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Mapplethorpe flower photos on exhibit at Montclair Museum



MONTCLAIR ART MUSEUM

Robert Mapplethorpe photograph of irises is one of 13 flower images by the artist on exhibit.

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The Record
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WHAT: “Robert Mapplethorpe Flowers.”

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MONTCLAIR ART MUSEUM

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WHEN: Friday through July 17.

WHERE: Montclair Art Museum, 3 S. Mountain Ave., Montclair; 973-746-5555 or montclairartmuseum.org.

HOW MUCH: \$12, \$10 for seniors (65 and up) and students with ID. Free for children under 12 and museum members.

Flowers are rarely the first thing that comes to mind

when someone mentions Robert Mapplethorpe. The famed photographer was much better known for his often controversial portraits of people and body parts. But Mapplethorpe also did a series of flower still lifes, and a selection of them is on display in Montclair.

“They are really beautiful images,” says Alexandra Schwartz, curator of contemporary art at Montclair Art Museum, which is showing “Robert Mapplethorpe Flowers: Selections From the JP Morgan Chase Art Collection.” “They’re not your typical still lifes. They’re arranged very precisely. The technique is very precise, modern, with hard edges. They’re rather severe-looking in a way, but they’re very beautiful.”

The museum is displaying 13 photographs, all black-and-white or sepia. The exhibit has

caused no furor and brought no public objection, unlike so many of Mapplethorpe’s past exhibits with some of his other work. To some, the photographs are much different from his explicit portraits. To Mapplethorpe, though, they were more similar than it might originally appear.

“I don’t think they’re very different from body parts,” Mapplethorpe, who died in 1989, said of his shots of flowers. “Maybe I experiment a little more with flowers and inanimate objects because you don’t have to worry about the subject being sensitive or worry about the personality. I don’t think I see differently just because the subject changes.”

According to Schwartz, Mapplethorpe also talked about the very quick lifespan of flowers, how they’re fresh for only a short while.

“He seemed to find a kind of gravitas in that,” she says.

The Mapplethorpe exhibition works nicely with an Andy Warhol exhibition — “Warhol and Cars: American Icons” — scheduled at the museum from March 6 to June 29.

“It’s a nice counterpoint to the Warhol show,” Schwartz says. “Warhol and Mapplethorpe were in the same kind of general artistic and social circles in New York and often get talked about together. They knew each other and admired each other’s work.”

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