

Art for Art's Sake



The name Robert Mapplethorpe conjures up controversial portraits, writes Arts Editor Jean Eainwright of men.

Clinically photographed their muscular bodies sculpted perfection, they reference acts of extreme sadomasochism anaesthetised, beautified and stilled by Mapplethorpe artistic gaze. Then there are his portraits of flowers sexual, decadent and beautiful Asprey Jacques who now represent the Mapplethorpe estate in Europe bravely showed neither, but rather a unique collection of previously unseen black and white and colour Polaroids. The images are a moving document of Mapplethorpe's relationship with Patti Smith and Sam Wagstaff. Both formulative partnerships in his life. When Smith said that she was leaving him he begged her not to go "Please don't go, please ... if you go I'll become gay". Sam Wagstaff was equally important, both a friend and curator who took Mapplethorpe under his wing sexually and creatively. The photographs in the exhibition focus on aspects of these two relationships as well as a series of self-portraits.

The images of Smith are testament to the volatility of their liaison and its many nuances. Untitled 1973 shows a cigarette hanging from Smith's mouth her hair tousled her stance aggressive, taken in the same year



that Mapplethorpe exhibited his Polaroids with Brigid Polk and Andy Warhol. In another Untitled 1973 she sits hugging her legs her pose reminiscent of a curled up flower. The reticence of her pose is contrasted with Patti Smith 1975, a bold and sexy image which appeared on the cover of her first album *Horses*. The contrast of black and white stark framing, the unknotted tie and casually slung jacket, understated rebellion.

Sam Wagstaff is shown celebrating his relationship with Mapplethorpe, playful insightful images evoking great intimacy. Also interesting to see were pages from Mapplethorpe's linen workbooks providing an insight into his working methods. Coloured pencil divides the space, small artistic experiments which are echoed in his larger commercial works. Mapplethorpe died tragically young; these images have a poignancy and

playfulness of his life pre AIDS. The subtle hang which carefully balanced and juxtaposed the images both emphasised the sureness of his gaze and the museum quality of his images.

