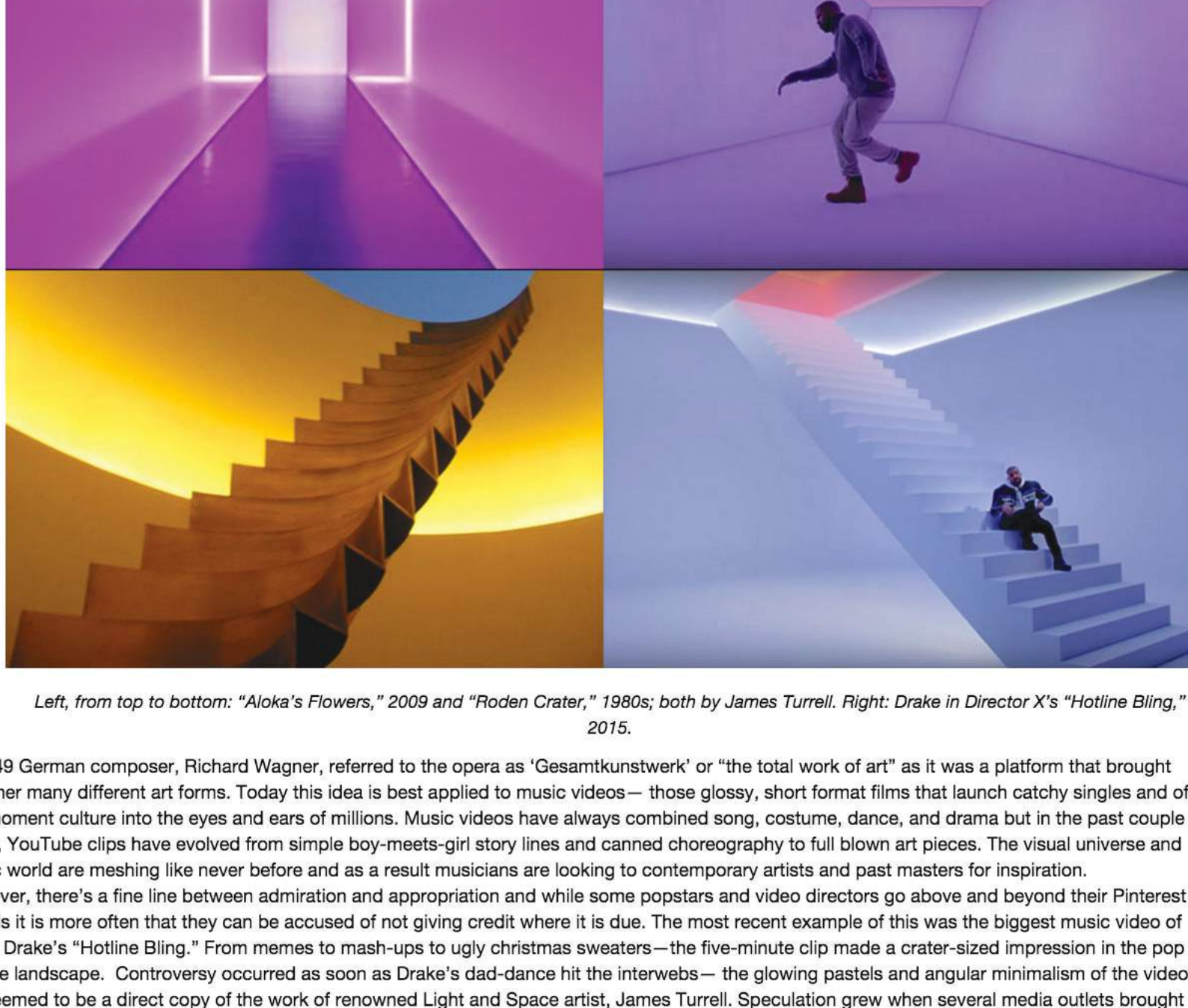


RIFFED OFF OR RIP-OFF? THE SYNTHESIS OF MUSIC VIDEOS AND VISUAL ART

Article by: Admin21 - January 17, 2016

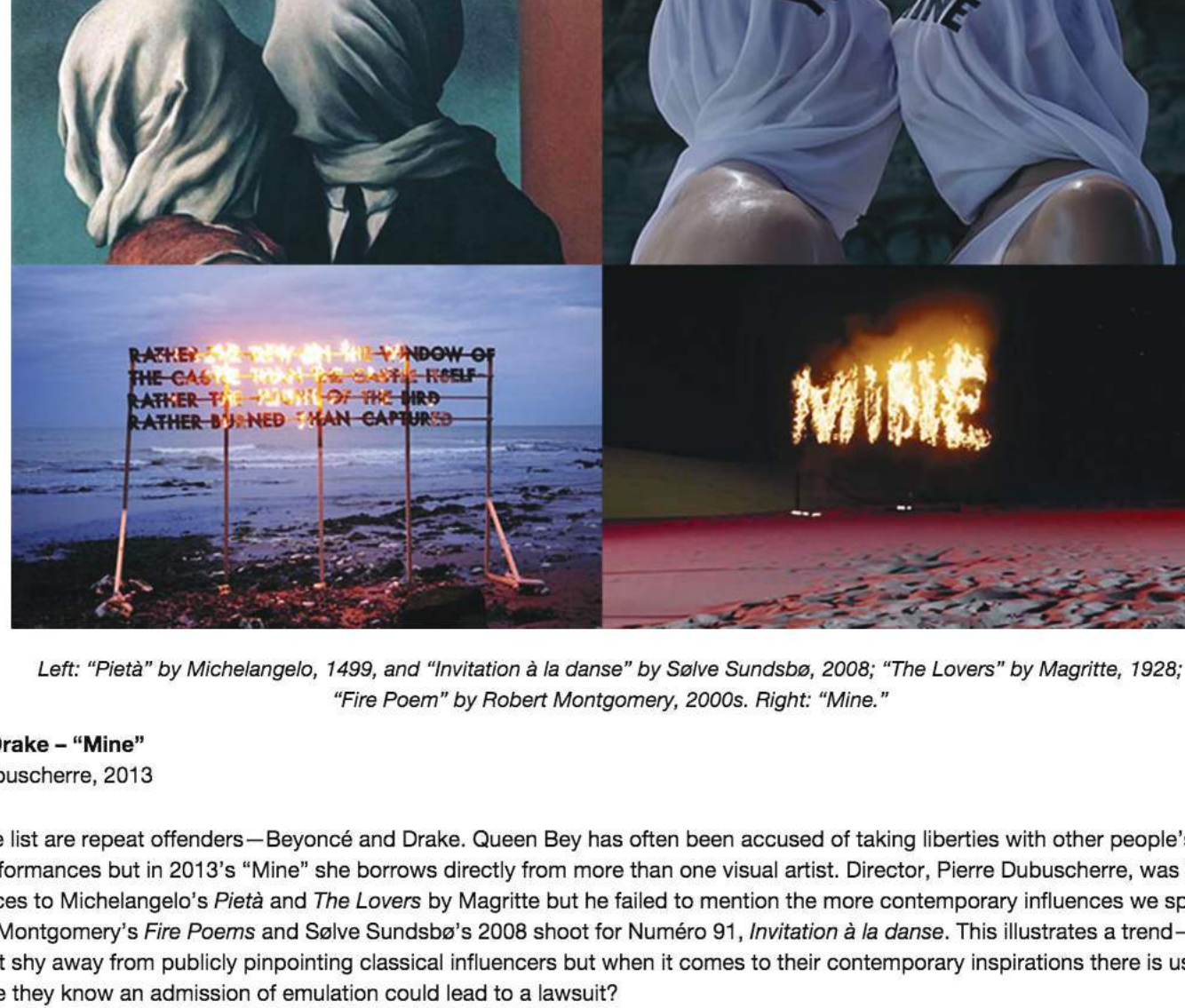


Left, from top to bottom: "Aloka's Flowers," 2009 and "Roden Crater," 1980s; both by James Turrell. Right: Drake in Director X's "Hotline Bling," 2015.

In 1849 German composer, Richard Wagner, referred to the opera as "Gesamtkunstwerk" or "the total work of art" as it was a platform that brought together many different art forms. Today this idea is best applied to music videos— those glossy, short format films that launch catchy singles and of-the-moment culture into the eyes and ears of millions. Music videos have always combined song, costume, dance, and drama but in the past couple of years, YouTube clips have evolved from simple boy-meets-girl story lines and canned choreography to full blown art pieces. The visual universe and music world are meshing like never before and as a result musicians are looking to contemporary artists and past masters for inspiration. However, there's a fine line between admiration and appropriation and while some popstars and video directors go above and beyond their Pinterest boards it is more often that they can be accused of not giving credit where it is due. The most recent example of this was the biggest music video of 2015, Drake's "Hotline Bling." From memes to mash-ups to ugly christmas sweaters—the five-minute clip made a crater-sized impression in the pop culture landscape. Controversy occurred as soon as Drake's dad-dance hit the interwebs—the glowing pastels and angular minimalism of the video set seemed to be a direct copy of the work of renowned Light and Space artist, James Turrell. Speculation grew when several media outlets brought up that time when Drake acknowledged himself at Turrell's sold-out retrospective at the LACMA and stated to a reporter, "I fuck with Turrell." However the hit-maker never acknowledged the artist in relation to "Hotline Bling" and video helmsman, Director X, maintained his innocence as well. Luckily for Drake's lawyers, 72-year-old Turrell took it all in stride stating: "While I am truly flattered to learn that Drake f*cks with me, I nevertheless wish to make clear that neither I nor any of my woes was involved in any way in the making of the Hotline Bling video."

Turrell maintains a sense of humor about the copycat scenario but the whole situation begs the question: with all of the money in pop music, why wouldn't a record label just hire the original artist or at least give them props? If musicians and music video directors openly acknowledged their inspirations they could extend the reach of contemporary art beyond the white walls of pretentious galleries and onto the iPhone screens of millions. Due to Drake and zealous art bloggers, a whole new demographic of people now f*ck with James Turrell. After all, who doesn't enjoy a good blurring of boundaries? GesamtKUNSTWERK!

So, which musicians and directors are creative, "idea people" and who are frame-by-frame "scene stealers"? Take a look at the music videos below and decide for yourself.

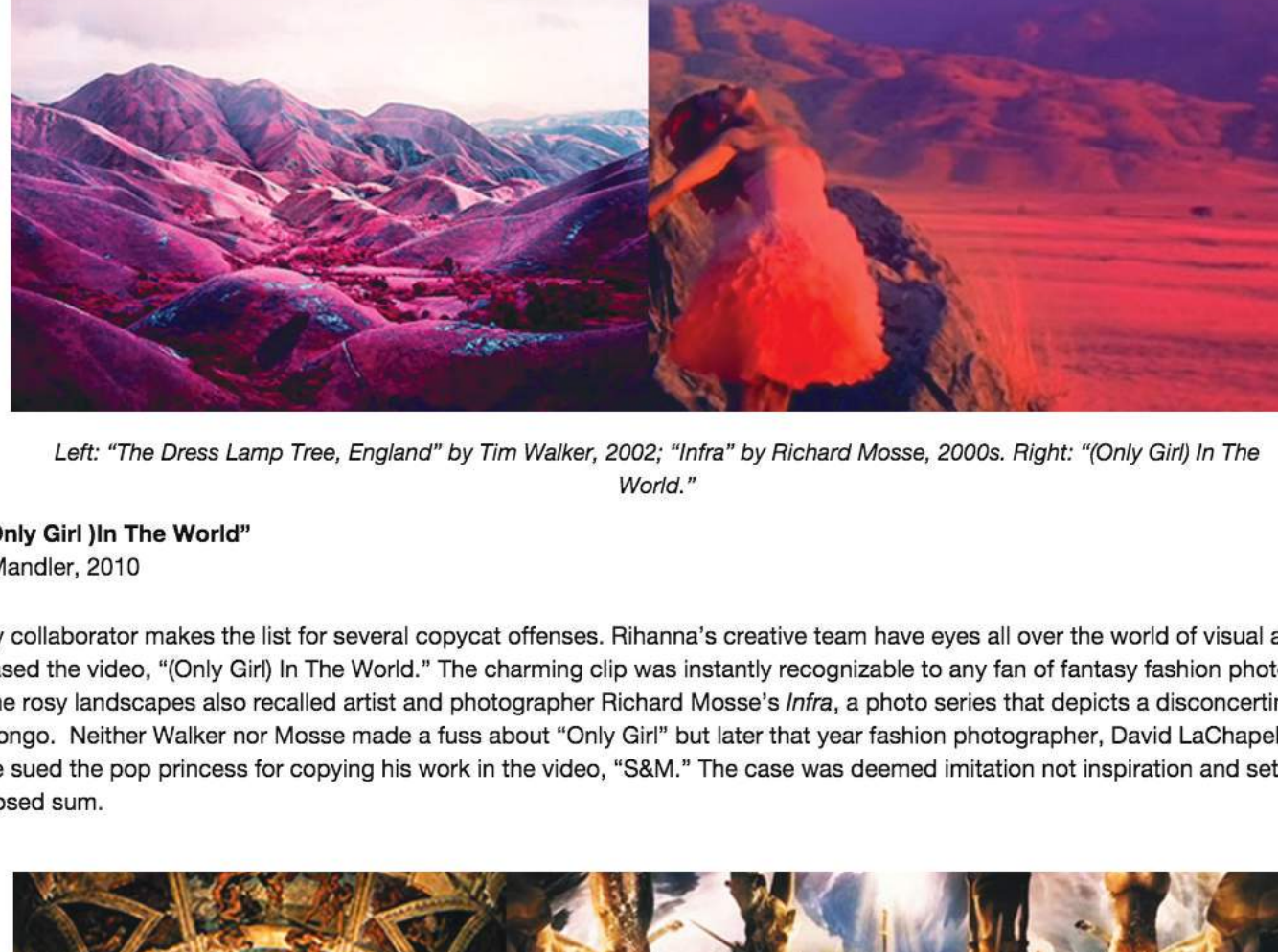


Left: "Pietà" by Michelangelo, 1499, and "Invitation à la danse" by Selve Sundsba, 2008; "The Lovers" by Magritte, 1928; "Fire Poem" by Robert Montgomery, 2000s. Right: "Mine."

Beyoncé ft. Drake – "Mine"

Dir. Pierre Dubuscherre, 2013

First off on the list are repeat offenders—Beyoncé and Drake. Queen Bey has often been accused of taking liberties with other people's choreography and stage performances but in 2013's "Mine" she borrows directly from more than one visual artist. Director, Pierre Dubuscherre, was totally upfront about references to Michelangelo's *Pietà* and *The Lovers* by Magritte but he failed to mention the more contemporary influences we spotted—Scottish artist, Robert Montgomery's *Fire Poems* and Selve Sundsba's 2008 shoot for Numéro 91, *Invitation à la danse*. This illustrates a trend—music video directors don't shy away from publicly pinpointing classical influencers but when it comes to their contemporary inspirations there is usually no naming names. Maybe they know an admission of emulation could lead to a lawsuit?

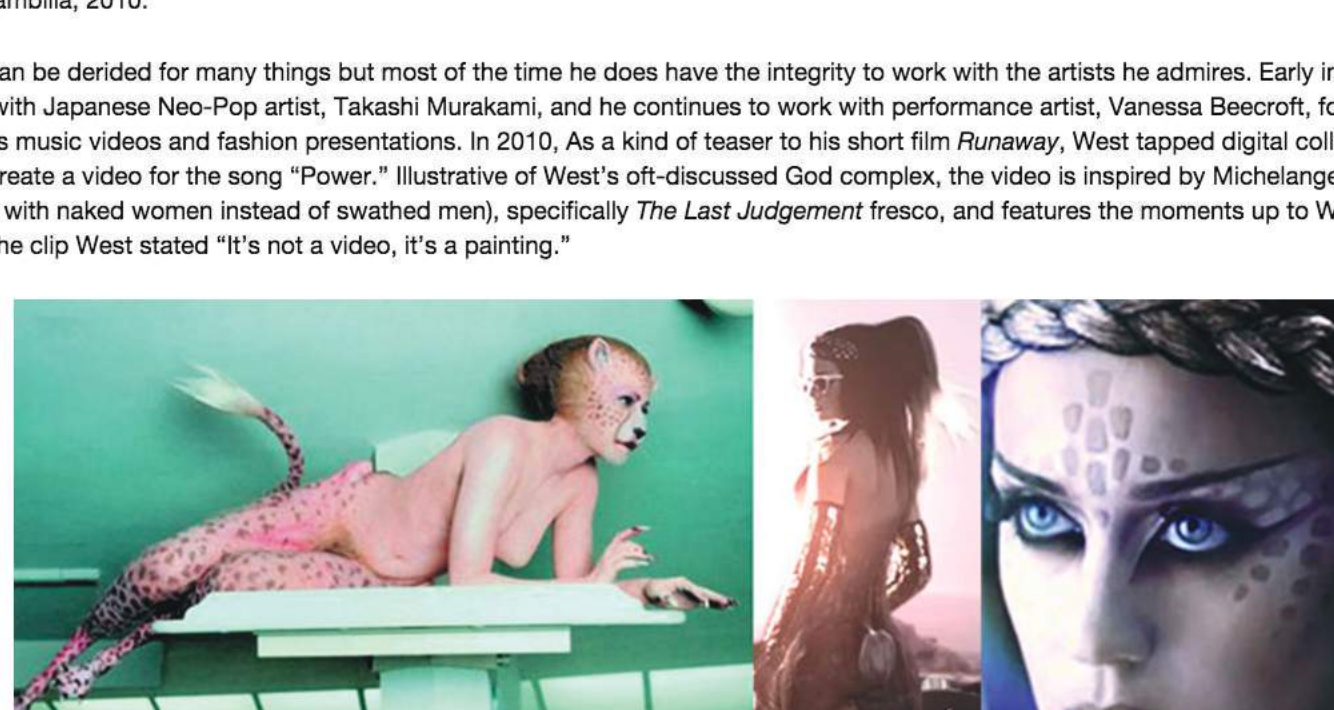


Left: "The Dress Lamp Tree, England" by Tim Walker, 2002; "Infra" by Richard Mosse, 2000s. Right: "Only Girl" In The World."

Rihanna – "Only Girl] In The World"

Dir. Anthony Mandler, 2010

Another Drizzy collaborator makes the list for several copycat offenses. Rihanna's creative team have eyes all over the world of visual art and fashion. In 2010 Riri released the video, "Only Girl] In The World." The charming clip was instantly recognizable to any fan of fantasy fashion photographer, Tim Walker, and the rosy landscapes also recalled artist and photographer Richard Mosse's *Infra*, a photo series that depicts a disconcertingly beautiful trip through the Congo. Neither Walker nor Mosse made a fuss about "Only Girl" but later that year fashion photographer, David LaChapelle, was not so laid-back—he sued the pop princess for copying his work in the video, "S&M." The case was deemed imitation not inspiration and settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.



Left: "The Sistine Chapel" by Michelangelo, 1470s. Right: "Power."

Kanye West – "Power"

Dir. Marco Brambilla, 2010.

Kanye West can be derided for many things but most of the time he does have the integrity to work with the artists he admires. Early in his career he collaborated with Japanese Neo-Pop artist, Takashi Murakami, and he continues to work with performance artist, Vanessa Beecroft, for the creative direction of his music videos and fashion presentations. In 2010, As a kind of teaser to his short film *Runaway*, West tapped digital collagist, Marco Brambilla to create a video for the song "Power." Illustrative of West's oft-discussed God complex, the video is inspired by Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel* (albeit with naked women instead of swathed men), specifically *The Last Judgement* fresco, and features the moments up to West's death in slow-mo. Of the clip West stated "It's not a video, it's a painting."



Left: A scene from "Cremaster 3" by Matthew Barney, 2002. Right: "E.T."

Katy Perry ft. Kanye West – "E.T."

Dir. Floria Sigismundi, 2011.

A year after Kanye was traveling through the depths of Purgatory he was navigating space with Katy Perry. The clip opens for her single, "E.T." was full of references — from pop culture to fashion to fine art. The clip opens by panning over a landscape of trash to an old-timey tune that is reminiscent of Pixar and Disney's 2008 instant classic, *Wall-E*. Later in the clip Perry travels through space in a flurry of stardust and ruffles, bringing to mind the late Alexander McQueen's hologram for the song "Power." Illustrative of West's oft-discussed God complex, the video is inspired by Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel* (albeit with naked women instead of swathed men), specifically *The Last Judgement* fresco, and features the moments up to West's death in slow-mo. Of the clip West stated "It's not a video, it's a painting."

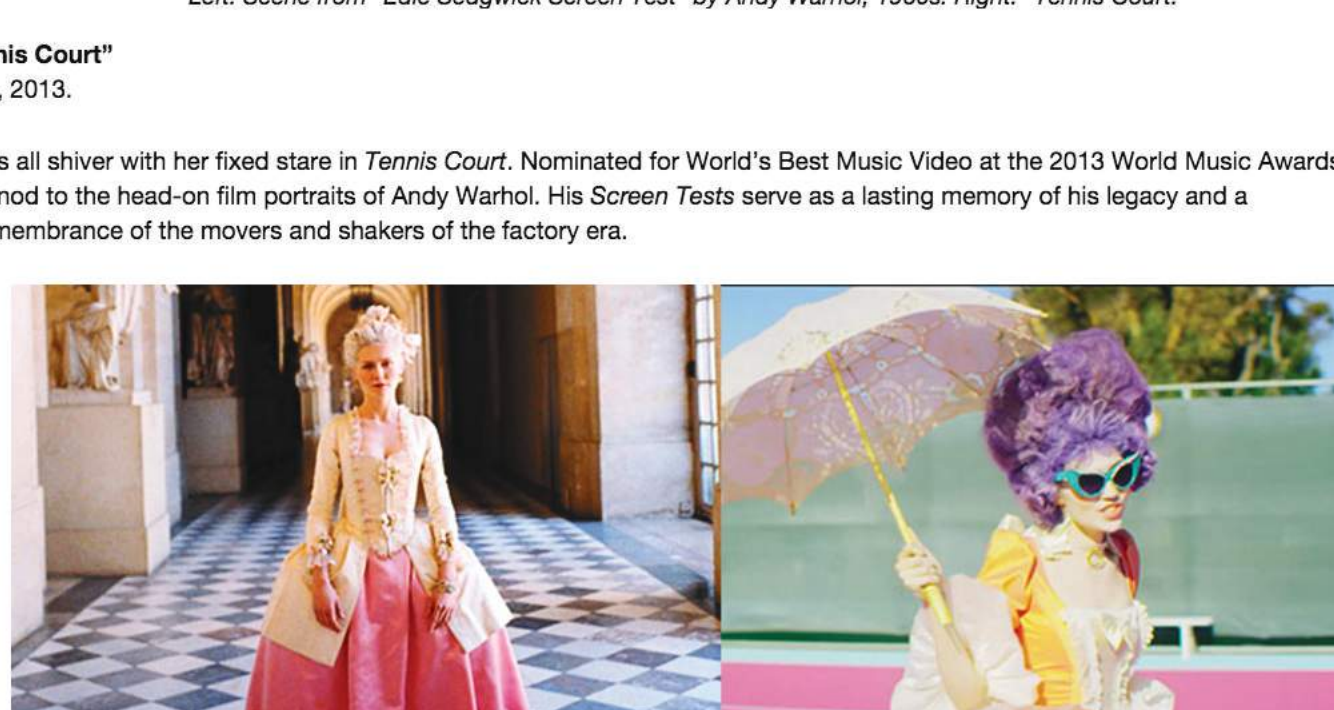


Left: "Relation In Time" by Marina Abramović and Ulay, 1977; "Young Woman with a Water Jug" by Johannes Vermeer, 1660s. Right: "Hi Custodian."

The Dirty Projectors – "Hi Custodian"

Dir. David Longstreth, 2012.

Speaking of performance artists lets discuss Marina Abramović. The groundbreaking artist's oeuvre extends the world of pop music again and again. In 2010 Jay-Z used her MoMA masterpiece, *The Artist Is Present* as inspiration for his *Picasso Baby* and most recently singer, Jessie Ware recreated Abramović and Ulay's 1977 image, *Relation In Time*, in her video "Chamagne Kisses." Our favorite Abramovićism is The Dirty Projectors recreation of the same picture in their creative short film "Hi Custodian." The long music video is brimming with artistic references, from the contemporary all the way back to the Dutch Baroque.



Left: Photo by Petra Collins, 2000s. Center: Photo by Arvida Byström, 2000s. Right: "Baby's On Fire"

Die Antwoord – "Baby's On Fire"

Dir. Ninja, Terence Neale, 2012.

Also in 2012, a love letter to the pastel-pop "Baby's On Fire." Not to be confused with Brian Eno's 70s track, Die Antwoord's clip is very much of the present and reads like a come die to the past-'pop' Tumblr and Instagram generation. Although rapper and video director Ninja naughtily told a reporter that he "referenced the colors on a baboon's ass" to make the video we think it's safe to assume that the indescribable trio drew influence from girls-on-the-internet such as photographers, Petra Collins and Arvida Byström. Die Antwoord often draws inspiration from contemporary art—their premier video featured graphics that instantly drew comparisons to Keith Haring and their "Fatty Boom Boom" video, was directly inspired by their painting, *Black Gynecologist*, by South African artist, Anton Kannemeyer. They once had to pull a video teaser due to copyright claims from artist, Jane Alexander, over imagery similar to her *Butcher Boys* sculptures.

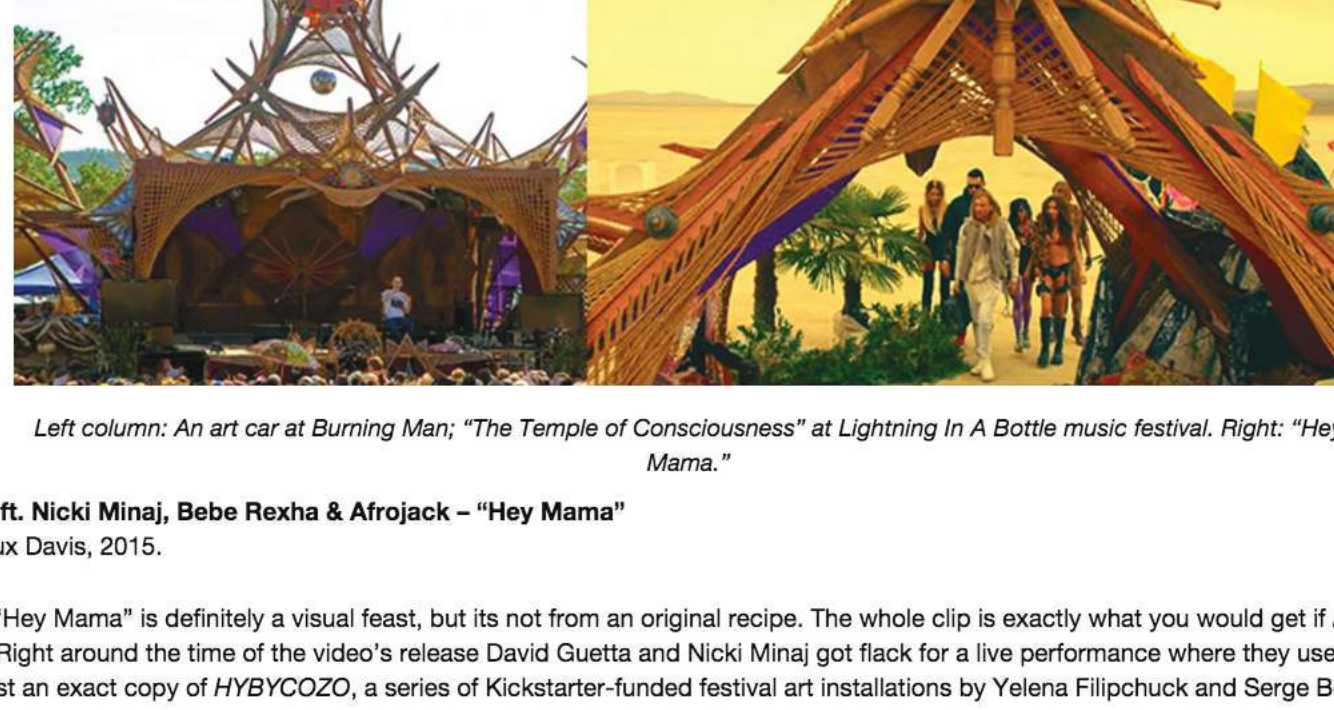


Left: Scene from "Eddie Sedgwick Screen Test" by Andy Warhol, 1960s. Right: "Tennis Court."

Lorde – "Tennis Court"

Dir. Joe Kefall, 2013.

Lorde made us all shiver with her fixed stare in *Tennis Court*. Nominated for World's Best Music Video at the 2013 World Music Awards, the clip seems to be a direct nod to the head-on film portraits of Andy Warhol. His *Screen Tests* serve as a lasting memory of his legacy and a permanent remembrance of the movers and shakers of the factory era.



Left column: "Marie Antoinette" by Sophia Coppola, 2006; "Romeo + Juliet" by Baz Luhrmann, 1996; "Scarface" by Brian De Palma, 1983. Right column: "Flesh Without Blood/ Life In The Vivid Dream," 1996; "Scarface" by Brian De Palma, 1983. Right: "Scarface" by Brian De Palma, 1983. Right: "Scarface" by Brian De Palma, 1983.

Grimes – "Flesh Without Blood/ Life In The Vivid Dream"

Dir. Grimes, 2015.

Many would argue that certain films classify as fine art, especially Coppola ones. One of the most original players of pop music today, Claire Boucher aka Grimes, would probably agree . Her latest LP is tellingly called *Art Angels* and the first single of the album remixes famous movie figures from stylish contemporary films. "Flesh Without Blood/ Life In The Vivid Dream" opens with Boucher rocking wings in the style of Claire Danes in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. The clip also features her wandering around the tennis courts of the famed Madonna Inn dressed like a Sophia Coppola-era Marie Antoinette but with the addition of dripping blood. Last but not least, she swagger dances in an outfit that could be straight out of a classic gangster movie by Brian De Palma, Martin Scorsese, or the elder Coppola.

Left column: An art car at Burning Man; "The Temple of Consciousness" at Lightning In A Bottle music festival. Right: "Hey Mama."

David Guetta ft. Nicki Minaj, Bebe Rexha & Afrojack – "Hey Mama"

Dir. Hannah Lux Davis, 2015.

The video for "Hey Mama" is definitely a visual feast, but its not from an original recipe. The whole clip is exactly what you would get if *Mad Max* went to *Burning Man*. Right around the time of the video's release David Guetta and Nicki Minaj got fack for a live performance where they used a stage prop that was almost an exact copy of *HYBYCOZO*, a series of Kickstarter-funded festival art installations by Yelena Filipchuck and Serge Beaulieu.