

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now



Self-Portrait, 1980 © The Robert Mapplethorpe
Foundation. Courtesy of Solomon R Guggenheim
Museum, New York

On the 30th anniversary of Robert Mapplethorpe's death, the Guggenheim launches a year-long exhibition looking back on his life and a legacy that continues to challenge

In the winter of 1988, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, an exhibition opened, triggering outrage. *The Perfect Moment*, a display of 125 photographs by New Yorker Robert Mapplethorpe, was the most comprehensive show of his work to date – and the most provocative – featuring images he had taken over the previous 25 years, including those of his divisive *X Portfolio*.

The retrospective came at a difficult time in Mapplethorpe's life: he was 42, and losing his fight with Aids – the disease that would take his life the following March. Perhaps, for him, this was his final chance to show this expansive oeuvre to the public – most of it shot in his Manhattan loft. But his pristine black-and-white photographs of BDSM scenes, and the sexy, sinewy strangers he met at the Mineshaft sex club, shocked conservative audiences. On a political level, the culture wars in the US were raging.

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The controversy continued after the artist's death, with the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC cancelling its showing, raising questions about the funding of public arts and the First Amendment right to freedom of speech. When the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Centre put up the retrospective, they faced obscenity charges. A national debate ensued. This remains, perhaps, one of the most important aspects of Mapplethorpe's legacy, and an issue that is far from resolved.



Ken and Tyler, 1985 © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Courtesy of Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York

Over time, perceptions have radically changed – between the 1990s and the mid 2000s, Mapplethorpe's open themes were deemed “unfashionably sincere”, as Vince Aletti reports in Artforum. Nevertheless, in acknowledgement of the three-decade anniversary, the Guggenheim in New York is now showing *Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now*. The year-long spectacle follows the joint 2016 retrospective at the Getty and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which commemorated what would have been Mapplethorpe's 70th birthday year, and repositions the photographer as one of America's most significant artists of the 20th century, with many unseen works.

As in LA, the New York show will be split into two installments; January to July, it will focus on the gallery's extensive collection – 200 pieces of which were donated by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. The second half of the year will address Mapplethorpe's legacy, analysed through the artists who quote him: Glenn Ligon, Catherine Opie, Paul Mpagi Sepuya and Lyle Ashton Harris, among them.

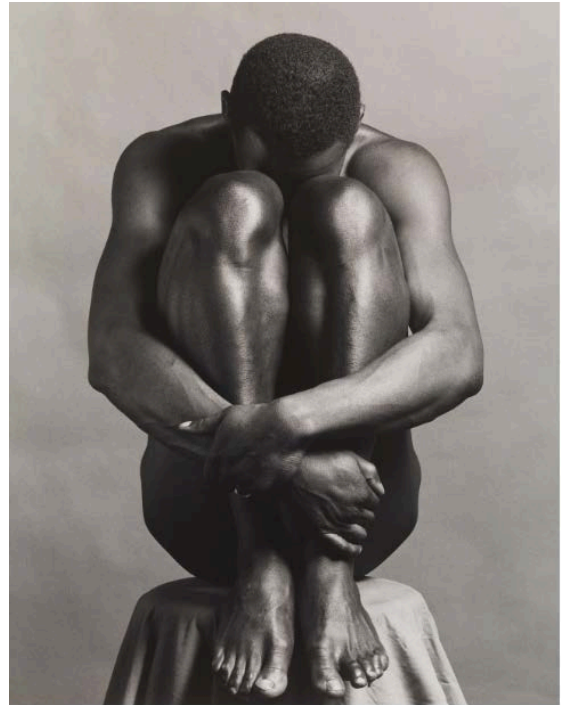
Mapplethorpe's influence, not only on the LGBTQI community, but on artists interested in the relationship between the camera, the gaze, sexuality and the self, continues at a time that politically mirrors the US culture wars of 1988, where censorship has become more insidious. The question that hangs over the contemporary audience is to what extent we are now conditioned to self-censor – something that is harder to perceive and dismantle.

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Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now is on show at the Guggenheim from 25 January – 10 July and then from 24 July – 05 January 2020; the first half focuses on Mapplethorpe's own images, and the second on his legacy in other artists' work. guggenheim.org



Lisa Lyon, 1982 © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Courtesy of Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York



Ajitto, 1981 © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Courtesy of Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York



Louise Bourgeois, 1982 © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Courtesy of Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York



Patti Smith, 1976 © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Courtesy of Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York

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Calla Lily, 1986 © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Courtesy of Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York