

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Robert Mapplethorpe
Unique constructions
March 19 – April 20, 2024
Opening Reception: March 19, 5pm - 7pm
130 East 64th Street
New York

In collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Gladstone presents an exhibition of rarely seen three-dimensional objects, photographic assemblages, and mixed media collages. Spanning from 1971 to 1986, the works in this special presentation offer a compelling new perspective into the artist's deeply intertwined life and practice. Through an exploration of less familiar imagery and juvenilia significant to Mapplethorpe's artistic development, the exhibition examines the artist's innate mastery of form evident across his oeuvre, revealing a deeper understanding of both his work and his world.

Mapplethorpe began his artistic endeavors at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn where he studied graphic art and design from 1963 to 1969. Mapplethorpe's education spanned various mediums including sculpture, drawing, painting, and graphic design, introducing the young artist to formalist principles that would be influential to a lifetime of aesthetic sensibilities. Mapplethorpe's discerning eye for symmetry and composition, developed through his studies, is evident in the graphic identity of his earlier works known for their geometric motifs and iterative presentation. This is shown in the artist's photomontage *Champagne* (1975) where Dom Pérignon bottles are arranged in a triangular pattern following the rule of thirds. Self-portraits, in a photo booth strip format, and arrangements of colorful dollar bills also engage ideas of sequencing; the imagery is presented in multiples, with slight adjustments made in each iteration, whether that be the expression made on Mapplethorpe's face or the hue overlaid onto George Washington's. Mapplethorpe's long-standing interest in formal perfection and experimentation can be traced throughout the artist's practice, influential from his studies and early works, to his later classically composed studio photographs.

Mapplethorpe's work shares a distinctive visual language of familiarity that can be attributed to the connections the artist had with his subjects and the objects he presented. Photographed by Mapplethorpe in 1988 for *House & Garden*, the artist's Chelsea apartment functioned as both a home and a studio, displaying a remarkable collection of art and decorative objects of his time while serving as the backdrop for his radical practice. The pleasure Mapplethorpe took in curating the belongings in his home accompanied a sophisticated eye for elegance and design, exemplifying the artist's belief that, "the whole point is to try to integrate your life into your work if you're an artist."¹ Expanding upon the relationship between form and familiarity, the works on view at Gladstone's Upper East Side townhouse share similar sculptural sensibilities and stylistic rigor to those that resided in the artist's own apartment. Presenting this exhibition in a gallery setting reminiscent of a domestic interior blurs the boundaries between personal possessions and artwork. A coat rack, topped with an exposed light bulb, is shown both as an assemblage on view and in a photograph featuring a nude figure posing dramatically with the piece – in both instances, the works exude a rawness with the human body and light source laid bare. Although individual details about these objects remain elusive, collectively they offer valuable insight into Mapplethorpe's artistic practice, underscoring the thematic importance of form, contrast, and composition.

Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) was born and raised in Queens, New York. Mapplethorpe attended the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn from 1963 to 1969, where he majored in Graphic Arts and worked primarily in painting, sculpture, and collage. It was not until the 1970s when the artist Sandy Daley gave Mapplethorpe a Polaroid camera that he began to experiment with photography, which he originally used as a means to document his mixed-media artworks, and develop his signature style. During his lifetime, Mapplethorpe had impressive solo exhibitions at some of the

¹ Filler, Martin. "Robert Mapplethorpe," *House and Garden*, June 1988, p.158–63.

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most acclaimed institutions around the world, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the National Portrait Gallery, London; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. After his untimely death from AIDS in 1989, Mapplethorpe has been the subject of solo exhibitions at major international museums, including the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, Italy; Grand Palais, Paris, France; Musée Rodin, Paris, France; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, Canada; and State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

For further information, please contact press@gladstonegallery.com

New York gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm

Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10am-6pm and Saturday, 12pm-8pm

Seoul gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm