



## NEWS FROM THE GETTY

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### **J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM EXHIBITION SPOTLIGHTS STUDIO PRACTICE, CONTROVERSIAL WORK, AND THE ENDURING LEGACY OF ARTIST ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE**

**Getty exhibition is one part of a two-venue museum retrospective with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)**

#### ***Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium***

March 15–July 31, 2016 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center  
March 20–July 31, 2016 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)



Left: *Self-Portrait*, 1980. Robert Mapplethorpe American, 1946–1989 Gelatin silver print. Jointly acquired by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; partial gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; partial purchase with funds provided by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation, 2011.9.21. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Right: *Self-Portrait*, 1985. Robert Mapplethorpe American, 1946–1989. Gelatin silver print. Jointly acquired by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with funds provided by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation, 2011.7.21. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

LOS ANGELES – Since his death in 1989, Robert Mapplethorpe (American, 1946–1989) has become recognized as one of the most significant artists of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is best known for his perfectly composed photographs that explore gender, race, and sexuality, which became hallmarks of the period and exerted a powerful influence on his contemporaries. The J. Paul Getty Museum will present one half of *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium*, a major retrospective exhibition of Mapplethorpe's work, on view March 15-July 31, 2016 at the Getty Center. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) will host the other half of the exhibition March 20-July 31, 2016. The two exhibitions are drawn from the landmark joint acquisition and gift of art and archival materials made in 2011 by the J. Paul Getty Trust and LACMA from the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

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"The historic acquisition of Mapplethorpe's art and archival materials in 2011 has enabled our institutions' curators and other scholars to study and assess Mapplethorpe's achievement in greater depth than ever before," says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "The rich photographic holdings in the Getty Museum and LACMA, together with the artist's archive housed at the Getty Research Institute, make Los Angeles an essential destination for anyone with a serious interest in the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century photography scene in New York. These exhibitions will provide the most comprehensive and intimate survey of Mapplethorpe's work ever seen."

The Getty's exhibition features the full range of Mapplethorpe's photographs from his portraits, self-portraits, and figure studies to his floral still lifes. It includes some of Mapplethorpe's best-known images alongside work that has been seldom exhibited. Key themes include Mapplethorpe's studio practice, the controversy provoked by the inclusion of his sexually explicit pictures in the 1988-90 retrospective exhibition *The Perfect Moment*, and the legacy he left behind after his death from AIDS-related complications in 1989.

The exhibition begins with a survey of some of Mapplethorpe's most familiar portraits, including those of his long-time benefactor and lover Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr., poet-musician Patti Smith, and fashion designer Carolina Herrera, among others. It also includes a number of intimate self-portraits, images of artists, and a rarely exhibited series of portraits of the eleven dealers who dominated the downtown New York City art scene during the late 1970s.

Mapplethorpe searched for well-proportioned models and underscored their powerful physical presence through obsessive attention to detail, the precision of their statuesque poses, and sophisticated lighting. This interest becomes evident in examples of the sculptural bodies he enlisted as subjects through the years. In particular, Mapplethorpe was attracted to the color of black skin (he liked to refer to it as "bronze"), and the exhibition includes a number of photographs of African-American models such as Ajitto and Thomas, whom he frequently used to evoke classical themes.

Mapplethorpe's *Ken and Lydia and Tyler* (1985) suggests the ancient trope of the Three Graces through three models of different racial backgrounds, while select photographs of model Lydia Cheng were further idealized through the application of a shimmering bronze powder on her skin.

One of Mapplethorpe's frequent subjects was Lisa Lyon, a bodybuilding champion who considered herself a performance artist or sculptor whose body was her medium. After meeting Lyon at a party in 1979, Mapplethorpe and his new model embarked on a six-year collaboration that resulted in 184 editioned portraits. A selection of these images in the exhibition shows her dressed, undressed, and in various guises, ranging from ingénue to dominatrix.

In his art Mapplethorpe was a perfectionist who preferred to make photographs in the highly controlled environment of his New York City studio loft. His style was predominately directorial -- during a shoot he used short verbal commands and gestures to communicate the poses he wanted his models to strike. Afterwards, he would spend hours reviewing his contact sheets and hired master printer Tom Baril to make finely crafted gelatin silver prints.



*Ken and Lydia and Tyler*, 1985. Robert Mapplethorpe American, 1946–1989. Gelatin silver print. Jointly acquired by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with funds provided by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation, 2011.7.19. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

"Mapplethorpe was more sophisticated than most people realize," says Paul Martineau, associate curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum and curator of the exhibition. "He was an artist who understood the value of his own intuition and eye, who taught himself the history of photography, how to network, how to run a studio, and how to keep the public interested in him."

The exhibition includes a selection of Mapplethorpe's floral still lifes, which further demonstrate his skill in the studio. In these photographs he imbued orchids, calla lilies, poppies, and irises with an erotic charge through carefully orchestrated compositions and meticulous lighting.

The Getty's installation also features Mapplethorpe's *X Portfolio*, which depicts the gay s&m community of which he was not just an observer, but a participant. It comprises 13 photographs of sex acts that

Mapplethorpe staged for the camera with particular attention to the harmonious arrangement of forms. The careful selection, sizing, sequencing, and packaging of these prints in a luxurious portfolio case wrapped in black silk help to blur the line between fine art and pornography.

The exhibition directly addresses *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*, a retrospective exhibition that opened in 1988 at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia before beginning an eight-venue tour. After the exhibition caught the attention of conservative politicians, it was canceled at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., two weeks before its scheduled opening. When it was later shown at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, director Dennis Barrie was arrested and charged with pandering obscenity -- a charge of which he was acquitted. The exhibition also traveled to the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA), where it had record-breaking attendance. The Getty exhibition documents the media uproar surrounding *The Perfect Moment* through items that include a 1989 cover of *ArtForum International* featuring a protest that took place outside the Corcoran, exhibition catalogues that include images that were considered "obscene," by some and Mapplethorpe's photograph of an American flag.

"When planning this exhibition, I wanted the focus to be on Mapplethorpe's work and not on the sensationalism that accompanied *The Perfect Moment*. I've included it in a small way because that exhibition not only represents a highpoint in Mapplethorpe's career, but the controversy it engendered puts his sex pictures in a historical context," says Paul Martineau. "I'm afraid that the first thing that comes to people's minds when they think of Mapplethorpe is that controversy. There is so much more to discover about Mapplethorpe and his work than that. He continues to have an enormous impact on the photographic scene."

The exhibition also emphasizes the care that Mapplethorpe took to craft his legacy. After being diagnosed with AIDS in 1986, Mapplethorpe continued to work more ardently than ever. In 1988 he established the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to steward his own work into the future, provide support for photography at the institutional level, and help fund AIDS research. A 1988 self-portrait on view shows Mapplethorpe's face revealing signs of illness, his hand gripping a skull-topped cane, a symbol of his impending death. The simple composition and brutal honesty combine to make this photograph one of his most visually and psychologically powerful images.



*Calla Lily*, 1988. Robert Mapplethorpe American, 1946–1989. Gelatin silver print. Jointly acquired by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with funds provided by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation, 2011.9.26. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

The two complementary presentations at the Getty and LACMA highlight different aspects of the artist's complex personality. LACMA's exhibition underscores the artist's relationship to New York's underground, as well as his experimentation with a variety of media. Following its Los Angeles debut, the exhibition will go on an international tour, traveling to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal, Canada (8/29/16-1/22/17), the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia (10/28/17-2/4/18), and another international venue. The Getty and LACMA will be the exhibition's sole U.S. venues, and the exhibitions will be combined and toured as one for the international locations. The LACMA exhibition is curated by Britt Salvesen, Department Head and Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Department of Prints and Drawings at LACMA.

Two books will be published in conjunction with the Mapplethorpe exhibition: *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Photographs* by Paul Martineau and Britt Salvesen with an essay by Eugenia Parry and an introduction by Weston Naef, and *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Archive* by Frances Terpak and Michelle Brunnick, with essays by Patti Smith and Jonathan Weinberg.

**Support for *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium* and its international tour has been provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Additional support for the Getty's installation has been provided by Sotheby's.**

During the run of *Robert Mapplethorpe: the Perfect Medium* the Getty Museum's Center for Photographs will also feature the exhibition *The Thrill of the Chase: The Wagstaff Collection of Photographs*. Wagstaff amassed an impressive collection of photographs that were acquired by the Getty Museum in 1984, an acquisition that formed one of the cores of the collection of the Department of Photographs. This exhibition and accompanying publication of the same name will be an opportunity to focus on Wagstaff's collection and his role as one of the most important patrons and collectors of photography.

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**The J. Paul Getty Trust** is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

**The J. Paul Getty Museum** collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum's mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

#### **Visiting the Getty Center**

The Getty Center is open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. It is closed Monday and most major holidays, open on July 4. Admission to the Getty Center is always free. Parking is \$15 per car, but reduced to \$10 after 4 p.m. No reservation is required for parking or general admission. Reservations are required for event seating and groups of 15 or more. Please call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish) for reservations and information. The TTY line for callers who are deaf or hearing impaired is (310) 440-7305. The Getty Center is at 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, California.

**Additional information is available at [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu).**

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