

“This book is essential art history giving a sense of time, place, and context while illuminating two Titans—one remembered, one nearly forgotten—at the end of the 1980s.

These lively historic transcripts of legendary New Orleans artist George Dureau in conversation with gay historian Jack Fritscher act as a lens through which we’re able to peer into one of 20th-century art’s great questions of influence and mentorship: George Dureau and Robert Mapplethorpe.

The author who knew both men for years leads us Virgil-like through these sessions recorded at long-distance on landlines—and up close on video cameras on Dureau’s French Quarter balcony from 1989 to 1991. George is fit and on top fifteen years before Hurricane Katrina and Alzheimer’s took their toll.

Fritscher’s release of this archival material is a great gift and an act of love for Dureau and Mapplethorpe and the models.”

—Jarret Lofstead, writer/filmmaker, *George Dureau: New Orleans Artist*

“In 2018, when my gallery hosted the first exhibit hanging Mapplethorpe and Dureau side by side, reviewer John d’Addario noted that going beyond mentorship, the joint pairing revealed both men were working ‘in the same vernacular’ creating ‘a kind of dialogue through their images.’ Having represented George since 1988, I couldn’t agree more with d’Addario that ‘the full story of Mapplethorpe and Dureau is still one that needs to be told.’ And here in *Dueling Photographers* that story begins.”

—Arthur Roger, Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans

“Dueling Photographers is a biographical history and indispensable archive giving George Dureau his due as a singular photographer of non-normativity. Suitably adjacent to queer and disability studies, this unique book takes on the important task of revealing this artist whose compassionate camera presents the beauty of the disabled human body in all its wondrous diversity.”

—Robert McRuer, PhD, author of *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*

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“*Dueling Photographers* is my ‘black bible’ reminding me, chapter and verse, how my longtime friend George Dureau inspired me, a Puerto Rican New York photographer, about body, soul, and spirit in my own multiracial shoots and books. I deeply appreciate Fritscher’s candid and authentic portrait of George mentoring Mapplethorpe on the aesthetics, boundaries, and courtesies of interracial photography. Back in the day, I knew both George and Robert, so it’s lovely to hear George speaking for himself in the telephone calls and in-depth interviews that deliver great insight to his life and work which are both compelling and now historic.”

—Michael Alago, author, photographer, music executive, *Polaroid Encounters 1998-2009*

“Fritscher takes us deep into George Dureau’s world where George speaks for himself mentoring Robert Mapplethorpe about photography and race.

As close witness and part-enabler to Mapplethorpe’s trajectory, Fritscher who was friends with George and lovers with Mapplethorpe cross-stitches the two great artists to explicate both from his unique perspective.

For Dureau, who called himself Big Daddy, another southern Big Daddy appears in Tennessee Williams who is, at a slight distance, omnipresent in the French Quarter context whilst the other Big Daddy Sam Wagstaff in New York pours fuel on Mapplethorpe’s fire with notions of what parts of a Dureau picture work best for his boy Robert to slice off—distilling the concepts of form and deformity in the robustly humanistic portraits of George Dureau into his own stylised New York masks and mirrors.

Whilst one can’t ignore their dueling personalities, Fritscher takes pains to reassure the reader that neither Robert nor George was a villain. So I’ve discarded notions of which of the two rivals is better. I’m entranced by Fritscher’s eyewitness research in this richly detailed memoir of fresh scholarship documenting two artists and the eternal visions they left us.”

—A M Hanson, artist/photographer, London

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Life and Half Life

George Dureau, 83
1930–2014



Robert Mapplethorpe, 42
1946–1989

“Robert Mapplethorpe” by George Dureau from the cover of
Jack Fritscher’s 1994 memoir *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*

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DUELING PHOTOGRAPHERS

**GEORGE DUREAU
and
ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE**

Jack Fritscher, PhD

**PROFILES IN GAY COURAGE
Volume 2**

**Archival Edition
Jack Fritscher-Mark Hemry Archives**



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For author history and for historical research <https://JackFritscher.com>

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Special dedication and thanks
to my stoic editor and husband Mark Hemry
without whose remarkable diligence
for nearly fifty years
this material would have been
impossible to collect, analyze, and present

“A portrait is not made in the camera,
but on either side of it.” —Edward Steichen



(Top) George Dureau installing his epic twenty-foot-tall canvas *Mars Descending* at the Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans for its *War Exhibition*. April 8, 1991. Video photo by © Jack Fritscher

(Bottom) George Dureau posing his recurring photography model Glen Thompson for the documentary *Dureau in Studio*, April 10, 1991. Video photo by © Jack Fritscher

Foreword

These lively historic transcripts of legendary New Orleans artist George Dureau in conversation with Jack Fritscher act as a lens through which we're able to peer into one of 20th-century art's great questions of influence and mentorship: George Dureau and Robert Mapplethorpe.

New Orleans master craftsman Dureau holds court on art history, his life, lifestyle, and career, and both Fritscher and Dureau speak candidly about their longtime relationships with the recently departed Mapplethorpe.

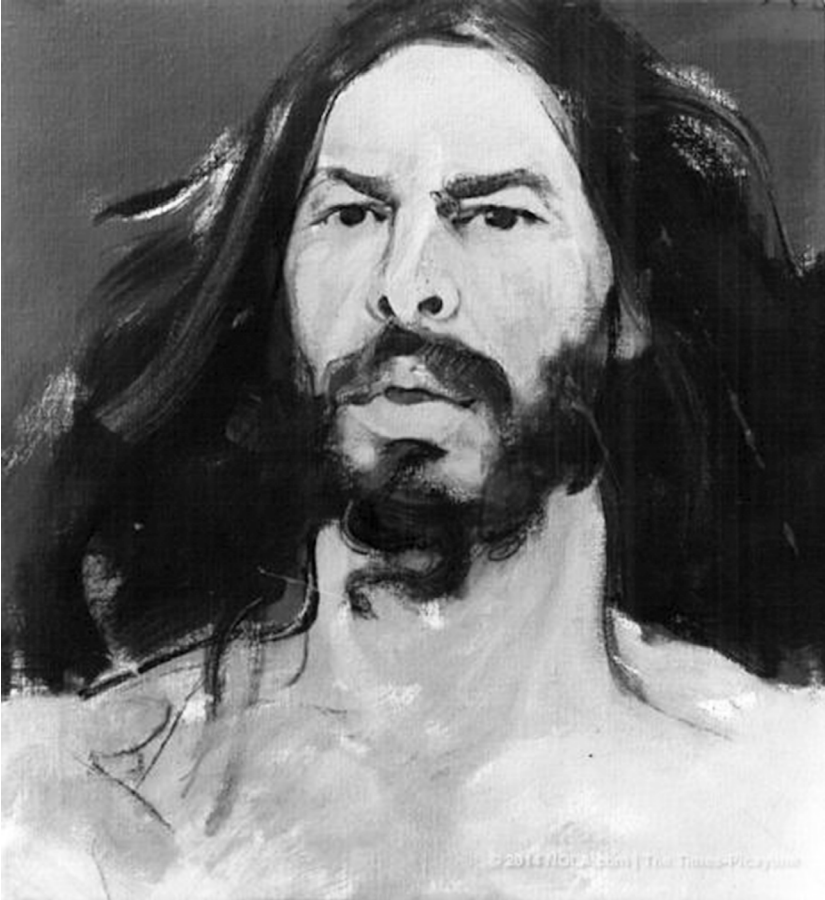
Fritscher who knew both men for years leads us Virgil-like through these sessions held long distance, and up close on Dureau's French Quarter balcony, from 1989 to 1991 showing us Dureau in his early 60s, demanding and generous, as he continues to pursue his art despite the odds surrounding homosexuality, race, and disability.

This is George fit and on top at the end of the century before Hurricane Katrina, gentrification, and Alzheimer's took their toll on this great creative and (generally) blithe spirit who lived twice as long as Mapplethorpe.

Authenticated by his friends and family, these conversations illustrate Dureau's life and his work as inseparable. Fritscher handles the artist with the same empathy and care George showed his subjects.

Fritscher's release of this archival material is a great gift and an act of love for Dureau and Mapplethorpe and the models. It's essential art history giving a sense of time, place, and context while illuminating two Titans—one remembered, one nearly forgotten—at the end of the 1980s.

—Jarret Lofstead, writer/filmmaker, *George Dureau: New Orleans Artist*



George Dureau, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1972. This assertive, baroque, and swashbuckling identity painting of the American man George Dureau, the homomascu-line homosurrealist who was nobody's second fiddle, was first published on the cover of the exhibition catalogue *George Dureau: Selected Works 1960-1977*, October 1-29, 1977, with essays by W. Kenneth Holditch and Terrington Calas, New Orleans: Contemporary Arts Center, 1977, 32 pages. First Edition.

Preface

THE PASSIONATE FEW

Emancipating New Orleans Sun King, George Dureau, from the Mapplethorpe Eclipse

“And it is by the passionate few that the renown of genius is kept alive from one generation to another. These few are always at work. They are always rediscovering genius. Their curiosity and enthusiasm are exhaustless, so that there is little chance of genius being ignored. And, moreover, they are always working either for or against the verdicts of the majority. The majority can make a reputation, but it is too careless to maintain it. If, by accident, the passionate few agree with the majority in a particular instance, they will frequently remind the majority that such and such a reputation has been made, and the majority will idly concur.”
—Arnold Bennet, “Literary Taste: How to Form It,” 1909

Toward the 2030 Centennial of the Birth of George Dureau

In the *Rashomon* of stories around George Dureau, I tip my hat to the Passionate Few who have had the pleasure of knowing George far better and longer than I who met him in April 1991 to shoot what he directed as his seminal video interview “for posterity” on his Dauphine Street balcony talking about his career and that of Robert Mapplethorpe whose double mentor he was in both photography and race relationships.

For too long the Mapplethorpe shadow has eclipsed George who, like Robert, was also a genius in a class and city of his own. In the way Stephen Sondheim spun a musical out of a painting to illuminate the other George, Georges Seurat, limning his *A Sunday*

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Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, the time has come to spin new art, thinking, and scholarship out of the storyboard painting, photography, and sculpture of George Dureau.

This book is a mandate of sorts because both George and my 1970s lover Robert asked me to write about them. For over forty years, I've told their stories in essays and books and onscreen documentaries recalling the way they were before their lives became legends that became myth. George passed at 83, and I, now 84, sorting my archives, simply wish to add my recorded conversations with George and my eyewitness observations about him to the sodality and solidarity of relatives, friends, critics, scholars, filmmakers, and art lovers who have championed him for so long.

George made everyone he met feel like a longtime friend.

To know George was to have a heartfelt platonic affair with him that endures to this moment.

"I'm capable," George told me, "of carrying on affairs with everybody on earth at the same time. Not successfully, but energetically. My life and my work are identical. There's a lot of warmth and passion, and a lot of dinners and candles in my life."

In 1994, George contributed his lovely 1979 photograph of a healthy Robert Mapplethorpe for the cover of my Mapplethorpe memoir which has its own Dureau chapter.

I cherish the last time my husband Mark Hemry and I were together with George in this life. It was Paris, May 3, 1996. We were strolling the Grande Allée path of the Tuileries on a sunny afternoon in the park with George. With our video camera filming, and George, vivacious and laughing, we were on our way toward the Maison Européenne de la Photographie where that night in the gay Marais at 5-7 rue de Fourcy, George was to be honored and our two video documentaries, *Dureau Vérité: Life, Camera, Canvas* and *Dureau in Studio*, were to be received into the permanent collection.

A dozen of his photos and one of his paintings hang, like a shrine to a New Orleans saint, in our living room where his lively spirit abides.

While George voices his authentic opinions and speaks for himself in my video documentation and telephone transcripts, may I

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say, out of respect for the *Rashomon* of other voices, stories, and opinions, that my efforts at scholarship, and my assertions, which I hope are compatible with others, are my own as are any errors in my book written to honor George.

Working as an academic gay historian since 1965, I have the greatest respect for the diverse efforts of the Passionate Few in New Orleans so long dedicated to keeping George's life, work, and legend alive. My thanks underscores my appreciation of the eyewitnesses who have written and spoken about, filmed, and cared for George so that my effort here can quote and assemble their voices together to organize existing information to offer research support to a new generation creating Dureau essays, biographies, films, and scholarship in the run-up to his hundredth birthday in 2030.

My particular appreciation to Don Dureau, Arthur Roger, Jonathan Webb, Jarret Lofstead, Michael Alago, Jim Marks, Edward Lucie-Smith, and especially George himself for the hours of his oral history transcribed here as he requested "for posterity."

Jack Fritscher, PhD
San Francisco
May 2024



George Dureau and Jack Fritscher strolling the Grande Allée, the Tuileries, Paris, May 3, 1996, on the way to La Maison Européenne de la Photographie at 5/7 Rue de Fourcy where that evening George was being fêted as the two Dureau documentaries by Fritscher and Mark Hemry were being inducted into its permanent collection. Video photo by © Mark Hemry from his unpublished footage of Dureau in Paris

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Contents

Foreword.xi
Preface	
The Passionate Few.xiii
TAKE 1	
An Eyewitness Camera.	1
TAKE 2	
Introductory Phone Call to George Dureau . . .	71
TAKE 3	
Dureau On Dureau Video Vérité	119
TAKE 4	
Dureau In Studio.	161
TAKE 5	
Hello, George Dureau: San Francisco Calling	167
Other Works by Jack Fritscher.	187



(Top) Painter-Photographer-Sculptor George Dureau at the open door of his French Quarter home and studio
Photo by © Michael Alago



(Left) Robert Mapplethorpe. Photo by © Jim Marks. "I shot Robert at his New York studio in 1986 when I interviewed him for *The Advocate* after publication of his *Black Book*. I think this is the best shot. When I mentioned Dureau, Robert told me after his recent visit to New Orleans, 'If you did in New York what George does in New Orleans, you'd be dead.'" —Jim Marks, journalist, from the "Jim Marks Collection," Stonewall National Museum and Archives, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

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