

press release

KUNSTHAL ROTTERDAM



Press release, 23 February 2017

Robert Mapplethorpe a perfectionist

22 April to 27 August 2017

From Saturday 22 April the Kunsthall Rotterdam will present a large-scale retrospective of the life and work of Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), one of the most influential artists and photographers of the 20th century. More than two decades after his death, his work remains controversial and tests the limits of what is artistically possible.

The exhibition offers an impressive survey of his career, from early works in the late 1960s to the art world success he established in the 1980s. More than 200 objects throw new light on his preferred genres: portraiture, self-portraiture, the nude, and still life.

This is the first time that Mapplethorpe's work is shown in the Netherlands on such a large scale after a long absence. The Kunsthall is delighted to be the only European venue to present this special exhibition, organised by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

With his photography and personality – intense and insistent – Mapplethorpe breaks down the boundaries between life and art. His passionate desire to achieve aesthetic perfection forms the core of his work. The exhibition focuses on what Mapplethorpe called 'perfection in form', which can be seen in his fascination with sexual fetishism and in his almost tangible floral petals.

'Robert Mapplethorpe, a perfectionist' shows Mapplethorpe's personal bond with his models, his talent for running a successful studio, and above all, his ambition to elevate photography to the status of fine art. The iconic images and masterly compositions that made him famous are set in a wider context. The exhibition, including the famed X, Y and Z Portfolios, provides

insight into his working method, showing the trajectory from his improvisational beginnings to the highly controlled studio practice he developed while seeking aesthetic perfection.

The retrospective follows Mapplethorpe's development over time and presents the major themes of his work. On display are portraits of friends and acquaintances – including his girlfriend and muse Patti Smith, the body builder Lisa Lyon and model Phillip Prioleau, as well as prominent artists, writers and musicians. But there are also many self-portraits, which demonstrate that Mapplethorpe understood the importance of crafting his own image.

Sexuality is at the centre of a large part of Mapplethorpe's work. In the late 1960s he used images from gay pornographic magazines for his collages. When he began to take his own photographs in the early 1970s, he had already discovered the SM subculture of New York. Mapplethorpe is unrivalled in recording the naked body sculpturally in photography. The combination of in-your-face sexual images and impressive technical mastery attracted very broad attention and launched Mapplethorpe's national and international career. His refined, sculptural and technically perfect floral still lifes also display Mapplethorpe's predilection for sensitively illuminated and balanced compositions.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, 'Robert Mapplethorpe: The Photographs', co-published by the J. Paul Getty Museum and LACMA. A comprehensive guide to the artist's work and career, this publication features an introduction by co-curators Britt Salvesen and Paul Martineau, five scholarly essays, an illustrated chronology, and a selected exhibition history and bibliography.

Save the date! Press preview Friday 21 April

The press preview of 'Robert Mapplethorpe, a perfectionist' will be held on Friday 21 April. Accreditation required via communication@kunsthall.nl. Detailed information about the programme will follow.

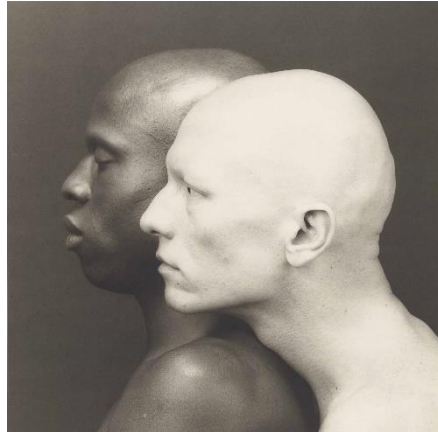


Image captions

(Top left) *Self-Portrait* (1980), Gelatin silver print. Gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and to The J. Paul Getty Trust

(Top middle) *Patti Smith* (1978), Gelatin silver print. Jointly acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The J. Paul Getty Trust. Partial gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; partial purchase with funds provided by The J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation.

(Top right) *Two Men Dancing* (1984), Gelatin silver print. Promised Gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to The J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

(Bottom left) *Poppy* (1988), Dye imbibition print. Jointly acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The J. Paul Getty Trust. Partial gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; partial purchase with funds provided by The J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation.

(Bottom middle) *Ken Moody and Robert Sherman* (1984), Platinum print. Jointly acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The J. Paul Getty Trust. Partial gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; partial purchase with funds provided by The J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation.

(Bottom right) *Lisa Lyon* (1981), Gelatin silver print. Gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and to The J. Paul Getty Trust

Exhibition partners

The exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum, in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation and the Kunsthal Rotterdam.

Support for the exhibition and its international tour has been provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.



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→ Please include the following information in all publications: info +31 (0)10-4400301, www.kunsth.nl, opening hours: Tuesdays to Saturdays from 10 am to 5 pm, Sundays and public holidays from 11 am to 5 pm.
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About the Kunsthal Rotterdam

The Kunsthal Rotterdam is a leading cultural institution in the Netherlands and is located in Museumpark Rotterdam. Designed in 1992 by the famous architect Rem Koolhaas, the Kunsthal has no less than seven different exhibition areas. Every year, the Kunsthal presents a varied and diverse programme of approximately 25 exhibitions. The Kunsthal always presents several exhibitions simultaneously, taking visitors on an exciting journey along various cultures and art movements. From modern masters and contemporary art to forgotten cultures, photography, fashion and design, this is culture for a wide audience. The Kunsthal also organises an extensive programme of activities to accompany the exhibitions.

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