



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Hyacinth*, 1987. Courtesy of Graphicstudio, University of South Florida Collection and Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE
AND
PATTI SMITH

FLOWERS, POETRY, AND LIGHT

FEBRUARY 13 - JUNE 26

MARIE SELBY BOTANICAL GARDENS



Marie Selby Botanical Gardens provides 45 acres of bayfront sanctuaries connecting people with air plants of the world, native nature, and our regional history. Selby Gardens comprises the 15-acre Downtown Sarasota campus and the 30-acre Historic Spanish Point campus in the Osprey area of Sarasota County, Florida.

The Downtown Sarasota campus is the only botanical garden dedicated to the study and display of epiphytes, or air plants, including orchids, bromeliads, gesneriads, and ferns. It features the best scientifically documented collection of orchids and bromeliads in the world. The Historic Spanish Point campus is a heavily wooded area rich in Florida native species. Its botanical interest is matched by its archaeological significance, as the site of 5,000 years of Florida history.



JEAN & ALFRED GOLDSTEIN EXHIBITION SERIES

Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith: Flowers, Poetry, and Light is the latest installment in the Jean & Alfred Goldstein Exhibition Series, which examines major artists and their relationships to nature in the context of a botanical garden. The series is the cornerstone of The Living Museum® exhibition model at Selby Gardens, which offers an exciting schedule of rotating exhibitions that combine dynamic gallery and garden displays.

SELBY GARDENS' YEAR OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Hyacinth*, 1987. Courtesy of Graphicstudio, University of South Florida Collection and Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation



Carmen Mitrotta, *Geometric Leaves*, 2016



BEST IN SHOW 2021 Annual Juried Photographic Exhibition
BEEutiful by Gary McNulty



Orchid Show

Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith: Flowers, Poetry, and Light begins a year of photography at Selby Gardens, in which the beauty of nature is captured by the camera's lens. The summer show, running from July to September, is **Flora Imaginaria: The Flower in Contemporary Photography**. It will feature photographs of flowers by international contemporary artists, presented in the Museum of Botany & the Arts and around the Gardens. The **42nd Annual Juried Photographic Exhibition** will take place virtually from mid-August through September. This wonderful event offers our visitors, members, and volunteers an opportunity to take photos of the Gardens and submit them for a juried show. The year culminates in the annual **Orchid Show**, running from October to December, which will showcase scientific photography of Selby Gardens' own rare orchid collection.



Robert Mapplethorpe
Orchid, 1986-87
Courtesy of Graphicstudio, University of South Florida Collection
and Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation



Robert Mapplethorpe
Irises, 1986-87
Courtesy of Graphicstudio, University of South Florida Collection
and Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation



© Fred W. McDarrah

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

Robert Mapplethorpe was the most renowned photographer of the late twentieth century. He is best known for his black-and-white photographs consisting of portraits, nudes, and still lifes. Many of his finest still lifes feature cut flowers in vases from his own glass and pottery collections. His images made floral still life a significant contemporary genre, heightening the status of photography as an art form in the process.



© Tom Hill

PATTI SMITH

Patti Smith is a celebrated singer-songwriter, musician, and poet. She was a central figure of the punk rock scene of the 1970s and continues to perform for audiences around the world. She is an inductee of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and a member of *Rolling Stone's* list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time. Her memoir *Just Kids*, recounting her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe, won the National Book Award for Nonfiction.

Wild Leaves

Wild leaves are falling
Falling to the ground
Every leaf a moment
A light upon the crown
That we'll all be wearing
In a time unbound
And wild leaves are falling
Falling to the ground

Every word that's spoken
Every word decreed
Every spell that's broken
Every golden deed
All the parts we're playing
Binding as the reed
And wild leaves are falling
Wild wild leaves

The spirits that are mentioned
The myths that have been shorn
Everything we've been through
And the colors worn
Every chasm entered
Every story wound
And wild leaves are falling
Falling to the ground

As the campfire's burning
As the fire ignites
All the moments turning
In the stormy bright
Well enough the churning
Well enough believe
The coming and the going
Wild wild leaves

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

AND PATTI SMITH



Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe IV, 1969, photograph by Norman Seeff

DR. CAROL OCKMAN, Curator-at-Large, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens

He dwelled, in dream, where grandeur dwelled... And he moved from world to world in the pursuit and prying of those eyes. Obsessively, wholeheartedly as he extracted the essence, the mystery of each world.

— Patti Smith, “A Final Flower,” *Flowers Mapplethorpe*

For Patti Smith, poet, visual artist, global rock star, and soul-mate of the photographer, Robert Mapplethorpe, his images extract the essence of their subject. Each is a “perfect shot.” Critics and scholars say much the same: “What he looks for is the isness of something, the strongest version of it” (Susan Sontag), “the moment of perfection” and “the peak of bloom” (Janet Kardon), and “the right decisive and enduring moment” (Kay Larson). Mapplethorpe himself asserts that “the work moves toward a kind of perfection.”

We now have the opportunity to see for ourselves. Selby Gardens’ exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith: Flowers, Poetry, and Light* spotlights six Mapplethorpe photo-

gravures featuring flowers and plants, on generous loan from the University of South Florida and Graphicstudio, Tampa, where he made them in 1985.

To be sure, the perfection of Mapplethorpe’s flowers has to do with the blooms he photographs. Seemingly eternal, these images are the opposite of the long tradition of memento mori still life intended to remind the viewer of the fleetingness of life. The only hint of transience in Mapplethorpe’s flowers is the fact that they are cut.

If “peak of bloom” helps explain their perfection, it hardly suffices. Paramount is the way Mapplethorpe presents his flowers to the viewer—the choices he makes. For example, when he photographs a bunch of flowers, they are all the same genus: irises, tulips, roses, simultaneously focusing and intensifying our attention. Alternately, he gives us a single blossom—an orchid or a calla lily. Head on, the bloom fills, or even overflows, the page, making it appear both monumental and precious.

Often, the flowers appear in a vase, generally from Mapplethorpe’s own glass and pottery collections. Some of the

Venini glass is incised so that it diffuses light: the flower stems in the vase appear soft in contrast to the crispness of the blossoms. The photographer loved symmetry and asymmetry equally but loved balance even more. It is this sense of order combined with light—an otherworld glow, the dramatic play of light and shadow—that gives a sacred quality to Mapplethorpe’s flowers. They are his own blend of photographic tradition—from Julia Margaret Cameron to Edward Weston—and fashion photo shoots. As the artist himself puts it: “they don’t look like anyone else’s flowers.” And they don’t.

Describing her own idea of artistic excellence, Smith claims that art showed her it was possible to elevate yourself to your highest form. “What has always attracted me has been perfection, whether it’s a diamond or a Smokey Robinson song,” she said. Inasmuch as Smith and Mapplethorpe nurtured each other’s desire to be and to live as artists, their relationship achieved a kind of perfection.

Smith’s lyrical writings about Mapplethorpe’s flowers and their lifelong rapport pay homage to their friendship in ways no one else could. They punctuate the exhibition in Selby Gardens’ Museum of Botany & the Arts, which also features photographs of Mapplethorpe, Smith, friends, and intimates, along with images of the places where the artists lived and worked. The Tropical Conservatory evokes a photographer’s studio and gallery, while the Gardens showcase stunning horticultural displays inspired by the artists’ work.

TIMELINE

- 1967** Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith meet in New York City
- 1969** Mapplethorpe and Smith move into the Chelsea Hotel
- 1970** Mapplethorpe acquires his first Polaroid camera
- 1971** Smith performs as a poet for the first time
- 1972** Mapplethorpe meets lover and patron, Sam Wagstaff
- 1973** Mapplethorpe has his first solo gallery exhibition, *Polaroids*
- 1975** Smith releases her debut studio album, *Horses*
- 1976** Smith meets her future husband Fred “Sonic” Smith
- 1985** Mapplethorpe begins producing photogravures at Graphicstudio in Tampa
- 1988** The Whitney Museum of American Art presents the first major retrospective of Mapplethorpe’s work
- 1988** The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation is established
- 1989** Mapplethorpe dies from complications due to HIV/AIDS
- 1990** *Flowers Mapplethorpe* is published with an introduction by Smith
- 2007** Smith is inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame
- 2010** Smith publishes *Just Kids*
- 2021** Smith receives the key to New York City

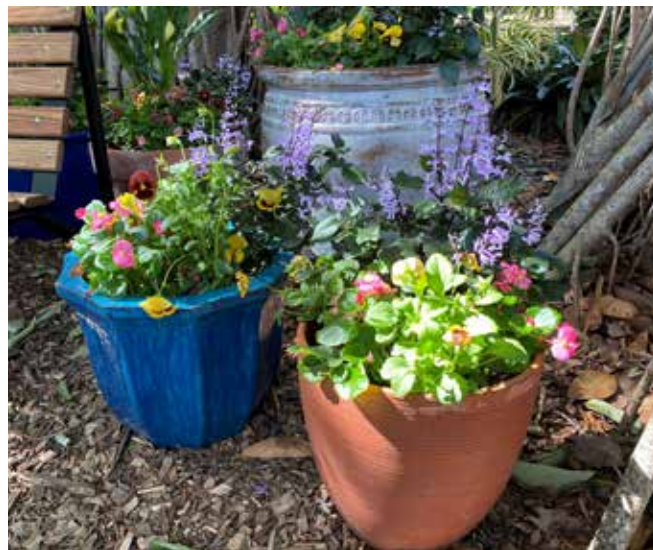
COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS

The following elements, inspired by the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith, are found in horticultural displays throughout the Tropical Conservatory and Gardens.



FRAMES

Frames are used to focus attention on, and compose views of, particular plants, offering a two-dimensional perspective of a three-dimensional subject. They reference the frames used to hang Mapplethorpe's photographs on the walls of a gallery.



COLOR

The richness of Smith's poetry and the vividness of her prose are reflected in brightly colored flowers and foliage in plantings across the exhibition.



LIGHT AND SHADOW

The balance of light and shadow in Mapplethorpe's photographs is mirrored in horticultural displays with cast shadows forming geometrical patterns.



GRAYSCALE

Mapplethorpe's black-and-white photographs influenced the use of shades of gray in plantings of foliage and other features all through the exhibition.

POETRY WALK

Located throughout the Gardens are eight panels featuring excerpts from two of Patti Smith's books. The first is her National Book Award-winning memoir *Just Kids*, recounting her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe, published in 2010. The second is an homage to Mapplethorpe in the form of an epic poem entitled *The Coral Sea*, published in 1996. Smith released *The Coral Sea* as an album in 2008 with musical accompaniment by guitarist Kevin Shields of My Bloody Valentine.

FOCAL POINTS

1. TREE IN FRAME

The spectacular *Tabebuia aurea* (trumpet tree) outside the Welcome Center is set in a cube-like frame, at times flattening and at others heightening the perspective of the tree as the viewpoint changes.

2. TROPICAL CONSERVATORY

The Tropical Conservatory evokes a photographer's studio and gallery, with a stunning display of air plants suspended in floating frames. The experience is enhanced with the sounds of Smith's iconic *Horses* album, the cover of which features her portrait by Mapplethorpe.

3. VIEWFINDER

The grid-like backdrop to the plants floating in the Koi Pond was inspired by the viewfinder of a Hasselblad camera like the one used by Mapplethorpe.

4. SELF PORTRAIT

Mapplethorpe took many portraits of himself, models, and celebrities. This Mapplethorpe-inspired photo opportunity enables you to enter the frame for a portrait of your own. Take a photo in black and white and share it with #SelbyGardens #BlackAndWhite.

5. 23RD STREET FIG

The pathway under the *Ficus altissima* (lofty fig) evokes the urban landscape of New York City, particularly the area along West 23rd Street in Manhattan near the Chelsea Hotel where Mapplethorpe and Smith once lived. The experience is enhanced with audio of Smith reading her memoir *Just Kids*.

6. GALLERY EXPOSED

The clean, crisp environment of the white-walled gallery has been set here in a lush, tropical landscape, in which plants have been framed as living works of art.

7. APERTURE

Through the circular opening to this structure, referencing the aperture of a camera, light is cast on botanical subjects set in negative space.

8. WAVE OF GRAY

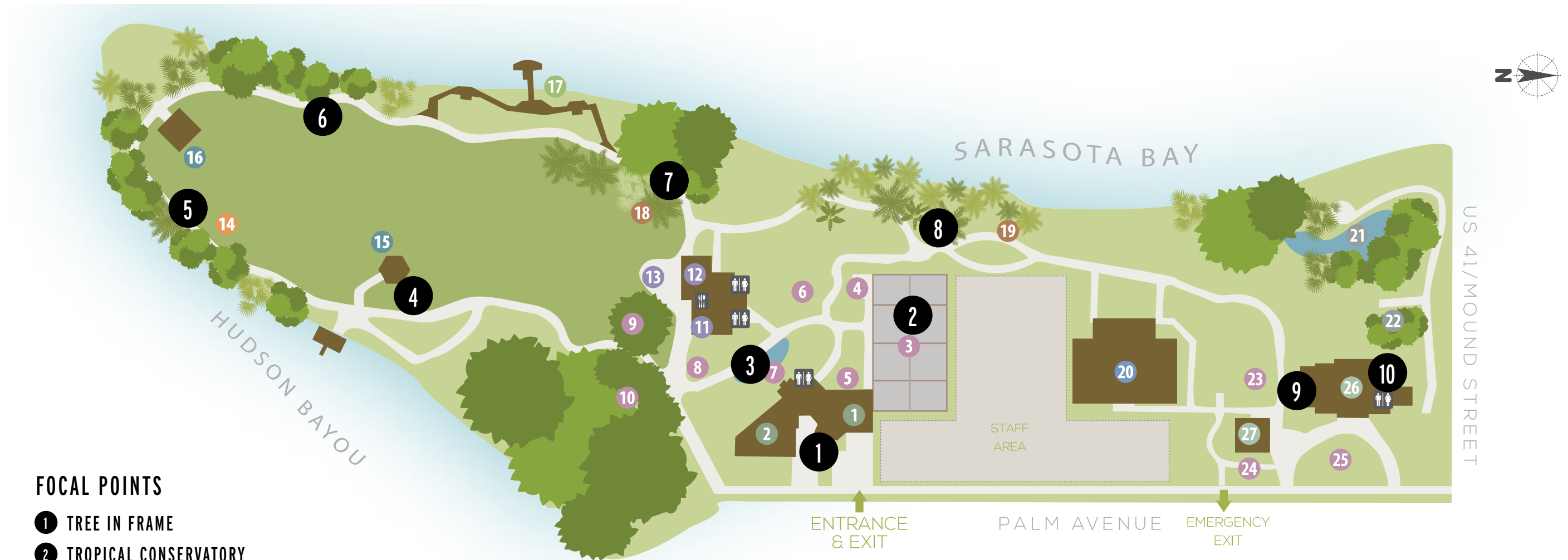
The ring of silvery-gray foliage, inspired by Mapplethorpe's black-and-white photographs, encircles a central planting bursting with color, representing the brilliant lyrics of Smith's *Wave* album, which wash over the space.

9. CONTRAST AND BALANCE

Props and plantings representing Mapplethorpe and Smith converge here at the entrance to the Museum of Botany & the Arts, where the story of these two different yet complementary artists and individuals is told.

10. MUSEUM OF BOTANY & THE ARTS

The Museum of Botany & the Arts presents Mapplethorpe's exquisite flower photographs made at Graphicstudio at the University of South Florida in Tampa together with Smith's haunting writings and lyrics. Reproductions of historic photographs of the two artists, their friends, lovers, and living spaces tell the story, accompanied by Smith's own words, of the pair she has indelibly called *Just Kids*.



FOCAL POINTS

- 1 TREE IN FRAME
- 2 TROPICAL CONSERVATORY
- 3 VIEWFINDER
- 4 SELF PORTRAIT
- 5 23RD STREET FIG
- 6 GALLERY EXPOSED
- 7 APERTURE
- 8 WAVE OF GRAY
- 9 CONTRAST AND BALANCE
- 10 MUSEUM OF BOTANY & THE ARTS

WELCOME CENTER

- 1 Admissions/Ticketing
- 2 Garden Shop

RAINFOREST

- 3 Tropical Conservatory
- 4 Bonsai Exhibit
- 5 Cycad Display
- 6 Fern Garden
- 7 Koi Pond
- 8 Bamboo Garden
- 9 Banyan Grove
- 10 Ann Goldstein Children's Rainforest Garden

SELBY HOUSE

- 11 Kids' Corner (closed temporarily)
- 12 Selby House Café
- 13 Selby Memorial

DESERT

- 14 Succulent Garden

GREAT LAWN

- 15 Gazebo
- 16 Schimmel Wedding Pavilion

MANGROVES

- 17 Steinwachs Family Foundation Mangrove Walkway

PALMS

- 18 Tropical
- 19 Coastal

EVENT CENTER

- 20 Event Center

NATIVE FLORIDA

- 21 Tidal Lagoon
- 22 Hardwood Hammock

DISPLAY GARDENS

- 23 Bromeliad Garden
- 24 Fragrance Garden
- 25 Butterfly Garden

PAYNE MANSION

- 26 Museum of Botany & the Arts (closes at 4:30 p.m.)
- 27 Amicus Learning Center



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Selby Gardens programs are sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, and paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenue.

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE AND PATTI SMITH

FLOWERS, POETRY, AND LIGHT

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