

Robert Mapplethorpe. Choreography for an Exhibition

Curated by **Laura Valente e Andrea Viliani**
in collaboration with the **Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation**

Photographs of the artist in dialogue with archaeological works, ancient and modern

International choreographers will meet at the Madre Museum for an unprecedented performative program inspired by the Mapplethorpe

**Olivier Dubois directs the new creation *In Dialogue with Bob*
for the debut of the exhibition**

15.12.2018 – 08.04.2019

**Madre · Museo d'arte contemporanea Donnaregina
Via Settembrini 79, Napoli**

From 15th of december 2018 to 8th of april 2019, at Madre · museo d'arte contemporanea Donnaregina of Campania Region, *Robert Mapplethorpe. Choreography for an Exhibition*, curated by Laura Valente e Andrea Viliani in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

The exhibition coincides with the thirtieth anniversary of the traveling solo exhibition *The Perfect Moment*, opened in December 1988, just a few months before the artist's death on March 9, 1989, at the age of 43.

More than 160 works, including those from the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli**, **Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte** and from **Reggia di Caserta (*Terrae motus* collection)**, thanks to a virtuous collaboration among the institutions.

An hypothetical dialogue between ancient times and modernity, between photography and dance, that at the Madre Museum goes on stage not only in the exhibition section, but also through a live performance program commissioned for the exhibition to some of the most important choreographers of the international scene.

Olivier Dubois, director of the Compagnie Olivier Dubois, and former director of Ballet du Nord from 2014 to 2017, opens the performative section. He is mentioned in the list of the twenty-five best dancers in the world in 2011. He will be the author of an original creation commissioned and produced for the Madre Museum, ***In Dialogue with Bob***, on the occasion of the opening (December the 14th), with a second staging the next day. The new creation of Dubois will see the participation of performers chosen in public auditions in Naples by the choreographer in the past weeks. This experience brings for the first time to the Museum of Contemporary Art The format ***Abballamm '!***, created by Laura Valente with the coordination of Gennaro Cimmino and the collaboration of Susanna Sastro- a project through which the Ravello Festival Dance artistic direction involves the best talents from Campania to whom is given the opportunity to take part in special projects that have involved so far artists such as Dimitris Papaioannou, Marie Chouinard, Bill T. Jones.



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"Until now the works of the American photographer had never been placed in a direct confrontation with that obvious performative component that seems to animate them - as the editors Laura Valente and Andrea Viliani explain - The Fondazione Donnaregina per le arti contemporanee thus affirms its vocation as a collector between different creative expressions that come together to rethink and re-formulate experimentally the fruition and nature of a museum. A "dance" between works and choreographic actions, which offers a new interpretation for the works of the New York photographer, reinterpreted under the light of the dynamic force that springs from the bodies portrayed, from the various references to the history of art, from the continuous search for a possible formal perfection. These characteristics are in harmony with the rigorous physical discipline and with the evolutions of dance. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the bodies of Bill T. Jones, Gregory Hines, Molissa Fenley and Lucinda Childs embody the "dancing alter-egos" of the most significant works by Mapplethorpe. For this reason, the exhibition foresees a program of site-specific performance, commissioned by the museum to famous international choreographers, in order to reread the main motives of the Mapplethorpe's photographic works: the reference to the canons of neoclassical art; the fading borders between sexual genders and identities; the continuous focus on the black-white contrast; the fragility (if not the inexistence) of the border between pain and pleasure; the seductive glamour of the New York artistic and cultural scene, mingled with a game of evocations to a Naples in constant swing between life and death."

THE CONCEPT OF THE EXHIBITION:

The exhibition at Madre museum focuses in a completely new way around the intimate performative matrix of Mapplethorpe's photographic practice, retracing and staging the intrinsic need to represent the erotic and intellectual vibration of the subjects, refusing the impersonal and documentary static nature of the photographic shot. This performative matrix is developed in the concept and in the structure of this exhibition, as a possible comparison between the actions of "photographing" in the studio (in the implication of the author / subject / spectator) and of "performing" on the scene (in the similar implication performer / choreographer / audience).

This exhibition's "choreography" is then developed into three sections, intimately connected to each other. In the entrance hall and in the two adjoining rooms, as in an *Ouverture*, that redesigns the space-time dimension of the museum, infusing it with a theatrical inspiration based in the exchange of glances between the two Mapplethorpeian muses, one feminine and one masculine, Patti Smith and Samuel Wagstaff Jr. To follow, in the five opening rooms and in the six final rooms of the exhibition, the audience is introduced directly on the stage of this *mise-en-scène* for images – among dancers, athletes, body-builders, and models – exploring the performativity of the subject photographed by Mapplethorpe, which the artist captured with meticulous preparation in his studio. The two rooms that precede and follow the central hall lead the visitors into potential stalls, in which the dynamic of the gaze of dozens of portraits not only gives us an extraordinary personal diary of the life, affections, friendships, meetings, collaborations and commissions of the artist, but at the same time reconstructs, between a private dimension and public sphere, a collective portrait of the society and jet-set of the Seventies and the Eighties. Among the faces of this "living" audience: **John Mc Kendry** (1975); **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, **Philip Glass** with **Robert Wilson** and **David Hockney** with **Henry Geldzalher** (1976); **Deborah Harry** (1978); **Carolina Herrera** (1979); **Francesca Thyssen** (1981); **Louise Bourgeois** and the Pop Art gallerist **Leo Castelli** (1982); **Doris Saatchi**, **Andy Warhol**, **Francesco Clemente** and **Lucio Amelio** (1983); **Susan Sontag** (1984); **Norman Mailer** (1985), **Louise Nevelson** (1986), **Laurie Anderson** (1987); In addition to the images of dancers and choreographers such as **Lucinda Childs**, **Gregory Hines**, **Bill T. Jones**, **Molissa Fenley** and the dancers of the NYC Ballet.



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The Central room (third section) – dominated by a **red carpet for dancers and a sequence of self-portraits of Mapplethorpe** – is transformed into a real *three-dimensional theatre*, in which, joining all the themes of the exhibition, the **performance becomes contemporary and current choreography**, in which the artist is protagonist.

To integrate this section, like two *retro-scene* spaces, two adjoining rooms to the central room: *the (Un) Dressing* room, a real set up dressing room, where the performers warm up before the performance, which hosts some images that introduce us to vision of the artist, and the *X (Dark) Room (forbidden to minors)*, in which the most "secret and extreme" works of erotic subjects are exhibited, including a selection of the famous *Portfolio X*.

The various subjects of Mapplethorpe, even the most controversial ones like the S&M images of *Portfolio X*, are the protagonists of a staging that reveals **continuous and sophisticated references to the history of art**, in which archetypes and universal subjects are evoked. The photographic activity occurred mainly in the intimacy of the studio of Mapplethorpe, where the artist carefully prepared backgrounds and scenographic elements, along with a rigorous drawing of the lights, to abstract in a "timeless time" the photographed subject.

THE PERFORMATIVE PROGRAM:

The Madre Museum in December will host Olivier Dubois and Vadim Stein.

Olivier Dubois signs *In Dialogue with Bob*, to which eight dancers from the Project Abballamm '1 will take part, focusing on the idea that Mapplethorpe's photographs are traces of his personal choreography, and *Le Trésor (Black gold and White gold)*, an installation that will take place in two rooms of the second floor, transformed for the occasion first in a *dark room* and in a room with dazzling lights immediately after. The experience of the depths of the dark and the limits of the sight and reason and its opposite. Perpetuation of the species or love, it is only about escaping death.

Another original choreography for the Madre Museum will also be the one signed by the Ukrainian Vadim Stein. Eclectic artist, he will bring to the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Campania Region his research that ranges from dance to photography, from video-art to Scenography. The body is the central focus of his work and long experimentation,, it becomes the protagonist through forms and expedients that overcome the connotations of the genre and of the age. The atmospheres of the time when Mapplethorpe gave life to his creations will be reproduced for the exhibition through a selection of music which repropose "cult" pieces of those years. With the use of the famous Garzati, performative quotation of the famous sequence *White Gauze (1984)*, present in the exhibition.

RETE TRA MUSEI E ARCHIVI:

The exhibition is transformed into **an hypothetical museum in which the history of art is staged as in a theatre**. In its collection, a selection of **archaeological works from the National Archaeological Museum of Naples** and a selection of **drawings, paintings, bronze sculptures, porcelain and ivory from the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, both partners institutions of this project**. As it already happened for the personal exhibitions dedicated by the Madre museum to Boris Mikhailov (2015) and Mimmo Jodice (2016), also in the case of the exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe the photographic research



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is deepened, and clarified, through the dialogue with the history of art and the possible matrices it provides to the photographic language. The torsos of the athletes and the female figures, the *Antinoo* from the Farnese collection, the *Hermaphroditus* and an ancient *tintinnabulum*, as well as the sanguine drawings of the bodies and the porcelain sculptures of the divinities and the Renaissance ephebes, the ebony sensuality of the *Crucifix* (from Giambologna), the theatrical intertwining between the naked bodies of *Cain and Abel* by Lionello Spada, the suspended softness of the *Morning Glories and "boules de neige"* by Andrea Belvedere and the silent relationship between master and disciple of the *Male Double Portrait* of Maso da San Friano, constitute, as a whole, a temporary and ideal museum, a disciplinary and scenic machine which, passing through time and space, makes emerge the contours of a cultured and refined artistic practice which is based, on the thread of a relentless pursuit of perfection, on the hybrid and subtle encounter between antiquity and modernity, Apollonian ideality and Dionysian sensuality, classic canon and baroque tension.

Asymmetric relations which correspond to the relationship that Mapplethorpe also had with the city of Naples and the culture of Campania region. Present in the *Terrae Motus* collection, conceived and created by the Neapolitan gallerist Lucio Amelio – who hosted the artist's first solo exhibition in Naples in 1984 (which was followed by a show-tribute in 1994, the year of the death of the gallerist) – Mapplethorpe was able to create a passionate and empathetic relationship with the contradictory humanity of the Neapolitan and Campanian culture, getting inspiration by his relationship between life and death and creating extraordinary works. Including the emblematic *views* of the Port of Naples, the Faraglioni of Capri, the Antro della Sibilla in Cuma, the skulls or “capuzzelle” and the views of the sculptures of monumental gardens and parks. Images that recur in the exhibition tour along with some documentary materials from the Archivio Amelio-Santamaria, including the 1990 album *Ma l'amore no*, which contains a reproduction of a portrait of the Neapolitan gallerist Lucio Amelio made by Mapplethorpe. In the exhibition is also deepened – introduced and framed through the combination with some drawings and the sculpture of Vincenzo Gemito's *Fisherboy* – the inspiration and influence exerted on Mapplethorpe by the imagery of German photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden, to whose stylistic and intellectual legacy Amelio dedicated between 1977 and 1978 an exhibition and two publications, with prefaces of the critics Marina Miraglia and of the semiologist and writer Roland Barthes.

The **Robert Mapplethorpe** catalogue. *Choreography for an exhibition* curated by Laura Valente and Andrea Vilianni, is published by the Fondazione Donnaregina per le arti contemporanee in Naples, in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, which for the occasion has granted the exclusive use of the photos. The logo is edited by Leftloft. The exhibition at the Madre Museum of Naples is completed with another solo exhibition of the artist in Italy, which will be inaugurated in March 2019 at the National Galleries of Ancient Arts - Galleria Corsini, in Rome. The two exhibitions are a diptych that intends to study, with different critical and methodological approaches, the "classicism" of a "radically contemporary" artist, Robert Mapplethorpe.



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BIOGRAPHY:

Robert Mapplethorpe was born in November the 4th, 1946 in New York, in an observant Catholic family of Irish descent. His education takes place in the context of protests against the war in Vietnam, student revolts and civil rights, feminist and homosexual rights movements. In 1967 he met the young poet Patti Smith, who will become one of his most photographed subjects between 1970 and 1973. Thanks to the encouragement from the curator of the photographic section of MoMA, John McKendry, from 1970 he began experimenting the use of Polaroid. In 1972 he met the collector and curator Samuel Wagstaff Jr., who in 1975 gave to Mapplethorpe his first Hasselblad camera and contributed substantially to the artist's affirmation. In 1973 he held his first personal exhibition, *Polaroids*, at the Light Gallery in New York. Experiencing different formats and printing techniques, Mapplethorpe documents the New York underground scene. The images produced will be the subject of two exhibitions, collectively titled *Pictures*, inaugurated in 1977 in two different New York galleries: the Holly Solomon Gallery and The Kitchen Gallery, the second one made of the works that will compose, in 1978, the *X Portfolio*. In the same year Mapplethorpe creates the *Y Portfolio*, collection of floral and arboreal subjects, followed in 1981 by his third portfolio, *Z Portfolio*, a series of nudes featuring African-American subjects. In 1978 his first personal exhibition in a museum, *Photographs*, is held at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, while his works are exhibited at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art in the *Bondage and Discipline* exhibition, and at the La Remise Gallery in Paris, the first personal exhibition in Europe is inaugurated. The recognition of his research at an international level allows the artist to deepen his relationship with intellectuals, writers, entertainment stars and aristocrats of the old continent, which become his reference audience and, at the same time, the commissioners of many portraits. Among the exhibitions of this period there are the personal exhibitions at the Frankfurter Kunstverein in Frankfurt (1981), at the Contemporary Art Center in New Orleans (1982) and at the Center Georges Pompidou in Paris (1983). In the same year was inaugurated at the Palazzo Fortuny in Venice, the exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe, photographs*, then repropose at the Palazzo delle Cento Finestre in Florence. In 1984 the exhibition *Matrix 80 Robert Mapplethorpe* is held at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut. After two years followed by the exhibition in Bologna, Palazzo Accursio. In September 1986 Mapplethorpe found out that he had contracted the HIV virus. In 1988 the artist established a foundation for the conservation of his works, to support the photographic creation and the scientific research against the HIV virus. In the same year he inaugurated a traveling exhibition, *The Perfect Moment*, hosted by the Institute of Contemporary Art-University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Washington Project for the Arts in Washington DC Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, University Art Museum-University of California at Berkeley, Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center and Boston Institute of Contemporary Art. The exhibition arouses fierce polemics. Mapplethorpe died on March the 9th, 1989, and from that year there have been several exhibitions dedicated to the artist by the most important international museums. In 1992 the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf brought together the works of Mapplethorpe and those of the French sculptor Auguste Rodin. The comparison will be presented again in 2014 by the *Mapplethorpe-Rodin* exhibition at the Musée Rodin in Paris. In 2000 *The Perfect Moment* was presented again at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in California, while in 2004 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Hermitage in St. Petersburg presented *Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition: Photographs and Mannerist Prints*. In 2009 in the exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe, Perfection in the Form* (2009) at the Accademia Gallery in Florence, the photographer's images are compared with the masterpieces of the Florentine art. *Robert Mapplethorpe: XYZ*, presented in 2012 by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is dedicated to the three portfolios of the artist. In 2016 *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium* is inaugurated, an important retrospective exhibition that takes up the title *Perfect Moment*.



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In 2018 a solo exhibition of the artist was inaugurated at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves in Porto, while in 2019 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York will dedicate a whole year of its program to Mapplethorpe.

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