

PRINCIPAL

Janet Lehr

Estab. 1972



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19TH and 20TH CENTURY MASTERS
and ART ADVISORY SERVICES

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE
American 1946 – 1989



Orchid dye transfer, 1989 Edition 1 of 5 21.5 x 22.5 inches Estate stamped and numbered on recto, and Estate numbered RMDT on verso

Literature: *Flowers* Mapplethorpe Forward by Patti Smith Bulfinch Press/Little, Brown and Company, 1990 in the Chronological Index

Provenance:

Janet Lehr Inc. Christie's New York: Monday, October 10, 2005 lots 34 (Orchid) Private Collector, New York

NOTES:

Robert Mapplethorpe was born in 1946 in the New York City borough of Queens. At the age of sixteen, in 1963, he left home to study art at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, where he concentrated on painting, drawing, and sculpture. Influenced by artists such as Joseph Cornell and

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Marcel Duchamp, he also experimented with various materials in mixed-media collages, including images cut from books and magazines.

After graduating in 1970, he experimented with the idea of the photograph as an object and began to take his own pictures. His first series of Polaroids were self-portraits and of the singer-artist-poet, Patti Smith. After he acquired a Polaroid camera in 1970 and began producing his own photographs to incorporate into the collages, saying he felt "it was more honest." That same year he and Patti Smith, whom he had met three years earlier, moved into the Chelsea Hotel. In the mid-seventies, he acquired a large format press camera and began taking photographs of a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. These included artists, composers, socialites, pornographic film stars and members of the S & M underground.

The turning point in his artistic development occurred when, at the age of twenty-five, he met Sam Wagstaff, a former museum curator, who provided him with financial support and encouraged him to concentrate on photography.

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, pornographic film stars, members of the S & M underground and the series of flowers for which he is recognized world wide. He also worked on commercial projects, creating album cover art for Patti Smith, and Television, and a series of portraits and party pictures for Interview Magazine. His first solo exhibition opened in New York in 1976.

In the late 70s, 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

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'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." Meanwhile 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 80s, Mapplethorpe produced a bevy of images that simultaneously challenge and adhere to classical aesthetic standards: stylized compositions of male and female nudes, his starkly sexual flowers, 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, Cibachome 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 series and book, *50 New York Artists*.

In 1986, he was diagnosed with AIDS. Fully understanding the fate of 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. Works of these last years are singular in their perfection. They are particularly prized for their small editions. *Orchid*, one of Mapplethorpe's final works was printed but unsigned at the time of his death is #1 of an edition of only 5. It bears the Mapplethorpe Estate stamp and number.

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Mapplethorpe's flowers are as carefully positioned as his human subjects. His still lives are stark -- usually only one or two flowers. They display a raw sexuality even more powerful than that of the nudes. His treatment of their male and female aspects are most striking. The *Jack in the Pulpit* photograph emphasizing the flower's phallic form, *Orchid*, emphasizing its erotic feminism. At the size at which the flower photographs have been printed, their sensuality becomes overwhelming. Their colors -- yellow-scarlet on both the *Jack in the Pulpit* and the *Orchid* forever unite them. -- They are so vibrant that they draw the viewer in, forcing him to acknowledge their primitive sexuality. For many, Mapplethorpe's flowers are his most "erotic" works.

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, and the historical and social significance of his work, his legacy lives on through the invaluable work performed by the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

In keeping with Mapplethorpe's wishes, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation has funded numerous publications on photography, supported exhibitions at various art institutions, and provided grants—in the form of funding or gifts of original Mapplethorpe works—to art institutions ranging from the world's major art museums to small university galleries. In 1993, the Foundation provided a major gift to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation to create the Robert Mapplethorpe Gallery and inaugurate the Guggenheim Museum's photography department and program.

Foundation has provided study grants to university research centers and established important medical facilities and programs, such as the Robert Mapplethorpe Laboratory for AIDS Research at Harvard Medical School in Boston, the Robert Mapplethorpe AIDS Treatment Center at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, and the Robert Mapplethorpe Center for HIV Research at St. Vincent's Hospital and Medical Center of New York. The Foundation has also provided substantial

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financial support to the American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR), which was one of the first recipients of Mapplethorpe's generosity during his lifetime. The Foundation continues to support research initiatives at various levels based on approved grant applications for research-based facilities and organizations.

In addition to its charitable work, the Foundation maintains Mapplethorpe's artistic legacy by preserving his archive of works, strictly maintaining the editions he established during his lifetime, facilitating loans of his photographs, and placing his work in important museum collections around the world.

Robert enjoyed a great deal of popular and critical success during his short working career. When his close friend, Andy Warhol, for whom he often took photos for "Interview" magazine, suddenly died in 1987, Mapplethorpe started preparing for his own death by establishing an AIDS research foundation in May 1987. He established the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to promote photography, support museums that exhibit photographic art, and to fund medical research and finance projects in the fight against AIDS and HIV-related infection. It is a very active and successful Foundation directed throughout by Michael Stout. It has been very supportive of the causes intended.

The first major museum retrospective of his work was presented by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1988, one year prior to his death of AIDS.