

# G L A D S T O N E

## Gladstone presents historic works by Robert Mapplethorpe, curated by Arthur Jafa

Drawing from both iconic studio photographs and a selection of rarely exhibited Polaroids, the exhibition offers a fresh reading of storied works

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.

### **Exhibition Details**

Curated by Arthur Jafa

# GLADSTONE

March 12 – April 24, 2021  
515 West 24th Street  
New York, NY 10011

## About Robert Mapplethorpe

Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989) was born and raised in Queens, New York. Mapplethorpe 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 Galleri 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. Mapplethorpe is currently 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 in 2016, and has recently toured to Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, on view through March 4, 2018.

## About Arthur Jafa

Arthur Jafa (b. 1960, Tupelo, Mississippi) is an artist, filmmaker and cinematographer. Across three decades, Jafa has developed a dynamic practice comprising films, artefacts and happenings that reference and question the universal and specific articulations of Black being. Underscoring the many facets of Jafa's practice is a recurring question: how can visual media, such as objects, static and moving images, transmit the equivalent "power, beauty and alienation" embedded within forms of Black music in US culture?

Jafa's films have garnered acclaim at the Los Angeles, New York and Black Star Film Festivals, and his artwork is represented in celebrated collections worldwide including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The Tate, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, The High Museum Atlanta, The Dallas Museum of Art, The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Stedelijk, Luma Foundation, The Perez Art Museum Miami, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, among others. Select recent institutional solo exhibitions include MCA Chicago, Illinois (2024); OGR Torino, Italy (2022); LUMA Foundation, Arles, France (2022); Glenstone, Potomac, Maryland (2021); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2021); Fundação de Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2020); Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Canada (2020); and Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2019). In 2019, he received the Golden Lion for the Best Participant of the 58th Venice Biennale "May You Live in Interesting Times."

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## **About Gladstone Gallery**

Gladstone Gallery is known for its commitment to artists whose prescient approaches and experimental practices have defined the contours of contemporary art. The gallery has long been an active partner in the cultivation of iconoclastic careers, fostering a roster of artists recognized for their ground-breaking contributions. Headquartered in New York and including outposts in both Brussels and Seoul, Gladstone's impact extends globally, enabling both the presentation of new bodies of work, and an amplification of the international reach of its artists. Alongside its work with contemporary artists, the gallery is steward to the legacies of pivotal historical artists and serves as an advocate for the enduring power of art. Gladstone is led by a team of partners who spearhead its long-term vision and program, building on the values of its founder Barbara Gladstone.

## **Press Contact**

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