

# When Robert Mapplethorpe made Patti Smith's extreme provocations eternal

The stars and stripes counterculture & our taboos through the shots of the American photographer on display and in the cinema with Patti Smith.

By [Simona Marani](#) 22/12/2018



ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE - PATTI SMITH, 1976, GELATIN SILVER PRINT, 35.2 X 34.9 CM, SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK GIFT, THE ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE FOUNDATION 93.4278 © RO MAPPLETHORPE FOUNDATION. USED BY PERMISSION



The musical language and poetic underground of Patti Smith knows how to keep up with the times better than others. It beats to the rhythm of a dialogue between art and contemporary that sees us long. In harmony with that of **Robert Mapplethorpe** who took this portrait of him in the autumn of 1976, stripped and in the center of a network of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines. The perfect synthesis of the artistic and sentimental partnership that has matured the provocative talent of both and, thirty years after the photographer's death, renews the dialogue of a controversial work that continues to disturb and seduce. Exhibited from Porto to Naples, waiting for the exhibitions in Zurich, New York and the new biopic for the big screen, played by a travel expert in other worlds such as Matt Smith (*exDoctor Who* ).



Robert Mapplethorpe, Self Portrait, 1980, Gelatin silver print, 35.6 x 35.6 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 93.4289

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From different perspectives, each exhibition, editorial and cinematographic study touches on the daring transgressions that have made the boy from Queens one of the most disruptive photographers of the twentieth century. It touches the sublime body of his work, together with everything that pushes its neoclassical perfection, well beyond the addictions of our imagination. Journey through his experiments, ushered in by collages that use gay porn magazines to explore the artistic potential of bodies, passions, obsessions and taboos. It matures with the skilful use of light and the form that Polaroid uses, when it has the urgency to save time and money to achieve what it

needs. Also the first solo show with *Polaroid* exhibited at the Light Gallery in New York in 1973. His artistic work full of vital and sensual tension, comes to our eyes disenchanted by the pornography of the most lethal instincts and the craving for objects to be consumed, with the gay S&M scene protagonist of the controversial *Portfolio X* and the most seductive soul of still life, without discriminating between flowers, phalluses and fetishes, even when taking portraits of famous people. Better, than what made them such, as in the case of Louise Bourgeois's explicit sculptural art, photographed while 'holding' her big and phallic *Fillette* ("little girl" in French) with an ironically mischievous look.



**Robert Mapplethorpe - Louise Bourgeois, 1982 Gelatin silver print, 38.7 x 38.6 cm Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 96.4367**

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"Pornography influenced me, but only in terms of the subject, since my attitude in photographing a flower is no different today from that of portraying a penis. Basically they are the same thing." **Robert Mapplethorpe** to Germano Celant, also in Robert Mapplethorpe *The Nymph Photography*, Skira Ed, 2014. For the photographer, they both prove to be ideal subjects of his controversial way of living everything, breaking down the boundaries between art and life, to enjoy both as he likes. A shrewd protagonist of the New York underground, artistic and homosexual scene. The formal perfection of classicism, all composition, balance and beauty, with which it frames the reproductive organs of human beings and plants, breaks down much more than the boundary between artistic photography and that destined for the pornographic market. The explicit poses of famous characters from New York's homosexual culture and subculture invest American concepts of race, sex, gender and morality. Far exceeding its author's lower goals, albeit aware of the power of photography on a world dominated by images. To the point that the audacious revolution of perception and of the art scene that it triggers, also resists the criticism and the processes ignited by his more S&M shots and the AIDS that killed the photographer at forty-two in 1989, but not his impetuous legacy, shared from the **Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation** , continuing to donate a large part of its proceeds to the fight against the virus .



**Robert Mapplethorpe, White Gauze, 1984**

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Robert Mapplethorpe Lisa Lyon, 1982 Gelatin silver print, 48.7 x 38.7 cm Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 93.4294

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His notoriety told in a brutally frank way by one of his former lovers, confidants and colleagues Jack Fritscher, in the pages of *Mapplethorpe: Assault With a Deadly Camera* (Hastings House, 1994), makes no secret of what animates the photographer, also sharing confessions between the sheets: "I want to be a story told in beds at night around the world".

*Just Kids* by Patti Smith (Feltrinelli, 2010) offers a passionate story without rhetoric of the great harmony, matured as cohabitants, lovers, accomplices and friends for a lifetime on the margins of conventions, while politics, rock and sex (not necessarily in this order) were preparing to change the world. Tales of adventures and experiments that have influenced both talents and transgressions. The story of a deep bond imprinted in many famous shots by Mapplethorpe, starting with the one finished on the cover of *Horses*, the first masterpiece album by **the rock priestess**. Witnessed by other lenses such as Norman Seeff's, currently also on display with *Sessions in Sound*:

*Photographs by Norman Seeff*, at the Proud Galleries in London (until 13 January 2019).



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Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith, 1969 by Norman Seeff.

Exhibition runs at [@proudgalleries](#) from November 23, 2018 until January 13, 2019.

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Far from idealizations and purifications of what is born to 'mortify', Mapplethorpe leaves us many stories to reflect on, while his photographs taken during the turbulent 70s and 80s, sexual and social liberation, seem perfect for reflecting on our times and modesty, forcing us to deal with instincts and perversions (those who have none), morals and hypocrisy.



## Robert Mapplethorpe, Phillip Prioleau, 1982.

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A questo scopo, *Robert Mapplethorpe: Pictures*, in mostra alla **Fondazione Serralves di Porto** (fino al 6 gennaio 2019), con la curatela di João Ribas e il coordinamento di Paula Fernandes, ne offre la panoramica più completa. La selezione di 159 opere, tra collage, Polaroid, ritratti audaci e pose scandalosamente provocatorie, toccano gli aspetti salienti della sua breve ma intensa carriera e brama di successo, mentre le 400 pagine del catalogo, ne offrono un corposo approfondimento con il contributo dello storico dell'arte portoghese Jonathan K. Nelson e una prefazione, richiesta dallo stesso artista all'influente intellettuale, scrittrice e amica **Susan Sontag**.



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*Robert Mapplethorpe. Choreography for an exhibition / Choreography for an Exhibition ,*

curated by Laura Valente and Andrea Viliani at **the Madre Museum in Naples** (until April 8, 2019), focuses on the performative matrix of Mapplethorpe's photographic practice. He who is part of the event and of the reality he photographs, who makes an object, not only when taking self-portraits or is the protagonist of extreme BDSM poses. An X (Dark) Room (forbidden to minors) is reserved for this kind of photographs, including overtures dedicated to muses, mentors, companions and lovers such as **Patti Smith** and Samuel Wagstaff Jr, while the other sections explore relationships with the rest of his world. The entire exhibition in images of over 160 works, together with the imagined dialogue between antiquity and modernity, photography and dance, is enriched by the program of live performances created by some of the most important choreographers on the international scene.



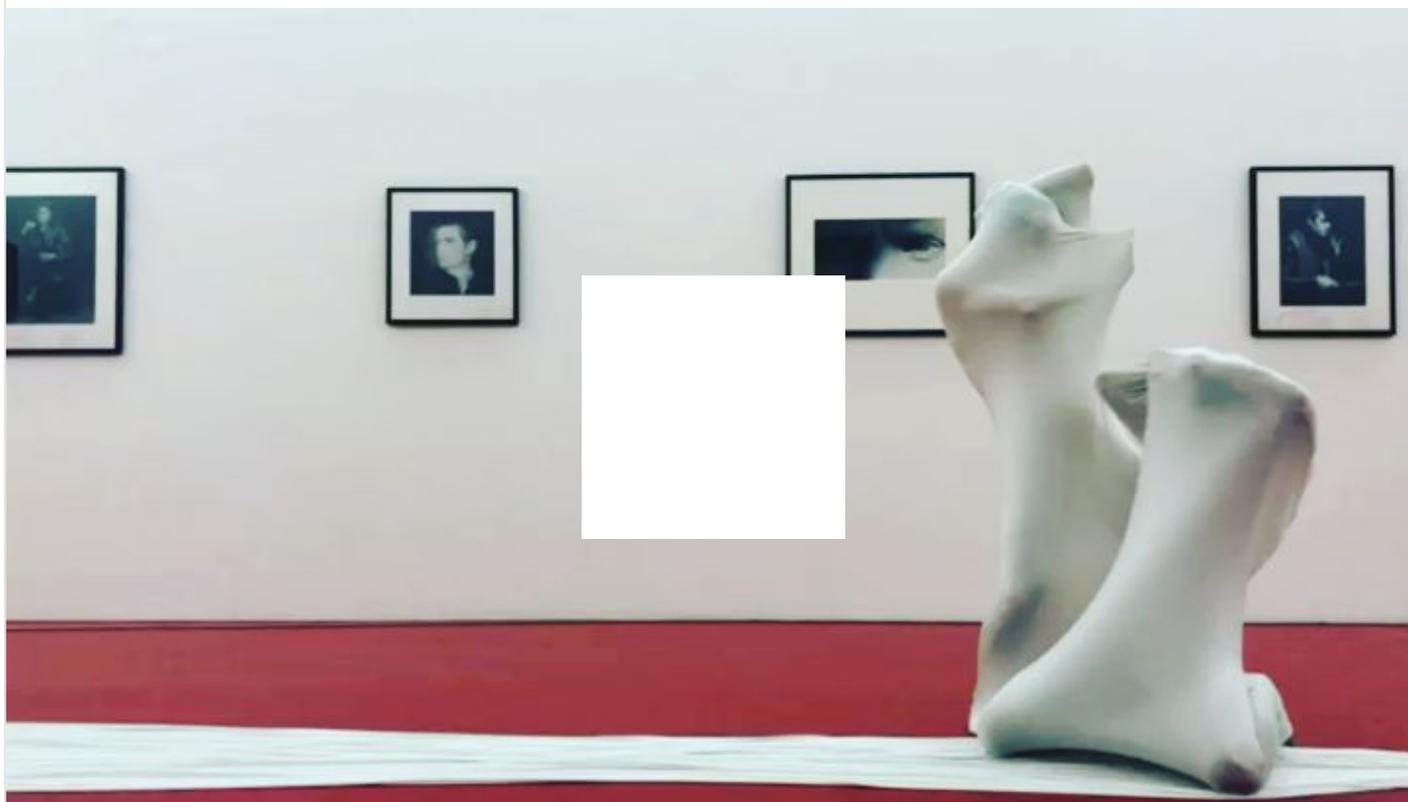
## Robert Mapplethorpe, Phillip, 1979

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• The Floating Grace •

The Floating Grace è un luogo dell'anima, astratto e potente allo stesso tempo, in cui lo spettatore è invitato a intraprendere un viaggio nella bellezza, rivelata dall'eco di due grandi artisti del XX secolo, Robert Mapplethorpe e Martha Graham, in un gioco continuo di rimandi e riflessi, a cui Stein aggiunge la sua cifra stilistica inconfondibile, quell'indagine sulla figura umana, scandita da pose plastiche e potenziata dall'uso di materiale tessile aderentissimo.

The Floating Grace is a place of the soul, abstract and powerful at the same time, in which the viewer is invited to embark on a journey into beauty, revealed by the echo of two great artists of the twentieth century, Robert Mapplethorpe and Martha Graham, in a continuous play of references and reflections, to which Stein adds his unmistakable style, that investigation on the human figure, marked by plastic poses and enhanced by the use of very tight textile material.

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The exhibition calendar of his works, in 2019 also touches Switzerland, with the *Robert Mapplethorpe* exhibition scheduled at **Mai 36 Galerie in Zurich** (18 January - 2 March 2019), ready to continue the dialogue on what they have always told us about his photography and what it still knows how to trigger, in a wide range of reactions that oscillate between admiration and annoyance. Thirty years after his death and several speculations about his work, the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York**, which houses one of the most complete public archives of his work, is preparing to explore his complex legacy, with *Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now*. A one-year exhibition, divided into two sequential parts in the **Mapplethorpe Gallery, Tower Level 4** (25 January 2019 - 25 January 2020).



**Robert Mapplethorpe Ajitto, 1981 Gelatin silver print, 45.6 x 35.6 cm Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 95.4322**

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**Robert Mapplethorpe - Calla Lily, 1986 Gelatin silver print, 48.9 x 49.1 cm Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 93.4302**

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**Robert Mapplethorpe Self Portrait, 1985 Gelatin silver print, 38.7 x 40.5 cm Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 96.4372**

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Un lungo viaggio espositivo che parte con l'installazione della collezione di circa duecento fotografie e oggetti unici donate al Guggenheim nel 1993. Eredità tale da influenzarne le successive acquisizioni, con le opere di artisti contemporanei che affiancano quelle di Mapplethorpe nella successiva fase espositiva, dedicata all'impatto esercitato nel campo della ritrattistica contemporanea e dell'auto-rappresentazione. Il dialogo curato da Lauren Hinkson e Susan Thompson, con Levi Prombaum, punta anche a riflettere sulle conversazioni che hanno interessato l'intera opera nell'ultimo trentennio.



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"If I had been born one or two hundred years ago, I might have been a sculptor, but photography is a very quick way to see, to make sculpture."—Robert Mapplethorpe, born on this day in 1946. In 2019, the Guggenheim will celebrate the sustained legacy of Mapplethorpe's work with a yearlong exhibition program conceived in two sequential parts in "Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now." Learn more at [guggenheim.org/mapplethorpe](https://guggenheim.org/mapplethorpe).  
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Image: Robert Mapplethorpe, "Ken and Tyler" (1985)

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Indipendentemente dall'esito delle loro e nostre riflessioni, a marzo 2019 è prevista l'uscita nelle sale americane di *Mapplethorpe*, **il nuovo biopic diretto da Ondi Timoner**. Due anni dopo l'uscita dello shockumentary *Mapplethorpe – Look At the Pictures*, diretto da Fenton Bailey e Randy Barbato, il controverso legame fra sfera personale e professionale del fotografo che ha scandalizzato l'America, torna anche sul grande schermo. Questa volta con Matt Smith nei panni del protagonista, Marianne Rendón in quelli di Patti Smith, John Benjamin Hickey il quelli del collezionista, mentore e amante Sam Wagstaff, mentre McKinley Belcher III in quelli dello statuario modello Milton Moore.

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