

Robert Mapplethorpe: More Than a Face

May 25th – July 22nd, 2023
Carpintaria

Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel is proud to present *Robert Mapplethorpe: More Than a Face*, an exhibition of works by Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) at Carpintaria, Rio de Janeiro.

Presenting works that range from the latter half of the 1970s to the 1980s, the show approximates themes present in both Mapplethorpe's photographs and the Japanese novel *Confessions of a Mask* (1949) by Yukio Mishima, in which a semi-autobiographical character seeks to understand his homosexuality in post-war Japan. The "mask" referred to in the book's title is the public persona, or a sort of social prosthetic, with which the author presents to the patriarchal society in which he was raised.

Mapplethorpe's photographs, as in Mishima's classic story, recreate archetypes, fetishes and characters associated with the imbrications between sex, violence, masculinity and submission. Mapplethorpe contrasts his sadomasochistic and erotic themes with his work's immaculate presentation, allowing the spectator an ambiguous position between fascination and distance. Likewise, the narrator in Mishima's novel masked his homosexuality under the external guise of a bodybuilder, placating an insoluble disparity between what Japan at the time considered a weakness and the toughness the same society legitimized.

Christian iconography, as much as the visual culture of homosexual BDSM, has its function structured on the fetish, interweaving devotion, submission and the adoption of archetypal positions in a complex code. Masks and mirrors recur in Mapplethorpe's photographs, among sculpted muscles, fishnet stockings, knives and leather.

One of the most impactful passages in *Confessions of a Mask* takes place when the main character, still a very young boy, finds himself attracted to a reproduction of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian. The saint's face seems suspended in ecstasy, experiencing pleasure indifferent to torment. This erotic dimension of devotional imagery appears in the portrait Mapplethorpe took of *Peter Reed* (1980), which recalls an image of Christ deposed. As in Mishima, the sexual force of visible forms is constantly encroached upon by the figuration of death. In *Cross* (1984) and *Leg* (1983), the crucifix, as much as the fishnet-clad leg, displays a stark contrast between shadow and light, producing a drama between obscuring and revealing. Mapplethorpe's use of the camera as a sort of mask, a screen before the artist's face, prolongs his gaze while simultaneously blocking his identity.

Exhibition: *Robert Mapplethorpe: More Than a Face*

Opening: May 25th, 7pm - 9pm

Dates: May 25th – July 22nd 2023

Visitation hours: Tuesday – Friday: 10 am – 7 pm | Saturdays: 10 am – 6 pm

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