

Robert
Mapplethorpe
Saints and Sinners
December 14, 2013
through January 25,
2014

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This December will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the landmark exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*. On the occasion of the anniversary of that defining juncture, not just in Mapplethorpe's career, but also in the larger dialogue regarding freedom of expression in the arts, Sean Kelly brings together twenty-seven pairings of Mapplethorpe images exploring the theme of *Saints and Sinners*.

While some pairings in the exhibition may have more obvious connections, others are more ambiguous in their associations. The fifty-four images that comprise *Saints and Sinners*, some of which have rarely been exhibited, afford the viewer an opportunity to find personally meaningful connections in the work. Mapplethorpe himself deftly subverted any moral implications by presenting his subject matter in an objective, even classical manner, putting the onus on the viewer to draw their own conclusions.

Mapplethorpe's *Self-Portrait* (1980) in drag is paired with a portrait of the singer and actress, *Amanda Lear* (1976) – two unique depictions of female sexuality. The profile of a marble sculpture of *Ermes* (1988) is shown next to a vanitas-like composition of a human skull (1988); the former perhaps represents an ideal of physical perfection whilst the latter reminds one of the realities of mortal existence. *Bruce Mailman* (1981) and *Christopher Holly* (1980) are, in different guises, potentially perceived as either playful or nefarious – in each case the viewer is called upon to decide the implications for themselves.

Together, the photographic pairings in *Saints and Sinners* offer the possibility of seemingly endless personal interpretations of the work and a fresh perspective on Mapplethorpe's practice and his fearless contribution to contemporary photography.

Robert Mapplethorpe was born in 1946 in New York. He earned a B.F.A. from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where he produced artwork in a variety of media, mainly collage. The shift to photography as Mapplethorpe's sole means of expression happened gradually during the mid-1970s. He took his first photographs using a Polaroid camera, and later became known for his portraits of artists, architects, socialites, stars of pornographic films, members of the S&M community and an array of other characters many of whom were personal friends. During the early 1980s, his photographs shifted to emphasize classical formal beauty, concentrating on statuesque male and female nudes, flowers, still lifes and formal portraits. Mapplethorpe died from AIDS on March 9, 1989, in Boston, at age 42. Since that time, his work has been the subject of innumerable exhibitions throughout the world, including major museum traveling retrospectives.

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Concurrently, Sean Kelly will present *Slater Bradley: A Point Beyond the Tree*.

Sean Kelly represents the Robert Mapplethorpe Estate in the Americas.

