

Robert Mapplethorpe: Auto-portrait Polaroids of the 1970's

April 28 – June 10, 2000

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce an exhibition of auto-portrait Polaroids by Robert Mapplethorpe from the years 1972-1974. Most of these have never been exhibited before.

Robert Mapplethorpe was born in 1946, the third of six children. He remembered a very secure childhood on Long Island, which he summed up by saying, "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." He received a B.F.A. from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where he produced artwork in a variety of media. He had not taken any of his own photographs yet, but he was making art that incorporated many photographic images appropriated from other sources, including pages torn from magazines and books. This early interest reflected the importance of the photographic image in the culture and art of our time, including the work of such notable artists as Andy Warhol, whom Mapplethorpe greatly admired.

Mapplethorpe took his first photographs soon thereafter, using a Polaroid camera. He did not consider himself a photographer, but wished to use his own photographic images in his paintings, rather than pictures from magazines. "I never liked photography," he is quoted as saying, "Not for the sake of photography. I like the object. I like the photographs when you hold them in your hand."

In an essay that accompanies the exhibition, Richard Marshall, who curated the 1988 Robert Mapplethorpe retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, compares these self-portraits to the work of Acconci, Nauman, Burden and Barney and concludes:

Robert Mapplethorpe's series of auto-portraits confirms his aesthetic alignment with other artists of his generation as they collectively shifted the direction of late twentieth-century art. Although self-portraiture has been of interest to artists for centuries, at the beginning of the 1970s Mapplethorpe introduced issues of identity, self, gender, body-as-sculpture, and body-as-organism into the contemporary artistic idiom that continue to have reverberations into the present.

For more information, please contact Amanda Kingloff or Mary Doerhoefer by calling 212/242-7727, faxing 212/242-7737, or emailing gallery@cheimread.com.