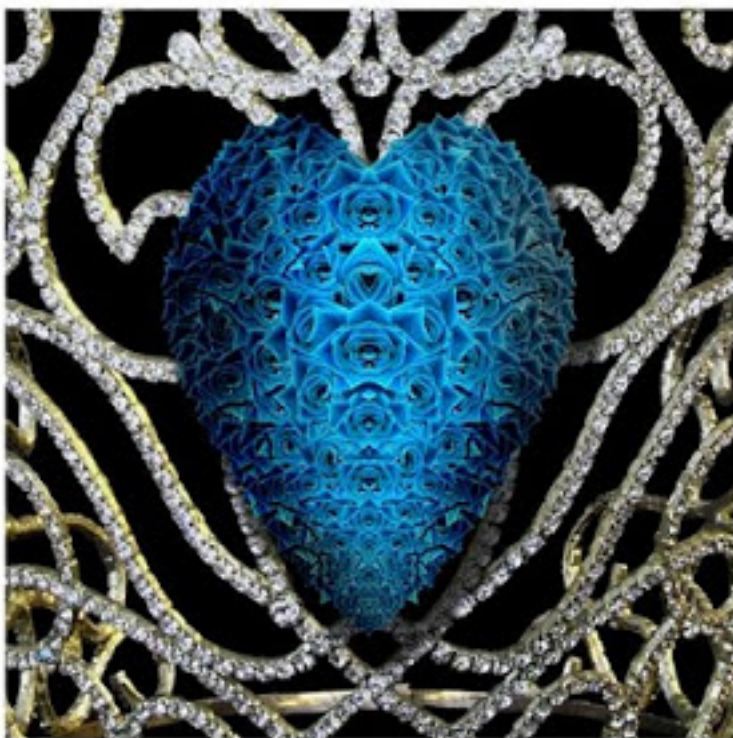


Carlos Betancourt, *Re-Collections X, Xray* (2010), c-print mounted on Plexiglas, 1/1 ed.



Carlos Betancourt, *Of Crowns and Journeys II* (2010),
42x42 inches, edition of 5

Betancourt, a Puerto Rican artist born to Cuban parents who lives and works in Miami, uses every ounce of his multicultural heritage to infuse his work with memories and artifacts that pay homage to his roots while also exerting a wildly contemporary, and conceptual, aesthetic. His photo-based art reflects his personal flair, love of life, and rich appreciation for the intimate parts that make up his bright, dynamic sum. We can identify most objects in Betancourt's *Re-Collections* images, and we can sometimes deduct their meaning. However, only the artist — and those closest to him — knows the deeply personal experience that inspired each object's thoughtful placement. The final pictures are photo-collages of hundreds of images — seashells, jewels, flowers, people, and kitschy objects — that Betancourt culls from a bank of his own photographs. He balances humor and glamour, representation and abstraction, spontaneity and discipline, past and present — all with unmistakable passion and signature bravado.



Martin Denker, *CandylandTV* (2008), c-print on Diasec
in artist's frame, 72x96 inches, edition of 6

Denker creates colorful photo-based collages that burst with countless images he gleans from a variety of media — slick graphics, advertising photography, video games, graffiti, even art history. His shiny, large-scale pictures become fantastical, surreal, and wonderfully abstract. Denker, a German artist, studied under Thomas Ruff at the Art Academy of Dusseldorf and worked as an assistant to Andreas Gursky before fully asserting his own dynamic vision and aesthetic to appreciable acclaim.

LaChapelle, whose first professional job was shooting for Andy Warhol at *Interview* magazine, is a rock star among celebrity photographers. Like Warhol, he uses beauty to attract people. He has photographed the A-list — from Leonardo DiCaprio to Marilyn Manson, Cameron Diaz to Hillary Clinton. His painstaking process and distinctive style power his longevity. And his work is as daring and controversial as it is iconic. LaChapelle boldly confronts society's overindulgences in images such as *Amanda Lepore – Addicted to Diamonds*, which finds the bare-breasted bombshell, her eyes rolled backward, appearing to be tasting a diamond from one of five lines of the gems situated on a circular mirror with a rolled up \$500 bill at the ready. LaChapelle's photographs offer a visceral thrill and a full-body rush.



David LaChapelle, *Amanda Lepore-Addicted to Diamonds* (1997), c-print mounted on dibond, 35

Three of the most exciting and important photographers working today explore the elaborately staged, exaggerated, and fantastic to reveal their vision in lush, all-consuming images. *Shooting the Life Fantastic*, which I co-curated with Chip Tom, examines highly choreographed photographs and photo-based constructions, or collages, created by **Carlos Betancourt**, **Martin Denker**, and **David LaChapelle**. Their images, epic and intimate, push the boundaries of realism, wear artificiality on their surface, and blur the line between cinema and photography, reality and fantasy, and what has happened and what is to come.