

Robert Mapplethorpe **11 April – 11 May 2025**

Galleria Franco Noero is pleased to present Robert Mapplethorpe's fifth solo exhibition in Torino, held in the space of Via Mottalciata and in collaboration with The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. This exhibition in Torino coincides with a major retrospective dedicated to the artist, opening on April 10 and running until January 6, 2026, at Le Stanze della Fotografia in Venezia, curated by Denis Curti.

Featuring over one hundred prints, many of the selected photographs have never been shown in gallery exhibitions before. In the main room, images from the 1980s are on display—a period in which Mapplethorpe explored and experimented in the studio using black backdrops within his controlled environment. These images evoke the charm and atmosphere of 1930s black and white film, capturing the fascination, anticipation, fantasy and mystery that one feels in the darkness of a movie theater. Whether depicting human beings or inanimate objects, the images freeze a moment in time, a tiny fragment that remains eternally imprinted on a black, almost lightless background. Through the camera lens, each moment becomes unique and unrepeatable. The depth of the background adds theatricality, reminiscent of the Caravaggesque Baroque, where the appearance of an image transforms into an unexpectedly motionless liturgy, still in time, arousing awe and pathos. These are images suspended in the limbo of an eternal present, yet aware of the constant existence of a beginning and an end. The models consist of Mapplethorpe's companions, some of whom were witnesses to, and participants in, an era defined by curiosity, risk taking, and pushing the bounds of conformism and conventionality. The subjects also include— his beloved flowers and the fluid shapes of the human body, revealing the body's sculptural form and muscular tension. Polished, marble-like bodies share the same formal qualities as in the portraits of Patti Smith, Lucinda Childs, Laurie Anderson, Jennifer Jakobson or Lisa Lyon. This meticulous attention to detail is equally evident in Mapplethorpe's emphasis of surprisingly gentle characteristics of grace; vulnerability, slight weightlessness, of indomitable enveloping, and soft geometry. On the contrary, he is simultaneously able to focus on the solid, thorny and lurid. For instance, a large format photograph depicting a vividly orange-red poppy, its green stem twisted toward its own seed bud, its jagged ridges stark against the deep black, stands apart in the main room like a precious gift. In the other two gallery spaces, images from the late 1970s and early 1980s alternate and offer a contrast of softer tones and illustrate the full scale of greys that often highlights a spontaneous empathy with the subject matter and circumvents the dramatically 'nocturnal' narrative of the main room. The photographs, sometimes taken outdoors or against backdrops ranging from optical white to silvery grey, convey a fluidity and freedom in expression—more in keeping with the energy of daylight than the dreamy stillness of night.

The exhibition in Via Mottalciata is complemented by the gallery's collaboration with the exhibition project at the NH Carlina in Piazza Carlo Emanuele in Torino. This collaboration began last summer with Mark Handforth and two of his sculptures still installed in the courtyard, a red fire hydrant 'informally' covered with the coloured wax of melted and constantly lit candles, and one of his typical benches with an essential design whose seat and backrest length is dictated by wooden boards as long as the entire trunk of the tree from which they come, possibly once fallen. In continuity with the previous artistic intervention, a striking and concise series of images emblematic of Robert Mapplethorpe's work will welcome visitors inside the niches of the large entrance hall leading to the courtyard, dotted with lemon trees in large terracotta pots, with the scent of an abundant vegetable garden.

Robert Mapplethorpe (New York 1946 – Boston, MA 1989), studied drawing, painting and sculpture at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn before dedicating himself to photography. His work led to numerous solo exhibitions at institutions around the world, with one of the most significant being the expansive retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1988, just one year before his death. In the same year, Mapplethorpe established the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to promote photography at the institutional level, and fund medical research to combat AIDS and HIV. The artist's work can be found in the collections of leading museums around the world, and his historical and social impact continues to be explored in major solo exhibitions around the globe.