
ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE FOUNDATION

OBJECTS

PARIS MARAIS

10 Mar 2017 - 01 Jul 2017



Opening: Friday 10 March 2017 from 6pm until 8pm

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac presents *Objects*, an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe that brings together a set of rare and unique works on display for the first time in Paris.

From the late sixties onwards, Mapplethorpe began to create three-dimensional objects, photographic montages and to a very personal creative approach that he has developed throughout his life. They reveal his fascination with topics such as mysticism, esotericism and fetishism. In terms of style and iconography, they are an unexpected mix between Duchamp's ready-mades and Dali's psychosexual divagations.

Drawn to symbols and geometric motifs, Mapplethorpe made numerous collages and assemblages by recycling — while interpreting and transgressing — religious imagery. He also explores darker subjects such as black magic or Tantra Art, and redesigned Tarot cards, replacing the imagery with male and female figures taken from pornographic magazines. Never afraid to break the rules or shock, Mapplethorpe used these *Objects* as a way to expand the notion of what is possible in art. They reflect his radical and innovative approach embedded in the sociocultural context of 1970s New York.

Amongst the works presented, a rare 1968 collage, *Untitled (Madonna Medaillon)*, presents an image of the Madonna in a hand-drawn geometric architecture. In a manner reminiscent of Surrealism, the figure seems to levitate on a shell-like organic shape, which may also evoke an anatomical view of male genitalia. Outside the frame, a felt sticker representing the Sacred Heart of Jesus emblematises Mapplethorpe's interest in recycling religious paraphernalia and mixing it with sexual references.

Jay Kiss (1973) highlights the fetishist dimension of Mapplethorpe's work. On a red-painted wooden structure, a silk scarf hangs beneath an enlarged Polaroid portrait of his friend Jay Johnson. A token of a tender memory, the actual scarf is the one Jay wears in the picture, where he is lovingly represented with his eyes closed. The innovative composition recalls an ex-voto, usually given in gratitude or devotion in a religious context.

A later large triangle sculpture, *Untitled* (1983), shows the artist's longstanding fascination for formal perfection and symmetry, largely drawn from the Christian liturgy. « A church has a certain magic and mystery for a child, » Mapplethorpe told Ingrid Sischy. « It still shows in how I arrange things. It's always little altars. It's always been this way-whenver I'd put something together I'd notice it was symmetrical. [1] » Once again, Mapplethorpe plays with the ambivalence of the X symbol, which carries both a religious and pornographic connotation. While the inscription of his own name and the felt coloured stripes give a mystical dimension to what can be read as an abstract self-portrait.

Robert Mapplethorpe (American, 1946–1989) was born and raised in Queens, New York, the third of six children in a middle-class, Roman Catholic family. From 1963 to 1969, Mapplethorpe attended the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where he studied painting and sculpture, and majored in Graphic Arts. During these formative years he produced numerous drawings, collages and also three-dimensional objects using all kinds of media. In 1971 he started taking Polaroids and progressively included photography into his collages, along with cut-outs from books and magazine clippings. The instantaneity of the Polaroid and the intimacy of its format contributed to forge Mapplethorpe's distinctive language of familiarity and seductiveness. It is only after 1975 that Mapplethorpe started to work exclusively with photography, when he was given a Hasselblad 500 camera by curator and collector Sam Wagstaff, who was also his mentor and lover.

Considered today as an essential part of his oeuvre, a large selection of these early works have recently been acquired by the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Los Angeles Country Museum (LACMA). In 2016, the two institutions organized the largest retrospective of the artist to date. The corresponding catalogue *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Archive* published by the Getty Research Institute is the first publication entirely devoted to this period.

[1] Quoted in Ingrid Sischy, « A Society Artist » in *Robert Mapplethorpe* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990), 82.

