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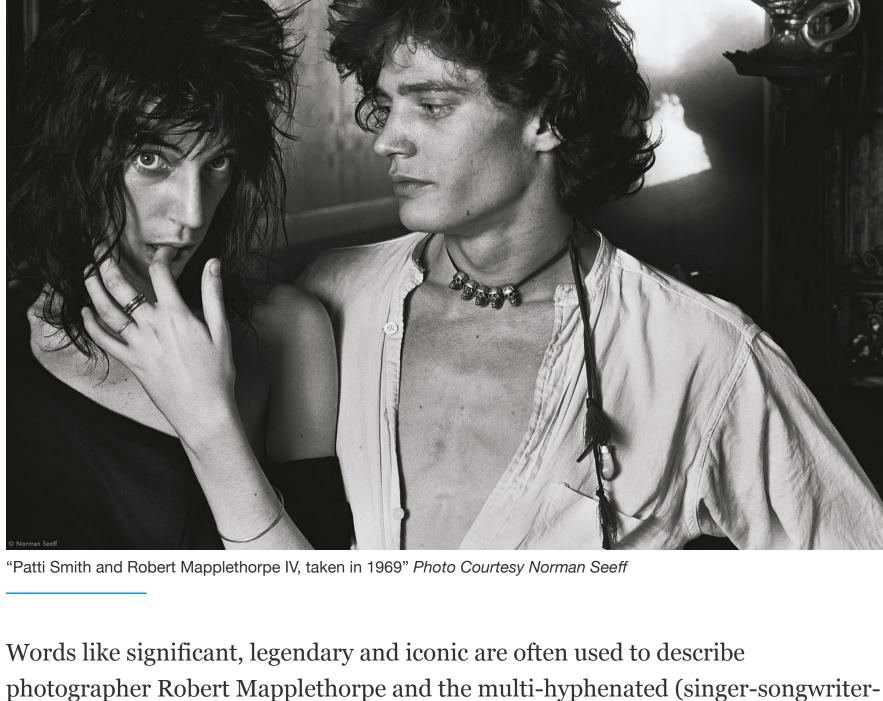
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**Under the covers of Selby Gardens'** 

**ARTS** 

## **Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith exhibit Emily Leinfuss** Special to the Herald-Tribune Published 7:15 a.m. ET Feb. 3, 2022 Updated 11:43 a.m. ET Feb. 3, 2022 **View Comments**



defy) even the most favorable definitions.

said Berry.

Flowers, Poetry, and Light," the sixth Jean & Alfred Goldstein Exhibition Series at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, was an exciting and complex mission for Curator at Large Carol Ockman and David Berry, vice president for visitor engagement and chief museum curator. "Both artists were brilliant at their craft. They were pioneers in their respective areas, did groundbreaking work, and remain the best exemplars of (that work),"

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poet-author-rock star) Patti Smith. While flattering, the way these two artists lived

and created – or, rather, lived to create – defied (and in Smith's case continues to

Thus, designing and implementing "Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith:

However, not everyone is aware of their significant contribution to the cultural

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Williams College in Massachusetts. Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe met in 1967 in New York City during a time

of massive cultural upheaval. The two artists lived together as lovers at first and

then remained lifelong friends and soulmates until Mapplethorpe's death from

AIDS in 1989. In 1970, when Mapplethorpe turned from mixed-media collage to photography, it was considered "the

Patti Smith's high-energy performance style led her to become a global rock star. But that trajectory began when she started reciting poetry in bars before the bands went on stage, which led to her Hyacinth, Robert Mapplethorpe, 1987 Courtesy Of Graphicstudio, University Of South Florida Collection experimenting with merging poetry with And Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

stepchild of painting and sculpture," said

Ockman. By the 1980s he had raised its

music. The shift was a natural extension

of her artistry with words and another

way to get her voice heard.

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status and value, solidifying the

legitimacy of the medium.

That's why the exhibit, which opens Feb. 13, had to "depict the historical sweep of the times the artists lived, and their relationship with each other," explained Ockman, who is also the Robert Sterling Clark professor of art history emerita at

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Nature also flutters throughout the range

exhibit those words. Berry explained that

heard, visuals were made from various

texts, including the lyrics to the song

of Smith's lyrics, poetry and literary

nonfiction. The challenge was how to

while music will most definitely be

Despite Mapplethorpe's masterful photographs of men in sadomasochistic clothing and situations, and Patti Smith's reputation as a punk rocker, both artists often

died of AIDS and he, too, was falling victim to the disease.

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The originality that streamed forth from

both artists was also the result of their

continual search for the perfect form to

communicate what they were seeing.

And, as Smith quotes Mapplethorpe in

"Just Kids," her National Book Award-

together, "Nobody sees the way we do,

Within their shared quest to portray an

winning memoir about their time

Patti."

"Irises," Robert Mapplethorpe, 1987 Courtesy Of Graphicstudio, University Of South Florida Collection

And Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

idea, or communicate a vision, the two artists "didn't differentiate between "Orchid," Robert Mapplethorpe, 1987 Courtesy Of Graphicstudio, University Of South Florida Collection forms," said Ockman. And Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

"My attitude when I photograph a flower today isn't different from when I portray a penis," Mapplethorpe has famously said. "One of the great things about Mapplethorpe's so-called controversial erotic art, is he represented a population that had never been seen in the realm of art before, (and) he had the credentials and the talent to get those photographs on the walls of the Whitney Museum of Art," said Ockman. In doing so, he called attention to and immortalized a gay community that was devastated by AIDS in the 1980s. "If it wasn't for Mapplethorpe, those people wouldn't be part of the cultural

lexicon," she added.

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portrayed flowers and nature in their work. "Mapplethorpe is the consummate photographer for images of flowers," said Ockman, noting that selections in the exhibit were printed at the University of South Florida, Tampa's Graphicstudio.

"Wild Leaves," which Smith wrote for Mapplethorpe after his longtime lover

Smith has also written directly about Mapplethorpe's flower photographs. The eulogistic, "A Final Flower," was authored as a forward to Mapplethorpe's posthumous book "Flowers." "He came, in time, to embrace the flower as the embodiment of all contradictions

reveling within ... . Often they were symbolic of him, his processes. Modeled in

their own simplicity – the blossoming of the mystifying aspects of the pure.'

geometric shade. Modified in a famous vase and inevitably turned in the realm of

their small towns. It was for any reason – for being an artist, for being different, for having political views, for just wanting to be free." Looking for fun events in February? 10 things to do in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith: Flowers, Poetry, and Light

The exhibit opens Feb. 13 and runs through June 26, 2022, at Marie Selby

Botanical Gardens. To learn more, go to selby.org.

Smith's work, then and now, embodies her desire to speak for and to the people.

disenfranchised people. In an interview by Terry Gross for NPR, she explained.

"Kids, like me, who were a little weird or a little different were often persecuted in

featured her now-famous photographic portrait, taken by Mapplethorpe.

But Smith has stated that her wider mission was to reach out to other

Her 1975 debut album, "Horses," was a masterpiece of rock and roll poetry. It also

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