

For Immediate Release

FotoFocus Presents
A Panel Discussion on the 25th Anniversary
Of the Robert Mapplethorpe Obscenity Trial In Cincinnati
Following the Watershed Exhibition
The Perfect Moment

The Perfect Moment: 25 Years Later
November 19, 2015, 7 PM
New Museum Theater at the New Museum
235 Bowery, New York, NY



Jeannette Montgomery Barron, *Robert Mapplethorpe*, 1987.
Photograph. Image: © Jeannette Montgomery Barron.
Courtesy ClampArt, New York

New York, NY – November 5, 2015 – FotoFocus is pleased to announce *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment, 25 Years Later*, a panel discussion hosted in collaboration with the **New Museum**, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the obscenity trial sparked by the artist's controversial exhibition *The Perfect Moment*, at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati. Under the leadership of **Mary Ellen Goeke**, Executive Director of FotoFocus, and curated by **Kevin Moore**, Artistic Director and Curator of FotoFocus, the panel discussion will feature leading curators joined by a legal expert, who will discuss the significance and implications of the Cincinnati presentation of *The Perfect Moment* which have evolved over the past 25 years as have the various curatorial approaches to engaging with the artist's work and legacy. The event at the New Museum follows the *Mapplethorpe + 25* symposium, organized by FotoFocus and the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati, Ohio, held on October 23-24, 2015.

Following an introduction by **Johanna Burton**, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement at the New Museum, the panel will be moderated by Kevin Moore and include: **Amy Adler**, Emily Kemplin Professor of Law, New York University School of Law; **Jennifer Blessing**, Senior Curator of Photography, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; **Paul Marti**

neau, Associate Curator, Department of Photographs, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; and **Britt Salvesen**, Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The Cincinnati presentation of *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment* opened on April 7, 1990, at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in a climate of national cultural unrest. The exhibition immediately sparked controversy when politicians took offense to the show and the use of public funds provided by the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) to support it, leading to the indictment of the CAC and Director Dennis Barrie on obscenity charges. Similar controversy had resulted in the cancellation of the exhibition tour at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the previous year. The historic trial that followed—where for the first time a museum and its director faced criminal charges because of an art exhibition—brought national attention to the subject of public funding for the arts, as well as arts censorship.

"With the 25th anniversary, we wanted to revisit the past but also delve into the meanings and intentions of the artist's work, something that was eclipsed by the controversy in the years that followed," says Kevin Moore. "With the upcoming Getty and LACMA exhibitions and catalogues, it seems that 25 years might be a good benchmark for gaining some historical perspective on Mapplethorpe, his work, and the controversies it sparked." FotoFocus Executive Director Mary Ellen Goeke adds, "FotoFocus has a tradition of producing photography exhibitions and events that are both artistically and intellectually engaging. Revisiting this significant moment in history offers a unique opportunity to reexamine Mapplethorpe's career, addressing both the fallout and the impact of his fame following the events in Cincinnati of 1990. We are delighted to work with the New Museum on presenting this panel."

About the Panelists

Amy Adler, Emily Kemplin Professor of Law at New York University School of Law. Adler specializes in the intersection of law and culture, and the litigation of artist rights, sexuality, and free speech. She has written numerous articles on topics ranging from obscenity law and how it interacts with postmodern artistic practice, to pornography and sexting. Adler is a graduate of Yale Law School, where she was the senior editor of the *Yale Law Journal*. She also graduated summa cum laude from Yale University, where she received the Marshall Allison Prize in the arts and letters. Adler clerked for Judge John M. Walker, Jr., of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and worked as an associate at Debevoise and Plimpton before joining the NYU Law faculty.

Jennifer Blessing is Senior Curator of Photography at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Currently, she is organizing *Photo-Poetics: An Anthology*, opening in November 2015. Recent exhibitions include the Guggenheim presentation of *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video*, an exhibition originated by the Frist Center for Visual Arts in Nashville; *Rineke Dijkstra: A Retrospective*, in collaboration with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); and the Guggenheim's presentation of SFMOMA's exhibition *Francesca Woodman*, among others. She publishes and lectures widely on art and cultural practices involving photographic representation. Blessing received a B.A. from Brown University, and an M.A. in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

Paul Martineau is Associate Curator in the Department of Photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum. He received a B.A. in art from the University of Massachusetts at Boston and a M.A. in art history from Williams College. Before joining the Getty Museum in 2003, Martineau held positions at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. He has organized numerous exhibitions at the Getty covering a range of topics that span from the mid-nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. Martineau is the author of several books, including *Minor White: Man*

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ifestations of the Spirit (2014); *Eliot Porter: In the Realm of Nature* (2012); *Herb Ritts: L.A. Style* (2012); and *Paul Outerbridge: Command Performance* (2009).

Kevin Moore is an independent advisor, curator and writer based in New York. He earned a Ph.D. in art history in 2002 from Princeton University and has worked in curatorial departments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. His museum exhibitions include *Starburst: Color Photography in America 1970-1980* (Cincinnati Art Museum, 2010); *Real to Real: Photographs from the Traina Collection* (de Young Museum, San Francisco, 2012); and *The One-Eyed Thief: Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs* (Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, 2014). Since 2013, he has been the Artistic Director and Curator of FotoFocus, Cincinnati.

Britt Salvesen is Curator and Head of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Prints and Drawings Department at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Recent exhibitions she has curated include *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s* (2014); *See the Light: Photography, Perception, Cognition – The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection* (2013); *Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa – Art and Film* (2013), and *Robert Mapplethorpe: XYZ* (2012).

About Robert Mapplethorpe

Robert Mapplethorpe was born in 1946 in Floral Park, Queens. He studied drawing, painting, and sculpture at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Influenced by artists such as Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp, he also experimented with various materials in mixed-media collages, including images cut from books and magazines. He eventually began producing his own photographs with a Polaroid camera and in 1973 received his first solo gallery exhibition titled “Polaroids” at the Light Gallery in New York City. Two years later he acquired a Hasselblad medium-format camera and began shooting his friends and acquaintances, some of which were involved in the New York S & M scene—by the late 1970s, he grew increasingly interested in documenting that scene. In 1986, he was diagnosed with AIDS. Despite his declining health, he continued to make strides in his career, including his first major American museum retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1988. Mapplethorpe passed away in 1989, but his legacy lives on through his work, which is represented by galleries and in the collections of major museums around the world.

About FotoFocus

FotoFocus is a non-profit arts organization whose mission is to present the finest in photography and lens-based art, and to produce programs that are artistically, intellectually, and academically rigorous yet accessible, educational and enriching to a large and diverse public. FotoFocus celebrates and champions photography as the medium of our time through programming that ignites a dialogue between contemporary photo-based art and the history of photography. FotoFocus has awarded more than 85 grants to regional artists and institutions since 2012 for the production and presentation of photography and lens-based art.

Launched in October 2012, the FotoFocus Biennial is a month-long regional photography festival based in Cincinnati. The second edition of the Biennial in 2014, included six original exhibitions curated by Artistic Director Kevin Moore, the premier of the FotoFocus ArtHub, as well as exhibitions by over fifty participating venues throughout the region. The FotoFocus Biennial 2014 featured programming included five days of lectures, panel discussions, screenings, and performances with curators, critics, and art world professionals.

Further information about FotoFocus can be found at www.fotofocuscincinnati.org and the FotoFocus Biennial 2014 at <http://www.fotofocusbiennial.org>. Additional information about the *Mapplethorpe +25* symposium can be found at <http://www.mapplethorpe25.org>.

Follow FotoFocus on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) via the hashtag [#FotoFocus](#)

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FotoFocus Biennial 2016: *Photography, the Undocument*, Oct. 1-31, 2016

The Undocument questions the documentary character of photography, exploring the boundaries between facts and fabrications. The FotoFocus Biennial 2016 will run through the month of October in Cincinnati at participating museums, galleries, organizations, and in the ArtHub. The FotoFocus Biennial will include four days of concentrated programming and events to be held October 6 - 9, 2016.

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Sponsors

FotoFocus is supported by Lightborne.

Education and Public Engagement programs at the New Museum are made possible, in part, by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts. Additional support is provided by the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation. Endowment support is provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Skadden, Arps Education Programs Fund, and the William Randolph Hearst Endowed Fund for Education Programs at the New Museum.

