



ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE: XYZ DIDACTIC

With the X, Y, and Z Portfolios, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe declared his three most important subjects: homosexual sadomasochistic scenes (X, published in 1978), flower still lifes (Y, 1978), and portraits of African-American men (Z, 1981). In the artist's view, these themes were united by his obsession with "perfection in form," and he imagined the photographs displayed "in three rows all in one mass," as seen here.

All three portfolios were included in the 1988-90 traveling retrospective *The Perfect Moment*, which opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia and drew large crowds without incident. When it was due to open at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., politicians who opposed federal funding for the arts became alarmed. The Corcoran canceled the exhibition, but more controversy ensued at a subsequent venue, the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati. Charges of obscenity were brought against director David Barrie, with five images from the X Portfolio used as evidence during a high-profile trial. Barrie was acquitted, and Mapplethorpe—who died of AIDS-related causes in March 1989—has been linked to debates about censorship ever since. Some have condemned the work for its explicit sexual content, while others have defended the artist's right to freedom of expression and admire his mastery of the photographic medium.

Robert Mapplethorpe: XYZ offers a new generation of audiences the opportunity to assess Mapplethorpe's bold, confrontational photographs—with their paradoxical mix of classicizing, austere form, and raw, uninhibited content—through three series of prints that defined not only his artistic career, but also a moment in American cultural politics.

In 2011, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Getty Museum, and the Getty Research Institute jointly acquired art and archival materials by or associated with Robert Mapplethorpe (United States, 1946-1989). The

majority of the acquisition comes in the form of a generous gift from the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, and the remainder from funds provided by the David Geffen Foundation and the J. Paul Getty Trust. This exhibition, together with the Getty Museum's concurrent *In Focus: Robert Mapplethorpe*, celebrates this landmark acquisition. All photographs are gelatin silver prints, and were jointly acquired by LACMA and the J. Paul Getty Trust; partial gift of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; partial purchase with funds provided by the David Geffen Foundation and the J. Paul Getty Trust.