

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Robert Mapplethorpe
Curated by Arthur Jafa

515 West 24th Street
March 12 – April 24, 2021
Opening March 12, 10am – 6pm

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to present a career-spanning exhibition of works by Robert Mapplethorpe curated by artist Arthur Jafa. Comprised of both the iconic studio photographs that are synonymous with Mapplethorpe's oeuvre as well as a selection of his own rarely exhibited Polaroids, Jafa employs the visual sequencing found throughout his work to reconfigure and destabilize our understanding of the familiar. Orbiting around the concept that re-oriented chains of connotation imbue culturally entrenched imagery with new narrative power, Jafa proposes a fresh reading of works that have long been embraced as art-historical canon.

Breaching the tacit barricades that quarantine Mapplethorpe's classically composed studio work from his notoriously unmitigated depictions of gay sexuality, Jafa's image selection spans the full arc of Mapplethorpe's practice. Silver gelatin portraits and still-lives are displayed with a series of Polaroids that fluctuate between the tender and the transgressive, all of which are granted equal footing in Jafa's hierarchy-leveling hands. Suggesting that visual information can supply narrative meaning in much the same way as a text, Jafa's sequencing re-examines the issues of agency and power that reverberate throughout both Mapplethorpe's work and his own.

Of particular interest to Jafa is the literal and metaphorical space between Mapplethorpe and his subjects, the delicate balance between intimacy and formalism that often charges the photographer's imagery. Sam Wagstaff is here presented as both a lover and public figure—an object of erotic desire and a revered mentor whose varying depictions in Mapplethorpe's work trespass simultaneously on the public and the private. Portraits of celebrated artists are confronted with the anonymous gazes of reclining nudes, while lush landscapes abut with landscapes of the body. Each choice made by Mapplethorpe is met by one from Jafa, resulting in a series of choreographed interactions between the two artists.

Echoing Mapplethorpe's practice of constructing narrative threads throughout his oeuvre via framing, cropping, and comparison (the flower mirrors human genitalia because the eye locates the logic in this proposition), Jafa's use of sequencing as a rhetorical device examines not only Mapplethorpe's formal practice but the dynamic emotional and social implications of authorship itself.

Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) was born and raised in Queens, New York. He 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 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 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. In 2016, Mapplethorpe was the subject of a major touring retrospective, *The Perfect Medium*, which opened at the J. Paul Getty Museum and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, and toured to Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. In 2019, Mapplethorpe was the subject of *Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now*, a year-long exhibition yearlong exhibition project in two parts at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Vivian Suter
12 Rue du Grand Cerf
March 11 – April 30

For further information, please contact Andrew Huff: ahuff@gladstonegallery.com
New York gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm
Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm and Saturday, 12pm–6pm