

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

b. November 4, 1946

d. March 9, 1989

Robert Mapplethorpe was a preeminent 20th-century photographer. His controversial works sparked debate about government funding of the arts.

“I’m looking for the unexpected. I’m looking for things I’ve never seen before.”

Robert Mapplethorpe was one of America’s preeminent 20th-century photographers. His works have been displayed in prominent galleries and museums, including the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Mapplethorpe was raised in suburban Long Island, New York. He earned his B.F.A. in graphic arts at Pratt Institute.

In the 1970’s, Mapplethorpe’s photographs chronicling the lives of New York’s gay community established him as a unique and controversial talent. Prominent art collector Sam Wagstaff became Mapplethorpe’s lover and bought him a \$500,000 Manhattan studio loft, where the artist lived and worked.

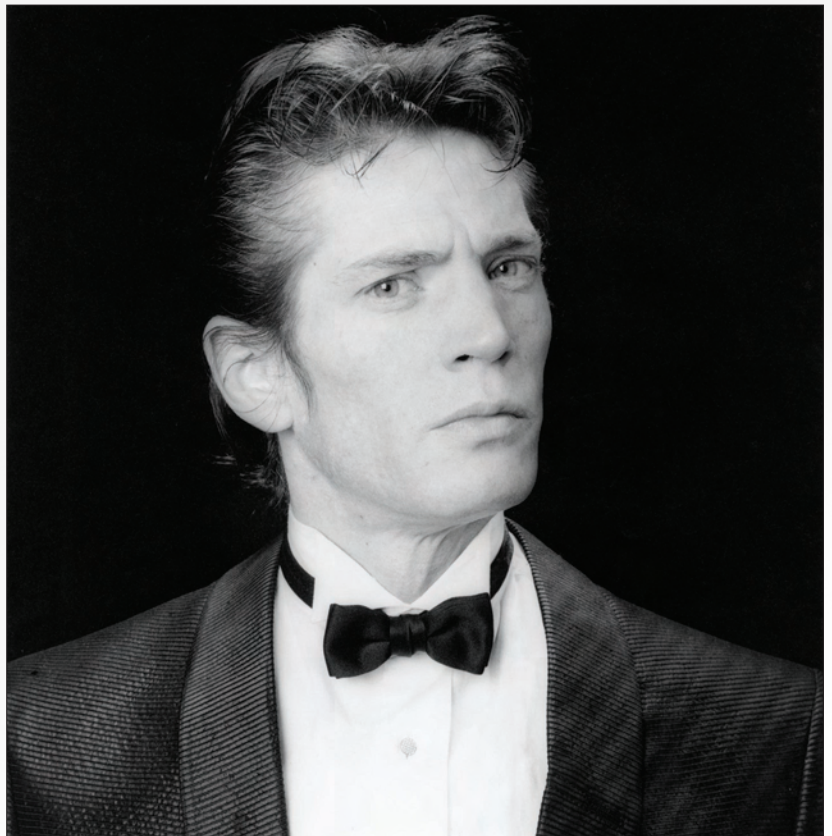
Mapplethorpe’s photography encompasses an eclectic mix of subjects: flowers, especially orchids and calla lilies, classical nudes, homoerotic acts, bondage and discipline, and celebrities. Andy Warhol, Richard Gere, Peter Gabriel, Grace Jones and Patti Smith were among the famous people Mapplethorpe photographed.

In the early 1990’s, Mapplethorpe’s “X Portfolio” series sparked a firestorm of criticism when it was included in “The Perfect Moment,” a traveling exhibition funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. The exhibit, which featured some of the photographer’s most sexually explicit images, was condemned by conservative religious groups who called on government leaders to withdraw financial support for the “presentation of potentially obscene material.”

When “The Perfect Moment” was installed at the Contemporary Arts Center of Cincinnati, the center and its director were prosecuted for “pandering obscenity” and subsequently acquitted. The legal wrangling stirred debate about the delineation between art and obscenity and government funding for the arts.

In 1988, Mapplethorpe established the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, which funds HIV/AIDS research, promotes the art of photography and maintains the artist’s legacy.

In 1989, Mapplethorpe died from complications arising from AIDS. He was 42.



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