

CHARLES RIVA COLLECTION

The work of Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) possesses many aspects. For the general public, the photographer is often associated with scandal and censorship (the organizers of his retrospective at le Grand Palais collected the "most disturbing" images in a room with access denied to minors. (According to which criteria are the images "most disturbing"?). It is nevertheless only an anecdotal aspect about his work.

In the exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe* displayed at Thaddaeus Ropac in 2011, Sofia Coppola underlined the central role in the life and the work of the photographer played by the women, who contributed to his first successes thanks to images of the New York sadomasochistic homosexual scene.

We find in the selection made by Charles Riva the inescapable figure of Patti Smith, who was the muse and the accomplice of Mapplethorpe. The cliché is prominent here of the androgynous singer illustrating the cover of her first album *Horses*, as well as a more intimate photography, where the indirect reference to the record - two images of horses stuck on the wall - is highly visible.

The Charles Riva collection also exhibits Lisa Lyon, who posed for Mapplethorpe many times. A dedicated body-builder, she succeeded in making her own body a synthesis of masculine / feminine which could only seduce the photographer. Lyon was briefly married to Bernard Lavilliers and inspired him to write the song *Night Bird*. Lyon was trained by Arnold Schwarzenegger, but contrary to the photo where he poses for Mapplethorpe, she rarely adopts the stereotypical poses of body-builders. She is photographed in her sports gear, while sitting on a tiled floor which evokes a changing room, or dressed in outfits inspired by sadomasochistic practices.

Mapplethorpe's photography featuring Lisa Lyon was used for the Italian edition of *Vogue*. It testifies of his attraction for the composed scenes, which we find expressed, with humor, in the double portrait *Brian Ridley and Lyle*: a sadomasochistic homosexual couple posing in a kitsch and bourgeois inside. This process remains exceptional: Mapplethorpe is at first a photographer of studio. In the portrait of Ramiros, executed the same year, he does not even try to hide the roller which is of use to him to create a plain background - a detail which has much importance and which we find in a bouquet (*Gladioli*) of 1979.

Mapplethorpe's attraction to sculpture his second passion after photography, is displayed in the series of Polaroids *Manfred* (1974). Its male, nude model, strikes the pose in a theatrical scene - columns, logettes - inspired by classic architecture. *Untitled* (*Terry*) joins in the same theatrical vein, and is not without evoking the pictorialist esthetics. Paradoxically, Mapplethorpe resorts to the Polaroid in these images of academic inspiration, while he uses the same technique previously for a series of clichés without subtlety which stage a man (*Tony*) dressed in his sadomasochistic outfit.

Only photographs can reveal the complex personality of Mapplethorpe. *Pictures/Self Portrait* (1977) consists of two images which show his hand tracing the word "pictures" on a sheet of paper. In the first, he wears a metal bracelet and leather fingerless gloves. In the second, his forearm is covered by a classic shirt, on his wrist he wears a luxury watch and his hand remains bare. We see two opposing or complementary images of masculinity. Two sides of the same artist.

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