Robert Mapplethorpe. The Sensitive Lens
Curated by Flaminia Gennari Santori

Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica — Galleria Corsini

Press preview: Thursday 14 March 2019, 11 a.m.
Inauguration and special opening hours: Thursday 14 March 2019, 6–10 p.m. (ticket office closes at 9:30 p.m.)
Exhibition dates: 15 March–30 June 2019

PRESS RELEASE
From 15 March to 30 June 2019 the Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica at Galleria Corsini in Rome will be hosting Robert Mapplethorpe. The Sensitive Lens, curated by Flaminia Gennari Santori, Director of the Gallerie Nazionali Barberini Corsini.

By interweaving the past and the present, the show continues the dialogue that began with the exhibition Parade by Picasso in 2017 and Eco e Narciso in 2018; this dialogue became one of the key features of the strategy of the museum.

Robert Mapplethorpe. The Sensitive Lens, displays forty-five works and focuses on some of the themes distinguishing the work of Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989): his study of still lifes, landscapes, classical sculpture and Renaissance composition.

Flaminia Gennari’s decision to organise an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe’s work was inspired by the artist’s habit of collecting: he was an avid collector of historical photographs, a passion he shared with his partner, Sam Wagstaff, whose photography collection — composed largely of portraits, figures and landscapes — is an extraordinary resource for the photography department of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

This exhibition is unique because, according to Flaminia Gennari, “On many occasions his photographs have been compared to the works of artists of the past — Michelangelo, Hendrick Goltzius, Auguste Rodin — through surprising and revealing dialogues; however, this is the first time they have been exhibited in the context of a collection of eighteenth century paintings.”

The photographs have been selected and arranged in Galleria Corsini with several different aims: to highlight the aspects of Mapplethorpe’s work that resonate particularly with Galleria Corsini, a space — in both physical and conceptual terms — dedicated to collecting, in order to forge a new relationship between visitors, the
works and the areas within the gallery.

Flaminia Gennari writes that, “Mapplethorpe never visited Galleria Corsini; yet he certainly would have found its rooms interesting as they are still arranged according to the taste of Cardinal Neri Maria Corsini (1685–1770), who created the collection and lived in Palazzo Corsini from 1738 until his death. In the eighteenth century, paintings were arranged on the walls according to the criteria of symmetry, eurythmy and variety of composition, which encouraged visitors to identify similarities and differences among the works, thereby training their eye. These are the same principles that guided Mapplethorpe’s lens over the course of his career. By introducing his photographs — black and white magnets attracting the eye within the colourful backdrop of paintings covering the walls — visitors are invited to explore Galleria Corsini as if they were eighteenth century connoisseurs, searching for similarities, symmetries and differences.”

The itinerary of the exhibition, which winds through all the rooms in the museum, starts in the Antichamber, where Winter Landscape, a rare landscape from 1979, is displayed beneath Rinaldo and Armida by Gaspard Dughet.

The exhibition continues into the First Gallery, where we can already see how Mapplethorpe’s aesthetic resonates with this place. Ken and Lydia and Tyler (1985) and Self Portrait (1988) are contemporary interpretations of the balance between the classical theme of the Three Graces in the first photograph and the brutal honesty of his 1988 self portrait, where Mapplethorpe, who knows he is going to die soon, is looking out at us from the darkness, gesturing in a way that is both powerful and ancient. However, photographs like Italian Devil (1988) highlight Mapplethorpe’s passion for collecting, for example small bronzes representing satyrs and devils. The series of four prints entitled Ajitto (1981) draws visitors’ gaze towards works at Galleria Corsini that otherwise might escape their attention, such as the small bronzes on the eighteenth-century console tables.

In the Cardinal Gallery Puerto Rico, Woman a portrait of a woman taken in 1981, is gazing at the sixteenth century Portrait of an Old Woman by a student of Jan Van Scorel, while Lisa Lyon (1980) is lying languidly next to two small mythological scenes by Francesco Albani, Jupiter sends Mercury to Apollo and Venus and Cupids.

In the Fireplace Chamber Mapplethorpe’s Marcus Leatherdale has been placed near Adonis and Diana by Antonio Montauti, becoming a character from Ovid’s Metamorphosis: the young man returning from the hunt. In the same room, Samia (1978) and Catherine Olim
(1982) are displayed alongside one of the paintings for which the collection is known, Salome with the Head of John the Baptist by Guido Reni, and the splendid Head of a Man by Pieter Paul Rubens.

It is especially striking, in the display in the Alcove of Christina of Sweden, how much Bernine (1978) resembles portraits by Lorenzo Lotto and the sixteenth-century masters from Lombardy. Lisa Lyon (1981), the bodybuilder immortalised by Mapplethorpe in hundreds of photographs, is placed next to a saying by the Queen: “I was born free, I lived free, and I will die freed,” a sort of declaration of physical and intellectual freedom. This portrait is also placed in relation to three oval paintings by Guido Reni, The Sorrowful Virgin, Christ with the Crown of Thorns and St. John the Evangelist.

Then in the Green Room, Guy Neville (1975) is displayed next to a much older paradigm of elegance, Cardinal Neri Corsini Senior, a portrait by Giovan Battista Gaulli from 1666. Whereas Harry Lunn (1976) and the portrait of the cardinal Ferdinando de’ Medici by Alessandro Allori bear a striking resemblance to one another.

Apple and Urn, taken in 1987 and displayed in the Green Room between still lifes by Christian Berentz (1658–1722), uncovers the deep resonance between Mapplethorpe’s photographs and seventeenth-century painting. Here, opposite some of the gallery’s most important works – St. John the Baptist by Caravaggio and Venus and Adonis by Jusepe de Ribera – we find Black Bust and Apollo, both taken in 1988, where Mapplethorpe achieves the perfect balance between light and shadow, hard and soft.

The famous portrait from 1976 of Holly Solomon is being shown in the Red Room along with the portrait of Carol Overby from 1979, next to a sequence of photographs focusing on the themes of classical sculpture and the pursuit of geometry in light and some images that have been rarely exhibited: Texas Gallery (1980), New Orleans Interior (1982) and Marty Gibson (1982). In a small, adjoining room, a few explicit works are displayed next to photographs of flowers.

Robert Mapplethorpe. The Sensitive Lens gives visitors the extraordinary opportunity to look at his photographs from uncommon points of view and explore the gallery’s collection in a more contemporary light.

2019 is the thirtieth anniversary of Robert Mapplethorpe’s death and this initiative, organised in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation of New York, is part of a series of exhibitions dedicated to this artist, including a large retrospective at
the Guggenheim Museum in New York and one at the Museo Madre in Naples, Italy, uniquely focused on the intimate performative matrix of his photography.

A brochure on the exhibition will be provided, written by the curator, Flaminia Gennari Santori. A series of activities have also been scheduled: a discussion about Mapplethorpe with the curator, Jonathan K. Nelson, a professor from Syracuse University in Florence and Andrea Viliani, director of the Museo Madre in Naples (Thursday, 15 May 2019); free guided tours (upon purchasing a ticket to visit the museum) every Thursday at 5 p.m.; workshops for children ages 5 to 12 every Saturday at 5 p.m., except June 29 (free for participants, tickets for the two adults accompanying the child are 6 euros).

On three Sundays — 26 May, 9 and 23 June at 4:30 p.m. — some of the works on display will be part of the Museo Adagio initiative, a “slow art” project aimed at encouraging visitors to slowly savour, contemplate and share the exhibition by looking at these masterpieces with greater attention and awareness. For further information, please write to: didattica@barberinicorsini.org.

Thursday 14 March, from 6 to 10 p.m., for the inauguration and during the special opening hours, Galleria Corsini visitors will also enjoy listening to pieces by Philip Glass, selected by Flaminia Gennari in collaboration with Alberto Salini, musician and producer. Glass was a friend of Mapplethorpe and, although they worked in different artistic fields, the work of both artists expressed the minimalist aesthetic of their times. In Glass’s music this is expressed as sound that is creative rather than representative, not through images but rather through abstraction, while still maintaining his innovative, breakthrough style with a strong link to the “classical”.

On this evening visitors will hear “Metamorphosis” (1988) composed for a stage adaptation of The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka and “Études for Piano” (1994-95), originally commissioned by pianist and orchestra director Dennis Russel Davies. The final piece, “Opening” from the album “Glassworks” (1982), is Philip Glass’s successful attempt to create an album that was closer to pop music, with shorter pieces that are more “listener-friendly”.

Rome, March 2019
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EXHIBITION: Robert Mapplethorpe. The Sensitive Lens, curated by Flaminia Gennari Santori

LOCATION: Rome, Galleria Corsini, via della Lungara 10

INAUGURATION AND SPECIAL OPENING HOURS: 6–10 p.m. (ticket office closes at 9:30 p.m.)

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: 15 March–30 June 2019

OPENING HOURS: Wednesday to Monday from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. The ticket office closes at 6 p.m.

CLOSED: Tuesdays, 25 December, 1 January

BARBERINI CORSINI TICKETS: General admission 12 €; Discounted tickets 2 € (for young people between the ages of 18 and 25)

The ticket is valid at both museum locations, Palazzo Barberini and Galleria Corsini, for 10 days after being stamped. Free: minors under 18, school groups and their accompanying teachers from the European Union (upon reservation), students and professors of Architecture, the Humanities (Archaeology or Art History Departments), the Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Educational Sciences, Fine Arts Academies, employees of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, ICOM members, working tour guides and interpreters, accredited journalists, the handicapped and their caregivers, public school teaching staff who have been accredited using the specific form provided by the MIUR.

Facebook: @BarberiniCorsini | Twitter: @BarberiniCorsin | Instagram: @BarberiniCorsini

Share using: #MapplethorpeaCorsini
Robert Mapplethorpe was born in 1946 in Floral Park, Queens. Of his childhood he said, “I come from suburban America. It was a very safe environment and it was a good place to come from in that it was a good place to leave.”

In 1963, Mapplethorpe enrolled at Pratt Institute in nearby Brooklyn, where he studied drawing, painting, and sculpture. 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. In 1969, he and Patti Smith, whom he had met three years earlier, moved into the Chelsea Hotel. He acquired a Polaroid camera in 1970 from artist and filmmaker Sandy Daley and began producing his own photographs to incorporate into the collages, saying he felt “it was more honest.”

Mapplethorpe quickly found satisfaction taking Polaroid photographs in their own right and indeed few Polaroids actually appear in his mixed-media works. In 1973, the Light Gallery in New York City mounted his first solo gallery exhibition, “Polaroids.” Two years later he acquired a Hasselblad medium-format camera and began shooting his circle of friends and acquaintances—artists, musicians, socialites, film stars, and members of the S & M underground. He also worked on commercial projects, creating album cover art, including covers for Patti Smith and Television and a series of portraits and party pictures for Interview Magazine.

In the late 1970s, Mapplethorpe grew increasingly interested in documenting the New York S & M scene. The resulting photographs are shocking for their content and remarkable for their technical and formal mastery. Mapplethorpe told ARTnews in late 1988, “I don’t like that particular word ‘shocking.’ I’m looking for the unexpected. I’m looking for things I’ve never seen before … I was in a position to take those pictures. I felt an obligation to do them.” His career continued to flourish. In 1977, he participated in Documenta 6 in Kassel, West Germany and in 1978, the Robert Miller Gallery in New York City became his exclusive dealer.
Mapplethorpe met Lisa Lyon, the first World Women’s Bodybuilding Champion, in 1980. Over the next several years they collaborated on a series of portraits and figure studies, a film, and the book, *Lady, Lisa Lyon*. Throughout the 1980s, Mapplethorpe produced images that simultaneously challenge and adhere to classical aesthetic standards: stylized compositions of male and female nudes, delicate flower still lifes, and studio portraits of artists and celebrities, to name a few of his preferred genres. He introduced and refined different techniques and formats, including color 20” x 24” Polaroids, photogravures, platinum prints on paper and linen, Cibachrome and dye transfer color prints. In 1986, he designed sets for Lucinda Childs’ dance performance, *Portraits in Reflection*, created a photogravure series for Arthur Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell*, and was commissioned by curator Richard Marshall to take portraits of New York artists for the book, *50 New York Artists*.

That same year, in 1986, he was diagnosed with AIDS. Despite his illness, he accelerated his creative efforts, broadened the scope of his photographic inquiry, and accepted increasingly challenging commissions. The Whitney Museum of American Art mounted his first major American museum retrospective in 1988, one year before his death in 1989.

His vast, provocative, and powerful body of work has established him as one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. Today Mapplethorpe is represented by galleries in North and South America and Europe and his work can be found in the collections of major museums around the world. Beyond the art historical and social significance of his work, his legacy lives on through the work of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. He established the Foundation in 1988 to promote photography at the institutional level, support museums that exhibit photographic art, and to fund medical research in the fight against AIDS and HIV.
**Robert Mapplethorpe. L’obiettivo sensibile**
mostra a cura di Flaminia Gennari Santori

Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica – Galleria Corsini

Apertura mostra: 15 marzo – 30 giugno 2019

**ELENCO OPERE IN MOSTRA**

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16. Bernine 1978 50,8 x 40,6 cm (20x16 inches) Camera dell’Alcova

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21. Flowers 1983 63,5 x 78,7 cm (25x31 inches) Camera Verde

22. Black Bust 1988 60,9 x 50,8 cm (24x20 inches) Camera Verde
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Robert Mapplethorpe. The Sensitive Lens
Curated by Flaminia Gennari Santori

Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica – Galleria Corsini

Exhibition dates: 15 March–30 June 2019

Education Programme
curated by the cultural organisations Zebrart and “Senza titolo” and the Department for Education and Research at the museum.

The Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica offer the young visitors (from 5 to 12 years old) a programme of active educative visits and workshops to discover the exhibition, curated by the cultural organisations Zebrart and “Senza titolo” and the Department for Education and Research at the museum.

These activities will take place every Saturday at 5pm from 23rd March to 22nd June.

The education programme is aimed at an audience of adults and children and will involve simultaneous guided visits and active visits: tours around the exhibition with short workshop activities in front of the works.

The photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, selected from amongst the portraits and still lives, will be used as starting points to reflect on the photographic technique, the composition of the works, and the representation of the body and nature.

An active and interactive visit to the museum which encourages children to discover and engage with the Collection’s works and Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs; the guided visit for the adults is an opportunity to create interdisciplinary links between the between the works presented and to enrich the connections between the old and the contemporary.

The Organisations:
Zebrart is a cultural organisation that was established in 2014 and is made up of art historians specialised in education. It programs and carries out workshop activities across Italy for children and teenagers, in addition to training courses for teachers and education instructors. (www.zebbrart.it).

“Senza titolo” (www.senzatitolo.net) is made up of specialised and professional museum educators that work in the cultural field. From 2008 it has worked in cultural mediation and education in the arts and heritage: ancient art, modern and contemporary, history, cinematography and music.
Every Saturday at 5pm from 23rd March until 22nd June
Duration approx. 90 minutes. Groups max 20 people.

Bookings to the following address: didattica@barberinicsorgini.org
Meeting point in front of the ticket office.

All the activities are free. For up to two accompanying adults there will be a reduced ticket price of 6 euros.

Facebook: @BarberiniCorsini
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PHOTOGRAPHER Robert Mapplethorpe (New York 1946 - Boston 1989) was a breakthrough artist of the late twentieth century. Through his perfectly balanced black and white images of nudes, flowers, portraits and extreme sexual situations, he eroticised still lifes and dignified gay culture and the complex universe of desire. Thirty years after his death, the aesthetic invented by Mapplethorpe in 1970s New York is already classic, yet still shocking. His photographs have been compared to the works of great artists of the past — Michelangelo, Hendrick Goltzius, Auguste Rodin — however, this is the first time they have ever been exhibited in the context of a collection of paintings from the eighteenth century.

COLLECTING THINGS AND IMAGES Mapplethorpe never visited the Corsini collection but he was, like Cardinal Neri Maria Corsini (1685–1770), an avid collector of art objects: prints, drawings, photographs, sculpture, furniture and decorative art. Above all, he was an observer, careful chronicler of antique and modern images. His memories of these images re-emerge, at times unconsciously and unexpectedly, in his compositions, inspired by an idea of classical visual purity and sophisticated formal elegance. In Mapplethorpe’s figurative repertoire, the Mannerists’ obsession with anatomy, the Baroque’s sensual responsiveness and the vibrant polish of Neoclassicism resurface in a completely new form.

PERCEPTION However, these memories are not mere references; they are visual reverberations. Mapplethorpe’s compositions are ruled by a logic of balance, symmetry and rhythm that echoes the one underlying the display of paintings on the walls of Galleria Corsini. These thematic and formal reverberations may be found among the landscapes, portraits, still lifes, and sculptures in the collection; and Mapplethorpe’s photographs of the same subjects allow us to look at things we have already seen using an eye — or rather, using a “lens” — that is new, just as Mapplethorpe himself would have wanted: “I see things like they’ve never been seen before”.

2019 is the thirtieth anniversary of Robert Mapplethorpe’s death. The exhibition at Galleria Corsini, organised in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation of New York, is part of a series of initiatives dedicated to this artist, including the one at the Museo Madre in Naples (15-12-2018 / 08-04-2019).
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Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) was one of the great masters of twentieth-century photography. Through his perfectly balanced black and white images of nudes, flowers, portraits and extreme sexual situations, he eroticised still lifes and dignified gay culture and the complex universe of desire. Thirty years after his death, the aesthetic invented by Mapplethorpe in 1970s New York is already classic, yet still shocking.

On various occasions, his photos have been compared to the works of artists of the past - Michelangelo, Hendrick Goltzius, Auguste Rodin - through surprising and revealing dialogues. However, this is the first time they have ever been exhibited in the context of a collection of eighteenth century paintings. Mapplethorpe never visited Galleria Corsini; yet he certainly would have found its rooms interesting as they are still arranged according to the taste of Cardinal Neri Maria Corsini (1685-1770), who created the collection and lived in Palazzo Corsini from 1738 until his death. In the eighteenth century, paintings were arranged on the walls according to the criteria of symmetry, balance and variety of composition, which encouraged visitors to identify similarities and differences among the works, thereby training their eye. These are the same principles that guided Mapplethorpe’s lens over the course of his career. By introducing his photographs - black and white magnets attracting the eye within the colourful backdrop of paintings covering the walls - visitors are invited to explore Galleria Corsini as if they were eighteenth century connoisseurs, searching for similarities, symmetries and differences.

In a 1974 interview at the outset of his career, Mapplethorpe stated: “I’m working with painting, sculpture and photography all at the same time. My goal is to come up with something I have never seen before.” He was obsessed with the ambition to create an entirely new aesthetic. However, as Joan Didion wrote in 1989, the year he died of AIDS at the age of 43: “The source of his strength derived less from the shock of the new than from the shock of the old, from [...] the perilous imposition of order on chaos, of classical form on unthinkable images. [His] subject was finally that very symmetry with which he himself had arranged things.” This exhibition juxtaposes two ideas about symmetry that are completely different in terms of aesthetic and purpose, because we believe that, in doing so, we contemporary viewers can develop a keener eye for both the works collected by an eighteenth century cardinal and those created by an extreme, controversial, deeply classical late-twentieth century artist as well.

We provide interpretations and food for thought, yet it is up to the visitor to find the threads woven throughout this intentionally daring contrast.

Mapplethorpe was an avid collector of historical photographs, Scandinavian pottery, old masters prints and arts and crafts furniture. In 1988, a few months before he died, he did a photo shoot of his apartment; and its walls covered in prints, photos and sculptures reveal how drawn he was to the angelic and the demonic, remnants of his deep catholic upbringing, which he always claimed he had been influenced by. Like for many others who came before him - including Cardinal Corsini himself - the spaces a collection inhabits and how that collection is arranged provide the perfect self-portrait, as they represent the aesthetic and intellectual vision of the collector; and Mapplethorpe - a sublime portrait photographer - created a photographic self-portrait made up of glimpses of how objects were arranged inside the spaces of his daily life.

Starting in 1973, collecting became an element that was essential to defining his aesthetic. He had already explored the collection of historical photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which had been a revelation for him. Yet it was the exhibition The Painterly Photograph, 1890-1914, dedicated to Alfred Steglitz, Edward Steichen and other pictorialist photographers, that transformed Mapplethorpe, and mainly his partner, art historian and curator Sam Wagstaff (1921-1987), into collectors of historical photographs. In just a couple of years, Wagstaff became one of the most influential collectors in the world, capable of transforming the market of a class of objects whose position was still being defined. They both sought to elevate photography to the status of art, and until their deaths Wagstaff was the artist’s patron and Mapplethorpe’s was the collector’s advisor.

Wagstaff’s collection is tremendously vast, yet its borders are very clearly marked out: portraits, figures and landscapes were his favourite genres, whereas documentary photography failed to arouse his curiosity. He amassed the largest collection of photographs by Nadar (1820-1910) outside France. He was one of the first to systematically acquire prints by David Octavious Hill (1802-1870) and Robert Adamson (1821-1848), Scottish photographers who specialised in extraordinarily powerful portraits even before Nadar. He also played a key role in the fame of Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), the English portrait photographer who in the 1860s began experimenting with leaving the lens intentionally out of focus and with entirely new cropping techniques. In 1975 Wagstaff gave Mapplethorpe a Hasselblad camera and from then on photography became the artist’s only means of expression. He quickly abandoned the immediacy of the first Polaroids and, starting from the eighties, began working almost exclusively in the studio, shooting photographs that had been orchestrated down to the last, tiny detail. Whether they are flowers or extreme sexual situations, his images are governed by order, symmetry and balance. Hill & Adamson, Cameron and mainly Nadar became his models: photographers who did not just capture an event; they created it, producing images where nothing is left to chance. Nadar’s influence can be clearly seen in his first portraits, suffused with soft, even light, where the subject is isolated and his or her relationship with the photographer is palpable. Mapplethorpe assimilated the formality and intensity that distinguish Nadar’s portraits and made them a central element of his aesthetic.

A keen admirer of Michelangelo since his student days, on his first trip to Europe in 1970 Mapplethorpe began photographing classical statues, which be-
came one of the main subjects of his work. He often said that if he had lived a few centuries earlier, he might have been a sculptor and that photography was the quickest way to make sculpture: everything was sculpture, the people he portrayed, the flowers, the nudes, the sadomasochistic acts he orchestrated as if they were figures carved in stone. The classical spirit permeating the poetry of Mapplethorpe’s work is crystal clear. However, juxtaposing his photographs with the works in the Corsini collection sheds light on a deep bond between this late-twentieth century artist and seventeenth century art. Fascination with decay and death and the theme of vanitas, or the allegory of the transience of life, pervaded his work along with an attraction to a symmetry that is both classical and contemporary. The two prints placed on the back wall of the First Gallery, Ken and Lydia and Tyler (1985) and Self Portrait (1988), exemplify an aesthetic that resonates deeply with many of Galleria Corsini’s works. The 1985 photo (p. 11) is a contemporary interpretation of the theme of the Three Graces, where male is confused with female and the differences in the skin colour of the figures allude both to the materials used in sculpture and to the portrayal of race, a crucial theme in American art. Mapplethorpe’s oft-ironic self portraits provide a counterpoint to his evolution as an artist and are a reflection of personal and historical time. The one taken in 1988 (p. 11) is brutally honest and one of the most powerful he ever took. Mapplethorpe knows he is about to die and looks out at us from the darkness, like the skull looking at us on top of the walking stick he is clutching in a gesture that is both powerful and ancient.

In 1973 Wagstaff sent Mapplethorpe a postcard of Caravaggio’s Basket of Fruit, housed in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan: “How about this as a still life. It’s one of the greatest of all & alas, the only one this crazy, wondrous & queer painter left us. The way the light background grabs the edges of things is an invention that has not been listened to enough. So there! Hugs.” The various ways the light “grabs the edges of things” is a common thread throughout Mapplethorpe’s still lifes and nudes, like in Apples and Urn taken in 1987 (p. 16), a decidedly seventeenth-century image on display in the Green Room among the still lifes of Christian Berentz (1658-1722). In the Red Room, the famous 1976 portrait of Holly Solomon (p. 21), the art dealer who hosted one of his most crucial exhibitions, is clearly inspired by the Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (1647-1652) and by the Blessed Ludovica Albertoni (1674), sculpted by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The vast majority of the works of art collected by Cardinal Corsini were unknown to Mapplethorpe; and it is not implied that the photographs visitors will come across in the halls of the gallery directly refer to or were somehow inspired by any of these works. All they do is bring to the surface Mapplethorpe’s deep memory of the art and painting of the past, perhaps unconscious but that may be clearly seen in the earlier portraits taken using natural light and strongly influenced by Nadar as well as by Julia Margaret Cameron, such as for example Carol Overby taken in 1979 (p. 21), on display in the Red Room alongside the portrait of Holly Solomon. Here, separated from the permanent collection, we have displayed some sequences of photographs focussing on key themes for Mapplethorpe - classical sculpture, the pursuit of geometry in light - alongside unusual and rarely displayed images, such as two interiors, Texas Gallery (1980, p. 17) and New Orleans Interior (1982, p. 17), or Marty Gibson (1982, p. 19), an uncommon combination of figure and landscape.

The eighteenth-century criteria of symmetry and balance as well as the playful pursuit of similarities, common themes and historical short-circuits are what guided the placement of the photographs among the gallery’s paintings. In the Cardinal Gallery, Puerto Rico, the portrait of a woman taken in 1981 (p. 12) is gazing at the sixteenth century Portrait of an Old Woman by a student of Jan Van Scorel. In the Green Cabinet Guy Neville (1975, p. 15) finds himself alongside Cardinal Neri Corsini Senior another paradigm of male elegance painted by Giovan Battista Gaulli in 1666. Opposite them, Harry Lunn (1976, p. 15) and the cardinal Ferdinando de’ Medici by Alessandro Allori bear a striking resemblance to one another, whereas Bernine (1978, p. 14), in the Alcove of Christina of Sweden recalls portraits by Lorenzo Lotto and the sixteenth-century masters from Lombardy.

Before Cardinal Corsini, these rooms were inhabited by Christina of Sweden (1626-1689), the legendary queen who in 1654 abdicated and rejected Luther-
anism to convert to Catholicism. Shortly afterwards she moved to Rome and amassed an extraordinary collection of both paintings and artists and intellectuals inside this palace. Christina had an adventurous life, never wanted to marry and, according to one imaginative theory, was a hermaphrodite. In the room of the Alcova, next to the commemorative plaque bearing the inscription: "I was born free, I lived free and I will die freed", we find Lisa Lyon (1981, p. 14), the bodybuilder immortalised by Mapplethorpe in hundreds of photographs. Almost as if she were a living sculpture by Michelangelo, Lyon shaped her body to achieve an ideal of beauty blending both the female and the male, indeed recalling the theme of androgyny, very dear to Mapplethorpe. In homage to Mapplethorpe’s catholic roots, Lyon’s portrait is next to three oval paintings by Guido Reni, The Sorrowful Virgin, Christ with the Crown of Thorns and St. John the Evangelist.

At other times, there is a primarily formal relationship between the photographs and the gallery’s works, as in the case of Winter Landscape, a rare landscape taken in 1979 on display in the Antichamber beneath Rinaldo and Armida by Gaspard Dughet, where the initial literary theme provides nothing more than a pretext for allowing the figures to lose themselves within the landscape. Or Lisa Lyon lying between the boulders (1980, p. 12) which in the Cardinal Gallery has been placed next to two small mythological scenes by Francesco Albani, Jupiter Sends Mercury to Apollo and Venus and Cupids. Sometimes the placement of the photographs serves to draw visitors’ gaze towards works in the collection that otherwise might escape their attention, such as the small bronzes statues placed on the console tables, extraordinary examples of eighteenth-century Roman manufacturing that Mapplethorpe, a sophisticated collector of furniture, would have appreciated. The same goes for a series of four prints of Ajitto (1981, p. 10) in the First Gallery or, in the Fireplace Chamber, of Marcus Leatherdale, (1978, p. 13) who, flanked by the small bronze statues of Adonis and Diana by Antonio Montauti, becomes a character from Ovid’s Metamorphosis: the young man returning from the hunt. In the same room Samia (1978, p. 13), portrayed in an interior that vaguely resembles the rooms of the gallery, and Catherine Olim (1982, p. 13) are positioned alongside one of the paintings for which the collection is known: Salome with the Head of John the Baptist by Guido Reni (ca. 1638), and the splendid Head of a Man by Pieter Paul Rubens (1600-1610).

In the Green Room, opposite the collection’s most important works, such as Caravaggio’s St. John the Baptist or Venus and Adonis by Jusepe de Ribera, and next to two neoclassical statues, Dancer with Finger on her Chin by Luigi Bienaimé (from an invention of Canova, ca. 1830) and The Transportation of Psyche by Zephyrus by John Gibson (1837-1840), we come across Black Bust and Apollo, both taken in 1988 (p. 16). In these photographs Mapplethorpe manages to achieve a perfect balance between light and shadow, hard and soft. As Sam Wagstaff said about his love for photographic images: “Joy takes on many aspects in photography - the joy of sadness, of forgetfulness, of outrageousness, the joy even of death.”

Flaminia Gennari Santori
February 2019
2. FIRST GALLERY

Ajitto, 1981

Self portrait, 1988
Ken and Lydia and Tyler, 1985
Italian Devil, 1988
3. CARDINAL GALLERY

Puerto Rico, Woman, 1981
Dominick and Elliot, 1979
Lisa Lyon, 1980

4. FIREPLACE CHAMBER

Catherine Olim, 1982
Marcus Leatherdale, 1978
Samia, 1978
5. ALCOVA ROOM

Bernine, 1978
Lisa Lyon, 1981

6. GREEN CABINET

Harry Lunn, 1976
Guy Neville, 1975
7. GREEN ROOM

Apples and Urn, 1987
Flower Arrangement, 1984
Flowers, 1983

Apollo, 1988
Black Bust, 1988

8. RED ROOM

Texas Gallery, 1980
New Orleans Interior, 1982

Orchid and Hand, 1983
8. RED ROOM

Female Torso, 1978
Lisa Lyon, 1982
Lisa Lyon, 1980

Marty Gibson, 1982
Lily, 1986
Phillip, 1979
8. RED ROOM

Bronze Sculpture, 1978
Alistair Butler, 1980
Dennis Speight, 1980
Orchid, 1985

Calla Lily, 1988
Milton White, 1983
Holly Solomon, 1976
Carol Overby, 1979
Cabinet

Jack in the Pulpit, 1988

Peeing in Glass, 1977

Cock and Devil, 1982

Cock and knee, 1978

Poppy, 1988

Jack in the Pulpit, 1988

Peeing in Glass, 1977

Cock and Devil, 1982
ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE
THE SENSITIVE LENS

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