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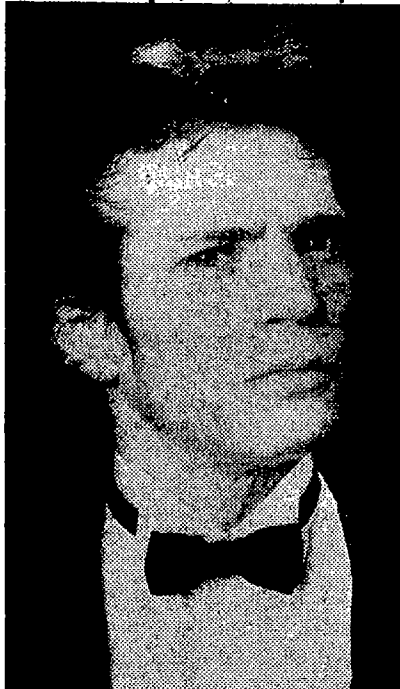
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Mapplethorpe Backers Picket the Corcoran and Plan New Shows



Robert Mapplethorpe, whose photography exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery was canceled, angering gay-rights protesters.

By BARBARA GAMAREKIAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 16 — Chanting slogans and waving photographs and signs, a hundred or more artists and advocates of gay rights demonstrated today at the Corcoran Gallery of Art to protest the cancellation of an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's work.

"We had to tear up a book," said Urvashi Vaid of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, speaking of the mounted Mapplethorpe photographs. "We felt awful doing that but we couldn't get prints on such short notice."

The Corcoran announced this week that it was canceling an exhibit of works by Mr. Mapplethorpe that was to have opened July 1. Mr. Mapplethorpe, a gay artist whose work has been exhibited in major museums around the country, died of AIDS in March. In addition to portraits and images of flowers, his photographs include many homoerotic and explicit sexual images.

"We don't think of this as a gay issue," said Ruth Bolduan, chairman of the Coalition of Washington Artists

and one of today's protest speakers. "We think it is an esthetic issue and social issue. A museum is a public forum for esthetic dialogue. In canceling the Mapplethorpe exhibition, the Corcoran has denied the people their right to make their own decisions about the merit of a work of art."

Laser Show Is Planned

Today's demonstration is but one of the protests planned in the Washington arts world. The night of June 30, when the opening reception was to have been held, Rockne Krebs, the laser artist, plans to project Mapplethorpe photographs on the facade of the Corcoran.

"We have gotten slides from the Robert Miller Gallery in New York," said Bill Wooby, an art dealer who owns the Collector Gallery and Restaurant in northwest Washington. "We have already gotten the necessary permit and we plan to project the entire show on the exterior of the Corcoran."

"We've been getting a big response from people outside D.C., calling, asking what they can do," he added. "Everyone is very upset with the Cor-

coran. But we understand the Corcoran; we know Washington. If the Corcoran had stuck to its guns on this issue, this would have made them a real museum in town, not just a stepsister to the Smithsonian."

In a telephone interview, Mr. Miller said he had done business with the Collectors Gallery. "We are glad to respond to the Washington community of artists and collectors and interested people who wanted to keep the situation open," said Mr. Miller, whose gallery has represented Mr. Mapplethorpe.

In canceling the show, the Corcoran's director, Christina Orr-Cahall, cited fears that the exhibition would create a controversy on Capitol Hill, where the National Endowment for the Arts, which helped pay for the Mapplethorpe show, is already facing scrutiny and criticism.

An Alternate Site

Another arts institution, the Washington Project for the Arts, is seeking to bring the Mapplethorpe show to the city later in the summer. Wednesday night its board, consisting of artists and art patrons, voted unanimously

to request the show from the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, the show's organizers.

"We feel it is essential to maintain and preserve a climate that encourages individual and institutional artistic freedom of expression in our city," said Jim Fitzpatrick, president of the group's board and a partner in the law firm of Arnold & Porter.

Michael Stout, executor of the Mapplethorpe estate and a member of the board of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, came to Washington Thursday to meet with Jock Reynolds, the director of the Washington Project for the Arts.

"I wanted to see Jim Fitzpatrick and the facility to be sure it was appropriate and could handle the exhibition," Mr. Stout said from New York today. "I think W.P.A. is extremely gallant, organizing themselves so quickly and coming up pretty much with the necessary funds."

The Mapplethorpe Foundation, he said, was the largest lender to the show, "maybe 70 percent." Mr. Stout added: "I don't see why the Washington Project for the Arts shouldn't host the exhibition. It is already organized

and was well received in Philadelphia and Chicago, which reflects oddly on the Corcoran. I think it is important to have it in Washington."

If the group cannot reach an agreement with the organizers in Philadelphia, he said, he is prepared to lend W.P.A. work from the Mapplethorpe Foundation. "It would be difficult to do in a short time, to pull together an exhibition that would have the same vitality as the one that Janet Kardon, the curator, put together for I.C.A., but we are committed to seeing something in Washington. The issues are very important here."

The Corcoran, meanwhile, has said nothing further about the cancellation since its original statement. Dr. Orr-Cahall is in Providence, R.I., at a meeting of the Association of Art Museum Directors.

As protesters marched in muggy sunshine today, two members of the museum's board, Gary Jewett and Gilbert H. Kinney, stood by in the cool environs of the Corcoran.

"We respect people's right to express their view," Mr. Kinney said. "It is a tough position, but we don't have anything more to say."