

PRESS RELEASE

**ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE
A SEASON IN HELL**

**14 OCTOBER – 21 NOVEMBER, 2009
OPENING AND PERFORMANCE BY PATTI SMITH
TUESDAY 13 OCTOBER, 6-8 PM**



Alison Jacques Gallery is delighted to present a new interpretation of the work of acclaimed and controversial American artist Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989). Bringing together a range of works in a variety of media, including rarely seen collages as well as photography, the exhibition focuses on the hitherto neglected roles of religious themes and imagery that informed much of Mapplethorpe's practice throughout his career. Since Mapplethorpe's tragically early death from complications arising from AIDS in 1989, the artist has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in museums worldwide and is now considered one of the most important photographers of the twentieth century. This new exhibition offers a timely reappraisal of the diversity of Mapplethorpe's work, and the significance of the sacred and profane in his art.

Alison Jacques has represented the Estate of Robert Mapplethorpe in the UK since 1999; for this exhibition she has assembled a number of important works which reveal the significance of religion, of Catholicism and Satanism and the extremes of these opposites, in Mapplethorpe's life and work. For the first time in a European gallery, five major early works will be exhibited, a series of collages from 1968-69 when the artist was living with the poet and rock singer Patti Smith at the Chelsea Hotel. Drawing on the Catholic culture of his upbringing, Mapplethorpe was inspired to make shrine-like works out of a broad range of materials, from men's underwear to prayer cards. However these works, both formally and substantially, become transformed more into objects of fetish than images of devotion, revealing the incessant influence of his religious background on Mapplethorpe's life and art, and his irreverent and rebellious relationship to it. As Mapplethorpe himself said "A church has a certain magic and mystery for a child.... It still shows in how I arrange things. It's always little altars."

Later in his career Mapplethorpe became more renowned for his photography, yet the themes of Heaven and Hell, the sacred and profane, still filtered through into his practice and are very much in evidence throughout the corpus of his work. The photographs in the exhibition bear witness to the recurrent impact of Catholicism on Mapplethorpe's craft, such as the use of the Crucifix as a compositional device in the photographs, a framing motif or as an actual sculpture. Mapplethorpe's influences were not, however, limited to Christian imagery; darker religious motifs, such as images of Pentagrams, references to witchcraft and shocking depictions of sexuality also feature in his work, and left Mapplethorpe mired in controversy in both life and death. Iconoclastic and aesthetically exhilarating, allusions to the sacred such as haloes in portraits, the use of traditional iconographic symbols such as white flowers, bread and, thorns, contrast powerfully with the devil imagery, of serpents and of smoke. Mapplethorpe himself in one of his most famous self-portraits assumed the aspect of Satan, complete with devil's horns.

In 1986, a newly translated version of French poet Arthur Rimbaud's 1873 extended poem 'A Season in Hell' was published with photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe. The book exemplified intriguing connections and parallels between the unorthodox and prematurely brief lives of Rimbaud and Mapplethorpe. They shared an often defiant and libertine excess in their personal lives, born partly of their queer sexualities and partly of innately rebellious spirits. This resistance to, and fascination with, the norms and strictures of bourgeois culture also led to both exploring through art the darker side of humanity's private life, in all its emotional, physical and sexual complexity. To mark Rimbaud's October birthday and the twentieth anniversary of Mapplethorpe's death, Patti Smith, a passionate devotee of both artists, will perform especially dedicated music and poetry at the opening of the exhibition in London. In 2010, Smith will publish her memoir about Mapplethorpe, a diary of their love and friendship called 'Just Kids'.

Mapplethorpe's work features in the collections of many major museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and Tate, London. A new publication of 'A Season in Hell' by Morel Books will accompany Patti Smith's performance and Mapplethorpe's exhibition at the gallery.

**NEXT: ANDRÉ BUTZER 27 NOVEMBER - 9 JANUARY 2010
OPENING: 26 NOVEMBER, 6-8 PM
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