

MAI 36 GALERIE

Zurich, April 2012

PURE – ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

Preview: Thursday, 26 April 2012, 6 to 8 p.m.
Exhibition: 27 April - 2 June 2012
Opening hours: Tue - Fri: 11 a.m. to 6.30 p.m., Sat: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Robert Mapplethorpe (b. 1946, Floral Park, Queens, New York City, d. 1989, Boston) dominated the world of photography in the late 20th century with his obsessive quest for consummate beauty. Although a cult figure par excellence, he generated controversy like no other photographer of his time. His explicit depictions of nudity and sexual acts met with outrage; the Japanese lucidity of his breathtakingly beautiful flower arrangements met with unqualified admiration. Poetic portraits of his early companion Patty Smith and of Andy Warhol or the bodybuilder Lisa Lyons are invested with a theatricality that still exerts an irresistible appeal.

Mapplethorpe created a classicist image of the human body that has left its mark on commercial photography. The artist drew on the iconography of antiquity and the Renaissance as well as a number of photographers like Wilhelm von Gloeden, Günter Blum, Alvin Booth, and Man Ray. His inimitable style is characterized by radically reduced compositions of formal perfection, reflecting an engagement with photography as the perfect method for creating sculpture. The sculptural qualities of the bodies in his pictures harmonize down to the tiniest detail, an effect enhanced by precise placement against a white or black background in the hard light of the studio, generating the impression of landscapes or still lifes.

In seeking perfection, Mapplethorpe did not prioritize content, as demonstrated in the early Polaroids made after completing his bachelor of fine arts at Pratt Institute. Although in color and therefore imbued with great immediacy, these early pictures prefigure later motifs. Mapplethorpe turned to classic black-and-white photography only in order to refine his technique and compositions; he focused increasingly on detail, plunging his camera deeper and deeper into the blossoms of flowers and exploring ever smaller portions of his models' bodies. All traces of individuality are eclipsed by a devotion to pure surface and pose, much like the sculpture of antiquity, to such an extent that his subject matter acquires the character of an object. Mapplethorpe pushes his aesthetic of rigorously emphasizing classical form and relentlessly subordinating content to such extremes that the pictures seem to have abandoned all reference to reality.

The exhibition comprises the major phases of Mapplethorpe's oeuvre from 1976 to 1987: portraits, nudes, flowers, and still lifes. Although Robert Mapplethorpe was very much an artist of his age, the presentation in the gallery testifies to artwork of a vibrancy that has clearly stood the test of time. His Polaroids of the 1970s link him with the cult of the moment and feelings of uniqueness, celebrated by such artists as Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, David Hockney, Ansel Adams, and Robert Frank. In contrast, the cool portraits and nudes show all the visual intricacy of artistically staged fashion photography, conjuring associations with such photographers as Richard Avedon. Mai 36 Galerie has showed the work of Robert Mapplethorpe over the last 25 years. (Text: Dominique von Burg)

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For further information and visuals, please contact: office@mai36.com.

We look forward to welcoming you in our gallery.

Mai 36 Galerie
Victor Gisler