly out of control. Fundamentally, he's an artist and I have total respect for him."



Kanye West performs during Kanye West Yeezy Season 3 on February 11, 2016 in New York City. (Photo by Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for Yeezy Season 3)

ARTNEWS

VINCENT DESIDERIO, WHOSE PAINTING WAS QUOTED BY KANYE IN
'FAMOUS' VIDEO: 'KANYE SAW THINGS IN IT THAT I DON'T KNOW
HOW HE COULD'VE SEEN'

By The Editors of ARTnews Posted 06/29/16 12:09 pm



Vincent Desiderio, *Sleep*, 2008 ©VINCENT DESIDERIO/COURTESY MARLBOROUGH GALLERY

Whew! It's been a whirlwind few day for Kanye West!

Over the weekend in Los Angeles he screened the video for his song "Famous," which shows various celebrities (Donald Trump, Chris Brown, Kanye, Kim, and so forth) naked in bed, a scene inspired by Vincent Desiderio's 2008 painting *Sleep*. Then West projected the video all over New York City. Talking with *Vanity Fair* about the video, West declared Matthew Barney "my Jesus." At some point Lena Dunham saw it, was quite displeased, and penned a note on Facebook that criticized the video while mentioning her love for the work of Carolee Schneemann, Kathy Acker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Vito Acconci, among others. The work, she wrote, "feels informed and inspired by the aspects of our culture that make women feel unsafe even in their own beds, in their own bodies." (One wonders her opinion of Acconci's *Following Piece*.)

In any sense, now Desiderio has spoken with Joe Coscarelli at the *New York Times* about meeting Kanye and seeing the video. He loves it! A bit of the interview:

I was really speechless. Kanye saw things in it that I don't know how he could've seen. Kanye is truly an artist. Talking to him was like speaking to any of my peers in the art world — actually, more like talking to the brightest art students that have their eyes wide open.

Desiderio, who is senior critic at the New York Academy of Art, also mentions that time Kanye started screaming "I am Warhol" in a radio interview with *Sway*. Enjoy that below, and give the whole interview a read. Lots to enjoy in it.

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Kanye West
+
Vincent Desiderio

NIGHTLINE

WEEKNIGHTS 12:35 AM ET|11:35 PM CT

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Vincent Desiderio/New York Academy of Art



#NIGHTLINE

Kanye West's Famous video: is it art?

Edward Helmore in New York Tuesday 28 June
2016 17.18 EDT

Inspired by painter Vincent Desiderio and featuring lookalikes of naked celebrities, the video has artworld pretensions, but insiders aren't so sure Kanye West's art world aspirations are not new but his execution of them – as evidenced by the new video to his song Famous – are becoming more sophisticated. Based on a 2008 work by American realist painter Vincent Desiderio, the video features the rapper and wife Kim Kardashian lying naked on an extremely wide bed in a sweaty, post-coital sleep. They are in the middle of 10 more nude celebrities – Taylor Swift (who is dissed in the lyrics), Rihanna, Chris Brown, Ray J, West's former girlfriend Amber Rose, his in-law Caitlyn Jenner, Donald Trump, Bill Cosby, George W Bush and Anna Wintour. Some, or perhaps all, are waxworks – the camera passes across their bodies, the quality of the film grainy, the soundtrack culminating in two minutes of cheering and heavy breathing.

Whether Famous makes West an artist is as contentious as whether making a line of clothes means he should be regarded as a fashion designer. West has claimed that as well as Desiderio, the video was inspired by Matthew Barney – “my Jesus”. Barney is renowned for his sprawling, mythology-packed films, which also often make use of famous people – though those are willing participants, unlike the ones in depicted in Famous. Two years ago, West attended the New York premiere of Barney's six-hour River of Fundament, a work inspired by Norman Mailer's Ancient Evenings, and which includes several controversial set pieces, including the insertion of an eye into the anus of a pregnant woman.

Famous does not include anything so transgressive, but its depiction of women like Swift naked, presumably without their consent (West defied them to sue, in a now-deleted tweet), has caused disquiet, though West claims that he took any overtly sexual shots out of the video. Unconvinced, Lena Dunham said the video brought to mind Stanford University rapist Brock Turner, writing: “Now I have to see the prone, unconscious, waxy bodies of famous women, twisted like they've been drugged and chunked aside at a rager? ... Seeing a woman I love like Taylor Swift (f--- that one hurt to look at, I couldn't look), a woman I admire like Rihanna or Anna, reduced to a pair of waxy breasts made by some special effects guy in the Valley, it makes me feel sad and unsafe and worried.”



Kanye West and Kim Kardashian in the video for Famous. Photograph: Tidal

A curator with a New York gallery, who contacted the Guardian and was reluctant to be named, agrees with Dunham. “Kanye is using the body of Taylor Swift without asking her and putting her in this submissive position. Sure, he's making a comment on television culture and appropriation, and he's calling it art, but I don't know if you can call something art just because it stirs up controversy.”

Whether or not it works as art, Famous has reinforced West's reputation as a skillful appropriator with a flare for controversy. “It's a comment on fame,” he told Vanity Fair. He also claimed his life is “walking performance art”.

Desiderio, the artist who inspired the video, gave the video his seal of approval. He told W magazine after being invited to see the video at its premiere in Los Angeles, that what Famous “demonstrated was the power of the artistic imagination to transcend categorical expectations”.

While that clears the threshold of certain kind of artistic criticism, Desiderio went further, offering that the video demonstrates “the fluidity of the transfer of codes deeply embedded within the apparatus of our preferred mediums”.

Meanwhile, cultural commentator Bob Lefsetz wrote over the weekend that Famous, “cut from the same cloth as Madonna's Sex book”, just proves that video is bigger than ever. “That's the appeal, it'll bring so many looky-loos, but in this case you don't have to buy it to see it, that's so last century, it's free for the taking on the internet. Because in today's world you don't charge for everything, you garner your audience and monetize later, like the tech companies.”

But does that make it art? “This is a stunt. We won't be talking about it next month, if we're even discussing it next week. But that's OK, Kanye will come up with something else.” As for content, Lefsetz adds, “when you marry boobies and fame you've hit the jackpot. All but the asexual want to see this clip at least once”.

The last time a pop star of similar standing, Jay Z, aspired to create a performance art piece it ended in acrimony. In 2013, the rapper performed at New York City's Pace gallery with artist Marina Abramović, playing his song Picasso Baby for six continuous hours.

Years later, Abramović claimed the rapper didn't live up to promises that were made in exchange for her involvement and said participants were “totally used”, and “came out with nothing”. She also described it as a one-way transaction. The Marina Abramović Institute later issued an apology to Jay Z.

A curator involved with the Picasso Baby performance told the Guardian that Kanye and Jay Z's art-music pieces have little in common. “Doing things just for the sake of shocking people doesn't make it art. He's trying very hard to create a controversy so people will talk about it.”

Or perhaps as West and Jay Z put it in their own single, Niggas in Paris, using a sample from Will Farrell's Blades of Glory: “I don't even know what that means. No one knows what it means, but it's provocative. No it's not, it's gross. Gets the people going.”

BAZAAR^{Harper's}

THE ARTIST WHO INSPIRED KANYE WEST'S "FAMOUS" VISUALS RESPONDS TO THE VIDEO

"I was almost in tears."

By Erica Gonzales Jun 30, 2016

When Kanye West's "Famous" video released last weekend, many pointed out its likeness to Vincent Desiderio's "Sleep," which similarly shows naked figures slumbering side by side.

Soon after the premiere, it was revealed that West not only aimed to recreate Desiderio's famed piece, he personally collaborated with the artist too. Since the weekend, Desiderio has spoken out about getting discovered by Kanye and helping to create "Famous."



The artist apparently didn't know the rapper was recreating his work until the morning of the video's premiere at the Forum last week, according to The New York Times. He only found out West wanted to meet him the night before, when he received an urgent call at his studio. He was then flown out by the rapper's team to meet with West in Los Angeles for a confidential project. When West finally showed him the piece he was working on, Desiderio nearly broke down.

"I was almost in tears," he told NYT. "We just hugged each other."

Desiderio described his reaction to watching "Famous" for the first time:

"I was really speechless. Kanye saw things in it that I don't know how he could've seen. Kanye is truly an artist. Talking to him was like speaking to any of my peers in the art world—actually, more like talking to the brightest art students that have their eyes wide open."

Apparently, West didn't get legal consent to recreate "Sleep," but Desiderio didn't mind. In fact, he was flattered. "As far as I'm concerned, it has nothing to do with copyright," he said. Even if West did offer him money, he wouldn't have accepted it, he told NYT. "It was an honor that I was being quoted. There was no money involved at all," he explained.

The artist also defended "Famous," as art, despite the criticism it received for the nudity. Lena Dunham, for example, said it reflects a culture that makes "women feel unsafe even in their own beds, in their own bodies."

Desiderio, though a fan of Dunham's, responded, "Artists are not saints. They're not people whose first obligation is moral correctness." Later, he added, "Art goes to dangerous places."

billboard

The Artist Who Inspired Kanye West's 'Famous' Video Calls It a 'Feat of Magic'

6/27/2016 by Colin Stutz

Kanye West's "Famous" video debut on Friday was a "feat of magic," says the visual artist who inspired the piece.

In an essay with W Magazine, Vincent Desiderio described the unusual call from West's camp last week that followed with a flight to Los Angeles the next day for the video's live premiere. He explains that when he arrived, he was told to go directly to the Forum, where he met with West and seemingly got a good sense of him from the start before even seeing the piece.



Courtesy of Tidal Kanye West's video for "Famous."

"I sat down in front of the computer screen as the play button was pushed," Desiderio writes. "Within seconds, the disturbingly familiar faces of a range of celebrities became clear. What was not clear was what in fact they were doing sleeping in the same bed. Had there been some agreement to pose together naked? That aside, why was every impulse to ridicule these people, some of whom (I won't name names) made my skin crawl, being tempered by a rising sense of empathy? Slumbering gods, they were, but also like babies or small children at the height of vulnerability."

Soon, Desiderio realized that the naked Taylor Swift, Bill Cosby, Donald Trump and other celebrity figures featured in the video were positioned identically to his painting "Sleep." He writes, "It had been sampled, or 'spliced,' into a new format and taken to a brilliant and daring extreme!"

"What was demonstrated was the power of the artistic imagination to transcend categorical expectations, and the fluidity of the transfer of codes deeply embedded within the apparatus of our preferred mediums," Desiderio continues. "Kanye West's video demonstrates how art speaks the language of art, how visual codes people the artistic imagination, enlivening the matrix of possibilities that are always and everywhere about us, but barely perceptible to those who focus only on the surface."

The New York Times

Kanye West's Latest Provocation: Lying Naked Next to Taylor Swift in 'Famous' Video

By JOE COSCARELLI JUNE 25, 2016



Kanye West, left, and Taylor Swift at the 2015 Grammy Awards. Credit Larry Busacca/Getty Images for NARAS

In his latest meant-to-shock music video, Kanye West puts himself and his wife, Kim Kardashian West, in a special breed of rarefied company. Splayed out on a huge bed, the couple — or realistic figures in their likenesses — are surrounded by nude depictions of family (Caitlyn Jenner), former flames (Ray J, Amber Rose), friends and colleagues (Rihanna, Chris Brown, Anna Wintour) and some of this era's most polarizing men (Donald J. Trump, George W. Bush, Bill Cosby).

And then there is Taylor Swift.

The song is "Famous," from Mr. West's recent album, "The Life of Pablo." On the track, which has been fuel for months of tabloid chatter and social media speculation, he raps about his complicated history with Ms. Swift — "I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex" — adding that he had made her famous. (The rapper claimed after the song's release that Ms. Swift had approved it, which she denied, even sending a rebuke his way in her Grammy speech this year for winning Album of the Year.)

The "Famous" video, a grainy and voyeuristic 10-minute "comment on fame," in Mr. West's own words, premiered on Friday night at the Forum in Los Angeles and on a simultaneous livestream hosted by Tidal, the music service. The video will be available exclusively on the streaming service for one week, the company said.

Shot like a creepy home video, the visuals feature an uncomfortably close camera panning across the sleeping celebrities in night vision, lingering over their instantly recognizable faces and uncovered bodies. The tableau recalls a painting, "Sleep," by the American artist Vincent Desiderio. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Mr. West also cited the artist Matthew Barney as an influence.

The history between many of those portrayed is complicated, sordid and the stuff of TMZ — a sex tape for Ms. Kardashian West and Ray J, for example, and the well-known history of abuse in the case of Rihanna and Mr. Brown. (Mr. Brown responded to the video, mostly in emoji, on Instagram, adding that Mr. West is "talented, but crazy.")

But it is the presence of Ms. Swift, directly next to Mr. West in bed, that seems to be the most button-pushing. Months after the back-and-forth over the song's content, Ms. Kardashian West revisited the feud in a recent *GQ* interview. "She totally approved that," she said of Ms. Swift, referring to the line in the song. "She totally knew that that was coming out." Mr. West even has his phone call with Ms. Swift on video, she added.

A representative for Ms. Swift replied, in part, "Kanye West never played the song for Taylor Swift. Taylor heard it for the first time when everyone else did and was humiliated." (Representatives for the singer did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the music video, and whether or not she had approved the use of her likeness.)

For his part, Mr. West, forever needling his rivals and eager to get the last word, expressed only gratitude. The video ends with a special thanks for those represented — just "for being famous."

BLOUINARTINFO BLOGS

Kanye West's New Video Inspired By Vincent Desiderio's "Sleep"

June 25, 2016

Kanye West did something last night, and people are talking about it. That's how it works these days. At an event at Los Angeles' The Forum yesterday, the artist premiered the music video for "Famous," a song from his latest album, "The Life of Pablo." But not just any song — specifically, the most controversial song on the album, the one where he mentions possibly being more "friendly" with pop star Taylor Swift in the future.



The video is inspired by the artist Vincent Desiderio's "Sleep," from 2008, which presents a last supper-like tableau of naked bodies stretched out across a lengthy bed.

But if you look closely at Kanye's interpretation, you may notice something strange: all the bodies are of famous people who have, in some way, cross paths with him. Among the faces: Ray J, the R&B singer famous for his sex tape with Kim Kardashian; the aforementioned Swift; Bill Cosby; West's ex-girlfriend Amber Rose; former president George Bush and presidential hopeful Donald Trump; Caitlyn Jenner, and more.

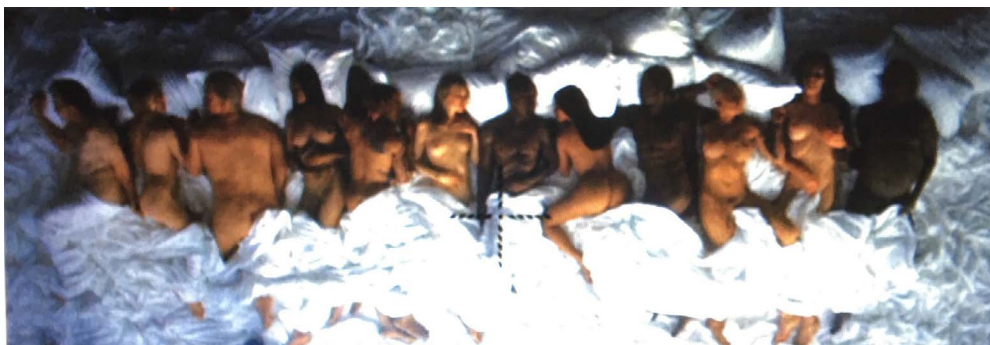
The video, which is creepy and definitely not safe for work, can be watched [here](#).

—Craig Hubert (@craighubert)

VANITY FAIR

Exclusive: Kanye West on His “Famous” Video, Which Might Be His Most Thought-Provoking Work Yet

The artist speaks to VF.com about George Bush, Kim’s co-sign, and why his life is “walking performance art.”



Courtesy of Kanye West

by Dirk Standen June 24, 2016 10:54 pm

I’m watching a video of 12 of the most famous people on the planet naked in bed together. The material is being guarded so closely that the people in possession of it have refused to send me a link in case it gets hacked. Instead I’m looking at it via Skype, with the person on the other end of the line pointing the camera at a laptop screen on which the footage is playing. You can understand the desire for secrecy. As the camera’s ghostly night-vision lens pans slowly, hypnotically over the mostly sleeping bodies, their identities are revealed as follows: George W. Bush. Donald Trump. Anna Wintour. Rihanna. Chris Brown. Taylor Swift. Kanye West. Kim Kardashian West. Ray J. Amber Rose. Caitlyn Jenner. Bill Cosby.

Fast forward 48 hours. By now—at this exact moment in fact, if all goes to plan—the rest of the world will be watching the film. That includes the 8,000 people seeing it on a 100-foot screen at the live unveiling at the L.A. Forum, as well as the glazed-eyed legions catching the live stream on Tidal or the afterglow on social media. Because the scenario I’ve described above forms the action of Kanye West’s visual manifesto for his new single “Famous.”

The crew West gathered one way or another (more on that below) for his meditation on fame in America includes current and ex-lovers (Kardashian West, Rose), collaborators and extended family (Rihanna, Jenner), and those with whom he is simply partners in controversy. Of George W. Bush, the then president he accused on live television of not caring about black people, West, speaking by phone from L.A., now reflected, “May-

be in some alternative universe me and George Bush could have been friends. I could have been his O.J. Simpson black friend on the golf course.” What about the inclusion of Cosby? Is that an endorsement? West once tweeted: BILL COSBY INNOCENT !!!!!!!!!!! “It’s not in support or anti any of [the people in the video],” West said. “It’s a comment on fame.”

Which brings us inevitably to Taylor Swift. The moment West debuted the track at the listening party for his album *The Life of Pablo* at Madison Square Garden in February, *Famous* became infamous because of that line. I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex, he rapped. Why? I made that bitch famous. Since then West and Swift have been trading public barbs on how much he discussed it with her in advance, but West now refuses to be drawn further on the issue.

Important to West was that he had his wife’s co-sign. “[I say] a lot of lines other wives would not allow a husband to say,” he said. “But my wife also puts up photos that other husbands wouldn’t let them put up. One of the keys to happiness in our marriage is we’re allowed to be ourselves.” The video also reminds me of something West said about himself and Kardashian West in an earlier conversation: “Our life is walking performance art.”

How much of what appears in “Famous” is real? The video, which was filmed over a period of three months and cycled through four different formats and several different collaborators until West felt he’d achieved the result he wanted, leaves you guessing as to which of the celebrities are really playing themselves and which are presumably only

there by the grace of some advanced prosthetic wizardry (will the real Taylor Swift please stand up?). Speaking from an L.A. editing suite where he was still obsessively recutting the film the day before its premiere—while also shooting a new scene involving Caitlyn Jenner and a purple Porsche—West was loath to divulge too much of what went on behind the curtain. For him, the ambiguity goes to the core of what he’s trying to say about the mythos of contemporary celebrity.

West has pushed the format of the music video before, most notably in 2010’s “Runaway,” the 35-minute-long mini-epic he made to showcase the album *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*. But, if you’ll excuse the expression, this is his most naked attempt to raise the music video to the level of an art piece. “Matthew Barney is my Jesus,” he said, referring to the artist known for his use of living sculptures in works like *The Cremaster Cycle*. (West was also directly inspired by the work of American realist painter Vincent Desiderio.) West’s video has some of the salacious trappings of a pop promo—the night-vision vibes; the presence of Ray J., who previously appeared in a sex tape with Kim, an epochal event that West hasn’t been shy about referencing in his lyrics. But here he raises those expectations only to confound them. “We were very careful with shots that had [something] sexual to take them out,” he said. What we see instead is a moody, quasi-religious tableau of naked, vulnerable, strangely peaceful bodies at rest. Under the sheets, West seems to be saying, celebrities are just like us.

Tonight’s premiere is just a prelude. In August, West embarks on a nearly 40-city North American tour to perform *The Life of Pablo*, and “Famous” offers only a hint at the spectacle we can expect. It’s too early to say what the reaction to “Famous” will be, but West has already won over one constituency. He has previewed the film for a few celebrity pals who don’t appear in it. “Guess what the response is when I show it to them?” he said. “They want to be in the bed.”