

G L A D S T O N E

Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs debut in new monumental scale

Gladstone Gallery presents 16 new large-scale, limited-edition photographs by American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989), fulfilling a longtime wish of the artist. Organized in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, the exhibition features a selection of Mapplethorpe's most iconic images. Most of these works are presented in a format of 60x60 inches, reflecting artist's desire to experiment with emerging technologies.

Mapplethorpe was considered the enfant terrible of contemporary art during the 1970s and 1980s, as much for his daring documentation as for his classical aesthetic. The formal beauty of his prints—manifesting his keen eye for both compositional harmony and the nuanced contrasts between black, grey, and white—stood out against a backdrop of postmodernism and neo-expressionism. He occupied an artistic realm unto his own.

The exhibition includes a range of the artist's signature subjects: flowers, classical sculpture, male and female nudes, portraits of artists and celebrities, along with seascapes, a leather-clad crotch, and a tattered American flag. Together, they demonstrate Mapplethorpe's obsession with perfection, which he employed in his practice as a whole.

Mapplethorpe pursued studies in graphic design, painting, and sculpture while studying at Pratt Institute in the late 1960s. After he began experimenting with Polaroid and Hasselblad cameras, he was convinced that photography could become his artform. While he mastered the medium, he never lost interest in the physicality of artworks, creating exquisite prints and thinking deeply about their framing and display. The scale of his photographs was of utmost importance to him and was to some extent determined by the printers with whom he worked and the availability of paper sizes. The blurring of boundaries between painting and photography intrigued him, as did the potential for scale. In conversation with printer Martin Axon in 1986, Robert said, "To make pictures big is to make them more powerful." The symmetry and geometry of his Hasselblad camera's square format present a scale which illuminates the artist's understanding for photography to compete with painting and sculpture. This concept continued to be realized by the generation of photo-based artists who followed him.

Mapplethorpe frequently turned to his own image, photographing himself throughout his life—from early Polaroids, some of which he incorporated in collages, and thereafter, formal self-portraits created in his studio. The idea of self-representation is key to his art. He posed for his own camera in various guises and emotional states. In his *Self-Portrait* from 1980, he presents a type of hypermasculinity, wearing a leather jacket with a cigarette dangling from his mouth. *Self-Portrait* from 1988, the year before he died from AIDS, shows him somberly confronting death, with skull-topped cane in

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hand.

The artist's celebrity portraits capture a time of intense creativity in the worlds of art, music, theater, and the like. His 1984 portrait of Grace Jones memorializes a collaboration among Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, and the singer/performance artist. On the occasion of the release of her hit single, "Slave to the Rhythm," Warhol commissioned a photo-feature for *Interview Magazine*. Haring painted Jones' body with his unique patterns and dancing figures, adorning her further with a painted crown and wire skirt. Jones wore embellishments over her breasts, which referenced modernist Alexander Calder's wire sculpture of performer Josephine Baker.

Mapplethorpe photographed musician, poet, and artist Patti Smith several times over the years, having first met her in 1967. Their lives were entwined, initially as lovers and one another's muses, and eventually as close friends. His portraits of Smith would grace the covers of three of her albums, most iconically for *Horses* (1975), the image included here.

Mapplethorpe's 1977 photograph of a torn American flag, set against the sky and lit from behind by the sun, is uncannily prescient. Spectacular in its battered beauty, this flag served as a stirring anthem to a country in turmoil and transition at the time of its making—a reality that is only more urgent and relevant today.

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 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 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, Italy; Grand Palais, Paris; Musée Rodin, Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, Canada; and State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. Significant public collections of Mapplethorpe's work are held by the J. Paul Getty Trust including the museum and research institute in partnership with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Artist Rooms Collection jointly owned by the Tate Modern, London, and the National Galleries of Scotland; at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Hessel Museum of Art; and the Kinsey Institute at Indiana

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Exhibition Details

Robert Mapplethorpe
March 5 - April 18, 2026
530 West 24th Street
New York, NY 10011

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.

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