Robert Mapplethorpe

October 19, 2008 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

"I'm looking for the unexpected. I'm looking for things I've never seen before."
- Robert Mapplethorpe

Robert Mapplethorpe is being honored this year on October 19 for GLBT History Month. He is one of five HIV-positive honorees this month, including Greg Louganis, Cleve Jones, Randy Shilts and Bill T. Jones.

Mapplethorpe was a famous photographer before he died of AIDS-related complications in 1989, but the controversy over his photos in the early 1990s solidified his celebrity.

A traveling exhibition funded by the National Endowment for the Arts included some of his explicit sexual images, which stirred up debates over government funding for the arts and defining the difference between art and obscenity.

Those photos shocked me the first time I saw them years later, but I quickly recognized their beauty. Even if they were obscene (which I'm not conceding), there is no question in my mind that they were art.

He established in 1988 the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, which funds HIV/AIDS research and maintains his legacy.

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