

Platform for Pedagogy (platformed.org)  
November 19, 2015

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Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment, Twenty-Five  
Years Later

Thursday 19 November, 2015  
7pm, \$10

New Museum  
235 Bowery

Organized by the Cincinnati-based nonprofit FotoFocus, the panel discussion “Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment, Twenty-Five Years Later” will commemorate the twenty-fifth 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 program will convene leading curators and a legal expert to discuss the significance and implications of this presentation over the past twenty-five years and the various curatorial approaches to engaging with Mapplethorpe’s work and legacy. The event follows the “Mapplethorpe +25” symposium, which was organized by FotoFocus and the Contemporary Arts Center Cincinnati and was 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 will 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 Martineau, Associate Curator, Department of Photographs, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; and Britt Salvesen, Curator and Head of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Prints and Drawings Department, the 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 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 to support it, leading to the indictment of the Contemporary Arts Center Cincinnati 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, DC, 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.

Twenty-five years later, numerous reassessments of the artist’s career have prompted fresh insights. This panel discussion will revolve around this revitalized interest in Mapplethorpe, as curators, artists, critics, and others explore the broader question: What does Mapplethorpe’s work tell us about the culture we have inherited and inhabit today?

**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-medium collages, including images cut out 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. Two years later Mapplethorpe acquired a Hasselblad medium-format camera and began shooting photographs of his friends and acquaintances—some of whom were involved in the New York S&M scene, which by the late 1970s, he grew increasingly interested in documenting. 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 is in the collections of major museums around the world.