

# WHITNEY

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## Press Release

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### WHITNEY MUSEUM TO PRESENT *POLAROIDS: MAPPLETHORPE* OPENING MAY 3, 2008

New York, March 28, 2008 – A little-known body of early work by Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–89) is presented in *Polaroids: Mapplethorpe*, opening on May 3, 2008, at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Curated by Sylvia Wolf, recently named Director of the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, the exhibition, features approximately one hundred works – many never exhibited before – including self-portraits, figure studies, still lifes, and portraits of Mapplethorpe’s lovers and friends such as Patti Smith, Sam Wagstaff, and Marianne Faithfull. It remains on view in the Sondra Gilman Gallery through September 7.

Best-known for the highly stylized and neoclassically inspired works he made between the late 1970s and his death in 1989, Mapplethorpe’s mature work was in fact preceded by an important but largely unknown body of over 1,500 photographs made with Polaroid cameras between 1970 and 1975, when Mapplethorpe was in his twenties. Unlike the carefully controlled images that Mapplethorpe would later come to stage in the studio, the artist’s Polaroids reveal remarkable spontaneity and creativity. Many of these small, intimate photographs convey tenderness and vulnerability, while others depict a toughness and immediacy that would give way in later years to more classical form. In these images, in the words of curator Sylvia Wolf, we can witness “Mapplethorpe learning to see photographically.”

As Mapplethorpe explained in 1988, photography “was the perfect medium, or so it seemed, for the ‘70s and ‘80s, when everything was fast. If I were to make something that took two weeks to do, I’d lose my enthusiasm. It would become an act of labor and the love would be gone.” Polaroid cameras, in particular, provided rapid results, allowing Mapplethorpe to see his photographs as he was making them, which in turn gave free

access to feeling and thinking. This visual responsiveness to the moment is one of the distinguishing characteristics of this body of work. The results are disarming pictures that give early evidence of the artist's avid curiosity about light, composition, and design.

***Polaroids: Mapplethorpe*** allows an examination of an important aspect of Mapplethorpe's career, and provides an invaluable glimpse into the artist's creative development.

A fully illustrated publication by Sylvia Wolf, *Polaroids: Mapplethorpe*, published by Prestel, places Mapplethorpe's early work in the context of his life-long artistic production. The book contains 183 plates (all Polaroids) and 43 figure illustrations, including works by a range of other artists, from Mantegna to Schiele, which place Mapplethorpe's Polaroids in an art historical context.

## **ABOUT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM**

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is regarded as the preeminent collection of American art and includes major works and materials from the estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, and Lucas Samaras, as well as significant works by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists. With its history of exhibiting the most promising and influential American artists and provoking intense critical and public debate, the Whitney's signature show, the Biennial, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in America today.

### **Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art:**

Demuth's Late Paintings of Lancaster

2008 Whitney Biennial

Polaroids: Mapplethorpe

Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe

Paul McCarthy: Three Installations, Two Films

Alexander Calder: The Paris Years

William Eggleston

February 23–April 27, 2008

March 6–June 1, 2008

May 3–September 7, 2008

June 26–September 21, 2008

June 26–October 12, 2008

October 16, 2008–February 15, 2009

November 7, 2008–January 25, 2009

*The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. Admission is \$15 for adults; free for members, children (ages 11 and under), and New York City public high school students. Senior citizens (62 and over) and students with valid ID: \$10. There is a \$6 admission fee for a pass to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 pm. For information, please call 1-800 WHITNEY or visit [www.whitney.org](http://www.whitney.org)*