

Sean Kelly Gallery

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**Artist Robert Mapplethorpe's Work As Selected
By Fifty Americans from Fifty States
To Reveal Portrait of America in the 21st Century**

*The exhibition, "50 Americans," conceived and presented by
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York
to be on view May 6 – June 25, 2011*

For Immediate Release

New York, February 23, 2011— Sean Kelly Gallery will present *50 Americans*, an exhibition that features fifty works by legendary American artist Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989) as selected by fifty Americans of diverse occupations, ages, races, and backgrounds. Fifty people, one from each state in the Union, were invited to select a single artwork from over 2,000 images in Mapplethorpe's oeuvre that resonated with them personally. While some participants may have already been familiar with Mapplethorpe's work, some were not. Each image included in the exhibition will be accompanied by a text that explains why the participant who selected it found it to be meaningful.

Robert Mapplethorpe is undoubtedly one of the most talented, prolific, and controversial contemporary American artists. Before his untimely death in 1989, he created a remarkable body of work that is unrivaled in breadth and scope. This exhibition will offer a unique opportunity to see two portraits emerge. While the exhibition primarily affords a fresh look at Mapplethorpe and his practice, it also offers a portrait of the tastes and concerns of the exhibition's curators: everyday Americans.

The fifty Americans were invited to participate in the project by a variety of means as diverse as internet advertising, cold calling, and friends of friends of friends. They range in age from their 20s to one individual who is over 100, they live in both rural and urban settings, and work as various professions such as a rancher, a business analyst, a salesperson, a rabbi, and an IT engineer. Each participant made his or her image selection based on individual interests and aesthetics, creating a demographic snapshot of America that reminds us of what a uniquely diverse country the United States is, with room for countless differing opinions and tastes.

50 Americans will present a new perspective on Mapplethorpe, whose artistic practice was shaped by the social, cultural, and political agendas of his time. It will serve as a visual sociological survey, demonstrating how Mapplethorpe's oeuvre is regarded today, shedding light on current cultural tastes and points of view and revealing the power of Mapplethorpe's enduring legacy.

Robert Mapplethorpe was born in 1946 in New York. He earned a B.F.A. from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where he produced artwork in a variety of media, mainly collage. The shift to photography as Mapplethorpe's sole means of expression happened gradually during the mid-1970s. He took his first photographs using a Polaroid camera, and later became known for his portraits of artists, architects, socialites, stars of pornographic films, members of the S&M community, and an array of other unique people, many of whom were personal friends. During the early 1980s, his photographs shifted to emphasize classical formal beauty, concentrating on statuesque male and female nudes, flowers, still lifes, and formal portraits.

Sean Kelly Gallery represents the Robert Mapplethorpe Estate in the Americas.

Robert Mapplethorpe: 50 Americans will be on view at the Sean Kelly Gallery from May 6 – June 25, 2011.

Image: Robert Mapplethorpe, *American Flag*, 1977 © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission.

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