TAKE 1

AN EYEWITNESS CAMERA

George Dureau and Robert Mapplethorpe Through a Lens Darkly But Then Face to Face

Mentoring Mapplethorpe on Photography and Race

"The camera is a mindless lunatic."
—George Dureau
28 December 1930 – 7 April 2014

On April 8, 1991, after three cordial long-distance phone conversations between California and Louisiana beginning on August 26, 1990, I met George Dureau who shot Mapplethorpe who shot Dureau who sat for my eyewitness camera. Like Manet's canvas-slashing friendship with Degas, theirs was a gentlemen's rivalry fit for the iconic Dueling Oaks in New Orleans. "Daguerreotypes at dawn!"

When they met, George, forty-eight and laidback in horizontal New Orleans, was already "The Dureau." Robert, thirty-two and climbing in vertical New York, was not yet "The Mapplethorpe." Robert first learned of the charismatic Dureau when he set eyes on the Dureau pictures being collected by his millionaire lover Sam Wagstaff in the 1970s before the three were introduced in person by New Orleans art collector and radiologist, Russell Albright, MD, in 1979 beginning their intermittent and fractious nine-year friendship.

George, fit and quick-witted and speaking for himself with vivid memories reclaiming his history, told me, "Robert wrote to me and bought some of my photos in the late 70s before we met in person

in 1979 when we shot each other.[1] My photograph *Wilbert Hines* [1977, leaning against a mantelpiece], was the first one he bought. He asked me how I did it and like a fool I told him."

He prized his photos of the fresh-faced Robert and he gave me one of those able-bodied portraits—to document Robert's healthy look when he and I were just men together—for the cover of my 1994 memoir *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*.

George said, "I'm sending you the cute ones of Robert I took up at his place in 1979. It's very much the style that comes from my drawing that I've been doing since the 60s, the way it's posed and put into the circle. I transposed my figurative drawing into my photography. It represents him very nicely in the period that you and I knew him best."

The reciprocal portraits by the two gay alpha males with extravagant personas pulsate with the kind of *frisson* expected by fans of Tennessee Williams, Louis Armstrong, Anne Rice, and the *Gris-Gris* of Dr. John eager to experience the magical realism of the prismatic French Quarter where something behind appearance may be the reality of the story behind the story. Each single frame they shot contains plot, character, and mystery similar to the kind Oscar Wilde found in a single frame picture of Dorian Gray and David Hemmings found in a single frame in Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up*.

Dureau inflected Mapplethorpe who without the infusion of Dureau's extra-strength-added might have been less than "The Mapplethorpe." Punished for his good deed, Dureau was cursed with the label "Mapplethorpe's mentor." He who hated the suffocating caption and refused to play second fiddle to anyone will always be double-billed as a supporting actor in the Mapplethorpe drama in the way one can't say "Mapplethorpe" without saying "Patti Smith."

Theirs was not a solidarity relationship, but neither was a villain. Robert was not the first Northerner rummaging opportunity in the American South disfigured by war and disabled by defeat. John

1 All quotations of George Dureau, unless otherwise cited, are sourced from his interviews in this book.

Berendt in his nonfiction novel *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* called the modern type "Gucci carpetbaggers."

"Robert was so famous," George told me, "his fame shit all over him, and not just over him, over me as well. Because people got such a load of Mapplethorpe, it's hard for them to understand my work. He doesn't have anything to do with me. His famous style laid a wet blanket on every other photographer."

In the early 1980s, the two frenemies, sharing the male bond of the hunt, cruised Mardi Gras together in search of models and sex. George said, "We both liked bowlegged boys." During the years George knew Robert, he skipped the new parades and only went to Old Line ones like Proteus and Comus until 1991 when Proteus and Comus refused to stop discriminating against race, disability, and gender orientation.

In the late 1980s, in *The New Yorker*, Pulitzer winner Hilton Als, the African-American author of *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* who saw his first Dureau photo in 1986, pronounced Dureau's 1985 gaunt portrait of Mapplethorpe as "creepy."[2] George more gently termed his eyewitness take on Robert as "a bit bedraggled." Shot at the height of the AIDS emergency, this important picture by the master photographer of disability is an iconic Dureau portrait revealing Robert's specific anorexic disability from drugs, tobacco, and HIV while giving face to the universal horror of AIDS disablement.

Accepting George's invitation, I flew with my husband, video producer Mark Hemry, from San Francisco to New Orleans to interview him at his antebellum home and studio which he rented at 1307 Dauphine Street, a 6,000-square-foot bohemian loft where he had lived for six years at $1500 a month mostly on the second floor in two huge main rooms each measuring fifty-five by thirty so he could stand back and look at his very big and bold paintings from fifty feet away like his enormous *Doing the Pollaiolo at the New Firenze, Three Maenads and a Centaur*, and *The Poseurs Illuminate the Eighth Deadly Sin*.

2 Hilton Als, "A New Orleans Photographer's Eye for Male Beauty and Imperfection," *The New Yorker*, July 30, 2016

"It's an ordinary 1840 house with guillotine windows, but a hundred years ago, it was gutted and made into a warehouse so," he joked, "it's got a Queen Anne front and a Mary Anne behind."

The larger space was his grand living room arranged around his paintings, easels, antiques, and four-poster bed. The other was his open kitchen, a man's galley, the welcoming heart of his home, just six indoor feet away from his in-home studio, and his side rooms in which unhoused models, some wearing prosthetics, sometimes slept, and his storage rooms filled with unfinished work because perfectionist George was never done with his drawings and paintings which galleries sometimes had to pry out of his hands to meet deadlines.

"It has," he said in a nod to Warhol, "the flexibility of a little factory."

When George finished his four years of courses for his Bachelor of Fine Arts from Louisiana State University in 1952 as well as courses in architecture at Tulane University, his family, who ran several successful local businesses, set the twenty-one-year-old up in a boutique lamp store, Letolier Lamps, in the 100 block of Royal Street where he also framed pictures for clients and hung his paintings that soon outsold the lamps. So he took up painting and when he was drafted in 1955, he closed the shop.[3]

Entering the U.S. Army for two years, 1955-1957, George had to negotiate his place in a straight world not welcoming to queer folks whose very existence was down by law with arrests and sentencing to jails and mental hospitals. Then as now, gay men, told they were broken "freaks of nature," had to buck fear, danger, and homophobia to get out of bed, go out the door, and live. The Army placed him for training in counter-intelligence in Maryland until military spies on the sniff for deviates detoured his tour of duty off to a stint in clerk school in New Jersey which allowed the twenty-four-year-old boy from New Orleans to experience New York for the first time when the odds were against lads like him in 1955.

3 Don Dureau, "Interview by Mark Cave," Oral Historian, Historic New Orleans Collection, May 26, 2015. https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/thnocaudio/mss629.19_web.mp3

In 1950, five years before George was drafted, U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy's hysterical House Un-American Activities Committee's witchhunt had ignited the ongoing Lavender Scare about subversive queers. In 1953, two years before George put on his uniform, President Eisenhower had issued executive order 10450 banning "sex perverts" from all federal and government jobs which destroyed lives for forty years until repealed in 1995.

In the worst ever decade to be gay in America, George, assessing his military career and calculating the homophobic odds against him, figured that his background checks—arguable and ambiguous even with the beards of his several women friends—caused him to be downgraded from counter-intelligence to an outpost in Indiana where he worked closeted off as a desk clerk and librarian until mustered out in 1957. Despite that, he said, "When I was in the Army, I seduced a mountain of people. I didn't go for sex first. I went for romance first. I worked at it because sex was a wonderful jewel in those days whereas today it's thrown on the counter like meat. I'm still romancing everybody who has ever appeared in my photographs. There's a lot of warmth and passion, a lot of dinners and candles in my life."

Having come home to New Orleans, the Army veteran and painter trying to kickstart his career in 1959 had his first art show at his LSU alma mater where ten years earlier in 1948, the "fabulous" Russian émigré dancer and choreographer Tatiana Semenova, founder of American Youth Ballet, much to George's flamboyant pleasure, had recruited the well-built sophomore with a dancer's body to lift and spin teenage ballerinas until George told her: "That's enough."

When he waltzed out Tatiana's door, he took the flowing movement, shape, and drive from dance into his brush, his first tool, and put it on canvas. When he took up the camera, his second tool, in 1970, he choreographed his models into personally expressive poses across the basic positions of dance. And Tatiana, "My Fabulous Tatiana," became one of the big-gestured stories he dined out on forever.

"I downright seduce the people I shoot," George said. "I put them through all kinds of directorial changes. I make up all kinds of stories to liven them up. 'Oh, let's do this one as if you're waiting for the bus to come and get you.' I'll babble at them and stroke them, and once in awhile we're having sex when I take the picture. I play with people a lot. I don't mind stroking them and kissing them and carrying on. Sometimes my pictures are foreplay or afterplay as the case may be. The foreplay experience of greasing my black models isn't a bad idea. I got that from my kickboxer friends [his models pro-athlete Al Mims Jr., Jeffrey Cook, and Byron Robinson] who grease themselves to look good under the lights. Robert got that from me.

"There are pictures in which I have directed things toward an ideal pose during a shoot, and others in which I have left the awkwardness in them. I just don't want to iron the person out of it. I try to keep some contact with their faces and personality. I'm kind of a slave to my models, in the camera, but not in painting. I serve them with my camera because I think it might be their only or last chance to say who they are, particularly if they have one arm and a scar on one cheek. It might be their one chance to speak to posterity.

"My camera gives them voice. So I frequently, always, let them do a couple of their own poses because they seem to crave something that they've been saving up for years. I give them space, step back, and kind of rearrange their ideas and hope for a compromise between my idea and their idea.

"I'm inclined to see my pictures in the eyes of the people I photograph, not the buyers. When Robert did a scary picture he was always thinking of the eyes of the beholders, the rich people who would buy it, look at it, and have to swallow it. His photos were like the painting of the reclining nude female hanging over the bar in a western cowboy saloon, quite passive, invitational, for horny men to speculate on and use in their heads as they will. But mine do the opposite. My pictures flip that dynamic. My pictures look back at the cowboys looking at the picture. My models make eye contact which can make viewers feel uncomfortable or guilty.

"Robert's models are meant to be looked at. His work is synthetic in the sense of his flattening his models against geometry. He pushed them all into a sort of come-hither calendar-boy pose that, even when they're looking menacingly at you, you're saying, 'Oh, that Robert's *Mr. December*.'"

"He knew," I said, "the sexual market value of his men."

"One thing I'll give him. He was very good at editing his pictures and figuring out what was the most bombastic and best. He also cropped his frames which I don't. He has many cropped images that might not be so impressive if they weren't cropped. So his work is very edited, and what's edited is edited. What's not edited by him now he's dead must be edited by someone else. So it's not the same original as him doing it."

In the way both Dali in 1939 and Warhol in the 1950s designed windows for Bonwit Teller on Fifth Avenue, George in 1959 began decorating windows for Kreeger's, the stylish women's emporium on Canal Street where he became art director. In the perfect frames of those plate-glass windows, the twenty-eight-year-old painter dedicated ten years of his life during the Swinging Sixties—except for nine months in New York in 1965—rehearsing disability by staging the postures of his mannequins' disjointed torsos, with boxes full of moveable and removable arms and legs and hands and feet, next to his props to engage window-shoppers the way his gay gaze would soon direct his models and his *mise en scene* within the frame of his photos to engage his viewers.

Film documentarian Jarret Lofstead, confirming the timeline in George's archive at the New Orleans Historic Collection, said that "while George was creating the windows for Kreeger's," he, who always loved the passing parade of the streets, was inspired to "reach out to the Orleans Gallery and the Downtown Galleries to provide art for the displays" to bring art to the people.[4] What an interesting 21st-century gallery show it would be exhibiting George's emerging eye if only he had taken up the camera in 1960 instead of 1970 and shot a treasure trove of documentary photographs of his ten years of staged and framed public window art.

4 Jarret Lofstead, email to Jack Fritscher, January 2, 2024

New Orleans Rhodes Scholar Keith Marshall—the brother of Don Marshall, current president of the Jazz & Heritage Foundation—was the director of the Contemporary Arts Center for Dureau's big 1977 show *George Dureau: Selected Works 1960-1977*. Keith wrote that their mother, Naomi Marshall, gave George his first show in her Downtown Gallery in 1961, and exhibited him five times up through 1965. He recalled the always stylish George Valentine Dureau in his 2014 "Valentine for George" in *ViaNolaVie* online. He had incidentally witnessed George channeling midcentury queer fashion gayly sourced in Oscar Wilde's secret code of the green carnation. "George wore a green woolen three-piece suit, even in summer. He dressed that way when Mother finagled him into being a judge for the Miss New Orleans Pageant held at Pontchartrain Beach that year."[5]

Don Dureau,[6] George's compatible half-brother and executor, a jovial Sagittarius centaur/archer born December 2, 1942, twenty-six days before George, a horned Capricorn goat/satyr, turned twelve on December 28, said, "George always dressed up especially when he was around women. In the early 60s, when he went out on his own, he wore black pants and a man's longsleeve white dress shirt tied up into a knot at his waist."[7]

George's home was a stage fit for a Tennessee Williams drama because he was very like the archetypal kind of male whose life-force Williams could not resist. In the way Williams' plays put beds center stage, George arranged his main public living room around the dramatic 19th-century Southern walnut four-poster canopy bed inherited from his grandmother by way of his beloved mother Clara who, having divorced his father in 1935, raised him with her three sisters, one of whom taught the boy to paint courtyards, moonlight, and magnolias.

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5 Keith Marshall, "How's Bayou?: A Valentine for George Dureau," *ViaNolaVie*, April 15, 2014

6 Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Don Dureau are from "Don Dureau: 'The Dureau Family Interview,' with Jack Fritscher," December 30, 2023.

7 Don Dureau, "Interview by Mark Cave," *op cit.*

Living inside art history, he so often posed stretched out like a reclining Matisse *Odalisque Couchée aux Magnolias* on that signature bedstead for photographers that those butch boudoir shots can be shuffled like a deck of virtual selfies lensed by cameramen he directed.

"Get this," George said to me. "I was talking to this woman [Rosemary James] who has this beautiful little house, something called 'Faulkner House Books' here in the Quarter, and she had also just been photographed for the *Classic New Orleans Homes* book. She said, 'Did they photograph your bed properly?'

"I said, 'It's a great angle. The bed's three quarters of the way into the picture.'

"She said, 'Oh, the bed from the front.'

"I said, 'Yes. It looks like a Federalist bed [1788-1800] that I draped sort of like Manet's *Olympia*. It has this Federalist appearance that really describes my nature. Like *Olympia* with her come-hither stare, I'm forthright, upright, but you could get to me if you tried.'

"She said, 'Did he get all that?'

"I said, 'I'm afraid it didn't come out as well as I thought he could have done.' But he must have liked it because he asked if they could shoot a few more photos for *Southern Accents* [a home, antiques, and luxury magazine]. *Southern Accents* here we come! All the magazines get a notion to do me, but some drop out because they decide there's just not enough 'precious stuff' in the house."

In truth, his domestic sanctuary was large enough to contain his huge paintings, his cameras, his photographs, his sketches, his collections of other artists, his antiques, his household treasures, his pots and pans, and his ebullient self.

Off-stage outside his guillotine windows, the base beat from car radios cruising past, the distant barking of dogs, the street voices calling out, the floating echo of a spasm band of young rhythm boys busking a mile away on Bourbon Street wailed like a blues soundtrack up to Dureau's wrought-iron balcony, where, having a go at spinning Tennessee Williams, he entertained guests over his famous crawfish étouffée dispensing to each and all the kindness

strangers always depend on. Or yelling at walkers, as we saw one afternoon, to pick up their dog shit.

Immediately upon our arrival he greeted us like long-lost friends and, with his natural command presence polished by military training, got us down to business videotaping him rushing and brushing his final strokes on an epic twenty-foot-tall canvas, *Mars Descending*, due that day for delivery to the Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans for its *War Exhibition*.

He was full of good ideas, fresh history, and deprecating humor. "Of course, I *had* to be a figure painter when it was so out of style in the 1960s. I've always worked against the grain. Back then I was a drunk and talking all the time before I quit all that, shut up, and got down to work." [*George Dureau: Self-portrait with a Wine Glass, within a Circle*, charcoal on canvas]

While Mapplethorpe shot self-portraits sometimes like a character actor in drag, George was a leading man who deemed it "odd to pose yourself pretty like a lady." As a star window dresser on Canal Street showcasing women's styles, he said, "I didn't dress like a girl when I was young. I'd maybe dress with ribbons around my dick, but I didn't dress in ladies dresses."

George drew and painted romantic self-portraits but did not shoot selfies. He knew his face without studying his identity on camera where Robert searched for his. George whose swashbuckling panache partying in a port city was as picturesque as the cover of a romance novel described himself to me: "I have a Minoan profile. I've got an exaggerated profile and I always think of it as my Minoan profile, you know, like the pottery that has satyrs and whatnot with very strong profiles. My hair is in a tight little braid down my back. I have a rather garish, deep profile."

While some journalists trying to heroize George report the wishful math that he served in the U.S. Army during the Second World War, he didn't. He, who was nine months younger than the starry composer Stephen Sondheim and six weeks older than star-crossed actor James Dean, was only a lad of fourteen when the war ended one year before Robert Mapplethorpe was born. As a veteran, he rarely spoke about his service, but he often wore his dog tags

alongside other fetish necklaces resting on his bare chest in his open shirt, and, sometimes, he painted his dog tags as a kind of signature in his art.

He said, "I like to do things political, and I'm glad that today I'm just as happy to do that as I was in the 60s. I like to push people into a corner of social and political problems, but I always try to bring a broad universality to it. My gut politics guide my work. Does politics trivialize painting? Think of Picasso's *Guernica*, Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat*."

On the evening of July 29, 1964, just after the Civil Rights Act passed, George was arrested in his Speedo swimsuit during his own private party in his home-studio located at 611 Esplanade simply because he happened to be the bohemian artist living upstairs over the Quorum Club where he was a charter member. "I was having a soirée with Negroes on my porch," he said. The Quorum was the only integrated coffee house in Louisiana, where the audience had come to hear black male blues singer and guitarist Babe Stovall (1907-1974).

In a culture where militant segregation was the norm, George said, "In 1945 [when he was about to turn fifteen], I sat behind the 'Colored Only' sign on a bus and the bus driver was furious."

Listening for years to boys' adventure programs like *The Lone Ranger*, *Sargent Preston*, and *Sky King* with his outsider queer-kid ear pressed close to his family's big radio, the precociously aware twelve-year-old winner of a local art contest woke up in the home of his liberal mother. In 1942, a month after the shock of Pearl Harbor, the start of World War II, and the draft of boys six years older, he could not help absorbing radio news about January race riots two hundred miles away in Alexandria, Louisiana, and February race riots in Detroit, and the summertime arrest in Nashville of a black man (the gay Bayard Rustin) for his sit-in on a bus. In a then-white city, young George intuitively identified with blacks the way gays often do because race prejudice, although different, seems akin to anti-gay prejudice. Ten years after George's 1945 sit-in, Rosa Parks refused

to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

The Quorum hosted poetry, dance, chess, conversation, and voter registration, but was raided because the coffee house was according to undercover police "a hotbed for communism, propaganda, homosexuality and racial integration." For all that jazz, the price of membership was a cup of coffee.

To prompt civil rights discussion, the coffee house discussed topics like white racists's favorite film, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. On its advertising poster, the three-hour film originally titled *The Clansman* featured a white-robed and hooded Ku Klux Klansman standing next to a burning cross. Making heroes of the KKK and villains of stereotyped blacks played by whites in black face, it was a huge box-office hit and the first film ever screened in the White House.

In the *French Quarter Journal*, Mary Rickard reported: "Although one of Dureau's frightened party-goers managed to escape arrest by jumping out a window, vice squad officers still rounded up 73 unsuspecting Black, white and Creole people, citing them with disturbing the peace with 'tuneless strumming of guitars and pointless intellectual conversation.' But undoubtedly, every person arrested understood the real reason for the bust: integration."[8]

So complicated was segregation around race and gender that on July 31, Quorum manager Jim Sohr told the *Times-Picayune*: "When we got down to the police station, they really had to wrack their brains to figure out how to separate us. They had to put the black females in one cell. The black males in another cell. The white females in one cell and the white males in another cell."

One of the policemen, blind to the fact they'd mixed gays and lesbians with straights in all four cells, explained, 'We don't mix 'em here!'"

Soon after, they were all bailed out by civil-rights activist Ernest "Dutch" Morial who later became New Orleans first black mayor in 1978. Thanks to him and the ACLU, all charges were dropped

8 Quorum information and quotations, Mary Rickard, "Everything Under the Sun: The Quorum Club," *French Quarter Journal*, March 30, 2023

including against Dureau who had been collared for, among other crimes against humanity, "resisting arrest" after the cops threw the Army veteran down the stairs three times and he could not get up from the floor.

George was thrown down the stairs of segregation yet again seven years later in 1971 when—like a foreshadowing of the censorship of Mapplethorpe's photos being put on trial in Cincinnati in 1990—he had to deal with nerve-wracking city rumors that cops were threatening to close his exhibit of paintings and drawings at the Orleans Gallery because black and white male nudes were paired within the same canvasses. Adding insult to injury, "Alberta Collier, art critic for the *Times-Picayune*, didn't like the exhibit…. Dureau…felt it was an assault on his character. He was quick to point out that there was no sexual activity in those works. As a matter of fact, unlike Mapplethorpe and others, there are no sex acts in any of Dureau's art…(thirty years later he can still recite her offensive words almost verbatim). The public rejection provoked in him a period of self-reflection, even depression. He declined to exhibit again for six years…. It was in this period of artistic hibernation that he discovered photography."[9]

When George was a dashing young buck acting up in the 60s, he flaunted segregation laws and continued to party and dance with black and white and brown Marines on shore leave at the sailor dive bar, La Casa de los Marinos, which, although illegal because it mixed all races, was ignored by the police and the Shore Patrol who turned blind eyes to the necessity of the venue. "The French Quarter," George said, "was full of sailors and soldiers from World War II and Korea and the Army. You could fall in love!"

Richard Balthazar recalled an hallucinatory mural on the walls over the crowd that perhaps impelled George to paint his own baroque allegories of classical myth on the walls of New Orleans restaurants and bars.

"The third room," Balthazar recalled, "had its own even more powerful juke box and a hallucinatory mural on the walls over the

9 Doug MacCash, "Opening the Shutter," *The Times-Picayune*, October 22, 1999

crowd. Around the room in a dreamlike swirl ran a dark flood of writhing nudes, racing motorcycles, a matador with sword, and a charging bull. As above [on the walls], so below [on the dance floor]. It was here in the dense throngs of the third room that the ecstasy happened, the Dionysian transports of *merengues* and *cumbias*. The clock was forever stopped at ten of three, though that was usually an early hour in an evening's revelry. We'd dance till dawn, even after."[10]

After Don Dureau turned the legal drinking age of eighteen in New Orleans, he often ran across his thirty-year-old brother at La Casa where they skirted a respectful distance around each other, not so much because of family estrangement or age difference, but because George was out and Don was not.

Don Dureau's eyewitness testimony, at once so parallel and parallax to George, provides a foundational voice documenting in sharp relief how Dureau Family Life, a struggle of patriarchy and matriarchy around divorce and homosexuality, impacted the patriarchal George who created as counterpoint his own chosen family shooting what he called his "family pictures" of nonnormative men exiled by society.

"I used to go to La Casa," Don told me, "with my high-school fraternity brothers and dance with girls. I'd see George and we'd wave at each other, and I'd go and tell him hello, and he'd hug me, and that was about it for our relationship. He'd then go off and be sitting at the bar with his legs crossed, looking around and scoping out the guys. I knew what was going on even though he always had lots of women in his life. One time, I was going into Al Hirt's Jazz Club on Bourbon Street with a girl and some other couples and someone said, 'There's your brother.' And there was George on a date with the girl my parents thought he'd marry."

George told me in 1991, "Three months ago, I turned sixty. I've been laying men, devotedly laying people, some women, since the 1940s. I've changed some with age, but back then I would go dancing and have a riotous good time in the Spanish or Greek bars. If

10 Richard Balthazar, "La Casa de los Marinos," January 18, 2015. https://richardbalthazar.com/2015/01/18/la-casa-de-los-marinos/

you fell in love with somebody, wasn't that wonderful? And if three months later they screwed you over, well, that was just a different period. You could fall in love with a sailor and wait for him to come back from some endless war."

Robert Mapplethorpe who was not a dancer and was never arrested wasn't particularly political or patriotic. As a teen cadet in the Pershing Rifles at Pratt Institute (1963-1969) during the Vietnam War, he gladly submitted like Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited* to the thrills of the meaty boys hazing him. Turned on by the inches of rifle they shoved up his bum, Pratt's "Imp of the Perverse"—who did things simply because he could—would soon have his nipple pierced and a whip up his ass. Picture the boy Bob becoming the man Robert conjuring himself in his dorm room, mirror-fucking himself through a glass darkly in his full-length mirror, creating the perfect moment of a live selfie in the fever dream of his framed reflection.

Recalling three years of intimacies with Robert in his early thirties, I can retrofit an impressionistic flashback of the teenage enigma picturing himself like Cocteau's "Orpheus" approaching the mirror, loaded on his first LSD, standing in front of the mirror, wearing his ROTC military uniform as a sex fetish, admiring his dick hanging out like a penis in a polyester suit. Imagine him invoking the gay gods Eros and Priapus and jerking off to the magical thinking of masturbation, conjuring his new self-image while smoking his first cigarettes. Think of him who could get no satisfaction wanking to the beat of his leather-clad idol Mick Jagger singing "Sympathy for the Devil" and hailing Satan and erecting his future. Every picture Robert ever took was autobiography of his forty years of longing.

In the closets of the 1950s, gay men often paired with women as self-defense against anti-gay prejudice. This pre-Stonewall vestige continued socially in the 60s and 70s in trendy pansexual venues like Warhol's Factory and Studio 54—and with men like George, and Robert who met his beat-punk muse in fellow Pratt student Patti Smith in 1967. In 1968, he dodged Vietnam by showing up for his induction physical stoned on acid. What "Americana" he shot was declarative fundamentalist American iconography of handguns,

assault rifles, knives, a Navy aircraft carrier, and a tattered American flag or two.

Robert's weapons pictures, often featuring himself brandishing his fetish guns and knives, went unnoticed by gun-culture conservatives, but his leathersex pictures put a target on his back during the Satanic Panic of the Reagan 1980s when religious fundamentalists lost their minds fantasizing about AIDS as divine judgment, gay satanic rituals, and the prolonged McMartin Pre-School child molestation case (1983-1990) that all exploded into an Ohio witch trial around Robert's pictures.

George's only gun pictures date from 1996 when in response to the murder rate in New Orleans, he photographed his amputee models holding guns decommissioned by the police for the group show *Guns in the Hands of Artists* at Jonathan Ferrara's Magazine Street gallery, Positive Space.

George and I met at a pivotal moment in the American culture wars. Six months before, on October 5, 1990, jurors ended the Mapplethorpe censorship trial in Cincinnati with a not-guilty verdict. Six weeks before, Republican President George H. W. Bush's Gulf War (August 2, 1990 – February 28, 1991) had ended in ignominy and was sharing the endless headline news about the Mapplethorpe verdict and the television polemics of the Republican defunding of the National Endowment of the Arts.

"We Americans find it very easy to turn success into moral right," George said. "Because we were 'successful' in this Gulf War, we tell ourselves 'You see, we are morally correct.' And unfortunately, I think we're going to do a lot of that thing soon with cops and fascism. I'm afraid that we're on a tear now that we've discovered where we've failed economically, and where we've failed politically and morally. We [think we] can clean up all that [our national moral failure] by using our guns and make "ourselves" *like* "ourselves." We really look like we're on that path."

Robert had been dead only twenty-four months. He had fame in the inside baseball of the art world and notoriety in the gay world, but he had no idea how world famous he would become a hundred days after he died when Jesse Helms, the Republican Senator from

North Carolina—not realizing the irony that his loud censorship was a million bucks of publicity even Robert could not buy—denounced him by name on the floor of the U.S. Senate and made him a pop-culture icon, a cultural lightning rod, and a legend.

"Robert's been gone that long?" George said. "I can never remember birthdays and anniversaries."

In the living room of his beautiful residence and studio that had, he said, "the biggest and best balcony in the city," George, who was born to play to the balcony, stood vibrant and barefoot on his enormous unstretched canvas that cascaded from the ceiling down the wall and fell in folds around his feet. At the top, he'd painted a military tank charging in 3-D perspective out of the painting. At

the bottom where the canvas dropped and spread like a rug across the floor, I filmed George crawling on his knees across his canvas while painting his final swirling Persian carpet patterns where he knelt.

Doug MacCash, astute in his continuing coverage of George, wrote in his *Times-Picayune* obituary for George: "He painted like

a dancer."[11] George had so internalized the aesthetics of ballet and modern dance at LSU that in 2015, Dureau, the effulgent painter, the visionary photographer, would have been a perfect convivial mentor to the Scottish Ballet's ecstatic production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. His figurative paintings of dancing satyrs and diaphanous women, like his strutting male quartet in *George and His Closest Friends*, his four-figure balletic *Classical Tableau*, his theatrical *Scandal at the Forge of Vulcan Café*, his 8x22-foot widescreen triptych *The Parade Paused* in Gallier Hall, and his untitled three-panel mural at Cafe Sbisa, are masterful storyboard sources of theatrical character, costume, and choreography.

An hour later, Mark and I and painter-photographer Jonathan Webb, George's personal assistant from 1982 to 1998, helped him transport his still-wet painting to the Contemporary Arts Center two miles away at 900 Camp Street where we three helped him hang and unfurl the falling folds of his unframed canvas for our video camera.

"This *War Show* is not anti-war," George said. "It's simply about war. Although my painting certainly dramatizes the current war."

"Another war to protest," I said, "while we're busy protesting censorship."

Perhaps because George Valentine Dureau, Junior, the hyphenate painter-photographer-sculptor, was the son of a resilient mother, Clara Rosella Legett Dureau (1909-1994), and an alpha father, George Valentine Dureau, Senior (1905-1994), who was a wedding and party supplier, he became a natural-born bon vivant and raconteur. He was the man New Orleans high society, and rich Texans in town to turn oil into art, wanted to sit next to at supper.

His resonant voice and genuine laughter made the new people he met feel like longtime friends. There was no falseness or hypocrisy in the man. He had that charming quality of storytelling peculiar to Southerners like William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Tennessee Williams who, himself a Sunday painter like Welty, once lived around the corner from George in an attic apartment

11 Doug MacCash, "George Dureau, New Orleans master painter and photographer, has died," *Times-Picayune*, Nola.com, April 8, 2014

at "722 Toulouse Street" where he began drafting *Vieux Carré*, his play about a painter and a photographer set at "722 Toulouse." Had George who told me he was "wildly dyslexic" read Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, an immersive Southern novel of disability narrated by the kind of triumphant alienated body "freak" beloved by Dureau, he would have cum over Wolfe's own orgasmic paean to "the romantic charm of mutilation."

Dureau addressed the gravitational pull of Southern time and place and artists in a panel discussion on "Pre-Pop Modernists," Arthur Roger Gallery, September 12, 1989. George, who grew up learning to paint during the popular regionalism movement in the art of the 1930s and 1940s, said about his staying put deeply immersed in the French Quarter: "…my purpose is to create a universal kind of statement in my pictures, but coming from certain particulars which back them up. Because of that, my own life has to be, I think, like the Southern writers who stay in one spot following the same people over and over and over, until, finally, out of these particular environments, I pull some universal sort of statement."[12]

Looking out at the French Quarter from his veranda, he told my camera, "I think New Orleans is about the size Paris was when Paris was great. I mean for creating art, for knowing your subject matter, for knowing the people you're dealing with, for reusing them and them being there when you need them for reconsidering things, for redrawing a picture and throwing it away and doing it another way. The people are there the way you know the grocer you've known for thirty years."

It's relative to the Dureau synergy and gestalt that in 2015, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, George's home museum which had honored him with its Opus Award in 2011, hosted *Tennessee Williams: The Playwright and the Painter* exhibiting nineteen of Williams' paintings including his mixed-media *Sulla Terrazza della Signora Stone* based on his novel *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone.*

12 George Dureau, Arthur Roger Gallery, Video, "Panel Discussion: Pre-Pop Modernists," September 12, 1989. https://arthurrogergallery.com/1989/09/arthur-roger-gallery-1989-panel-discussion-pre-pop-modernists

Williams' *Vieux Carré* scratches Tennessee's own itch for rough trade and erotic street cruising into his archetypal tale of art and sex and a dying painter who recruits models off the street, and an orgiastic young gay photographer whom Williams describes as "New Orleans's most prominent society photographer" who shoots "artfully lighted photos of debutantes and society matrons" and recruits his other saltier models off the street.

Williams began writing *Vieux Carré* in 1938 and finished it in 1977. Over those forty years, his observant queer eye accumulating the local color of his play's street narrative had to have spied the vibe of the Quarter's flamboyant star character who was everywhere.

Meant for each other, the two artists were kindred spirits covering the waterfront in their fetish-like fixations on broken bodies. George, who said he grew up fascinated by Long John Silver's peg leg and crutch, created pictures of men he found maimed in New Orleans where disabled vets hobbled home from wars and drunks, passed out at night on streetcar tracks, woke up as amputees.

Tennessee who was partially paralyzed as a child featured a crippled girl in *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and invented short stories and a canon of plays dramatizing processes of disablement through dismemberment and cannibalism and castration and medical lobotomy like "Desire and the Black Masseur" (1948), "One Arm" (1948), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1957), and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959).

By the late 1960s, Quarterites were becoming aware of Dureau as the very model of a modern major painter roaming the streets picking up talent for his canvas and camera. In 1991, George, who emphasized that his avatar "Tennessee lived right around the corner from me," identified himself to me as Williams' "Big Daddy" from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

"I had to put together my art and my insistence on telling stories my way," George said.

Claude Summers noted in *An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture* that many of Dureau's paintings include provocative narratives: *Reception with a Waiter* (1962), *Nude Beach* (1965), *Black Tie to Petronius* (1970), and *Poseurs Illuminate the Eighth Deadly Sin* (1997).

In both his white and black narratives, George's models with their backstories were his protagonists, but he was careful how much street drama named disaster was safe to recruit. Don Dureau said, "It was not really popular for a white man to be taking nude pictures of black men in the South and George really walked tiptoe around that all the time. While he didn't have any real problems with the models, he did get comments from some in the art world who said, 'We don't want that stuff in our show.'"

Regarding the street as a casting couch, George said about the models their cameras depended on, "Robert's models are too available whereas mine look like something just dragged in off the street which they were. His were dragged off the street too, but he presented them in a way that every good faggot will know what it means. With mine, every good faggot doesn't know what it means."

In daily practice, because street trade is often rough trade, George kept danger at bay by managing his models with care, vetting them, knowing who they were, and who their families were, to avoid the inevitable risk involved when a gay man violates the first commandment of gay safety and invites strangers into his lovely home.

"I have discretion," he said. "I have to be a bit choicy, but not too much. I still get enamored by someone's appearance and bring him home. So many older queers think they're something and hold themselves royally apart for no good reason. I think being older gives me more advantages to offer more to the cute things I'd much rather pickup. I'm a recognizable nice man who is an artist who will lay you if you want it.

"Robert would see a black man he'd say was 'scary.' I was careful not to disillusion him and say, 'Oh, yes. He used to be my delivery boy.'"

Even so in 1986, Mapplethorpe judging George's New Orleans "recruiting" style to Jim Marks, the first executive director of the Lambda Literary Foundation, deadpanned like the pot calling the kettle black, "If you lived like that in New York, you'd be dead."[13]

His New Orleans neighbor, the closeted painter and photographer John Burton Harter who was a secret multi-millionaire was

13 Jim Marks, Facebook message to Jack Fritscher, January 28, 2024

killed, age 62, in 2002 at his Faubourg Marigny home-studio in the kind of unsolved murder which is an all-too-familiar trope—no aspersions on victim Harter himself—about gay men hiring strangers as nude models off the street. In a kind of polite erasure to keep the usually rich, older, white, gay male victim from seeming like he "asked for it," a queer New York institution, denying reality, reported the soothing prevarication that "Harter died suddenly."

Assessing George's reaction around gay murder, Don Dureau recalled, "I once went with George and Richard Gere to the Vera Cruz restaurant where George went two or three times a week before it closed [around the time of Hurricane Katrina] because the owner took in street boys and was murdered, and George would not talk about it."

Like all gay men living under a constant state of siege when homosexuality itself was defined as a psychiatric disability, George lived inside the unspeakable stress of gay cautionary tales in New Orleans art circles. When he was seventy-four in 2005, the year of Hurricane Katrina, he was shocked when his sixty-two-year-old friend Russell Albright, MD, was attacked on Bourbon Street. Albright was the board member of the New Orleans Museum of Art who had introduced George to Robert who frequently stayed in the old slave quarters at Albright's mansion where he and his partner Michael P. Myers fussed over The Mapplethorpe in ways Dureau wouldn't. The radiologist who had retired in 1992 was pushed to the sidewalk outside Galatoire's allegedly by a presumably straight twenty-eight-year-old tourist from Texas, Anthony Creme, who followed the retired Navy veteran out of the restaurant because he reportedly took offense that Albright had tossed a mint onto the his table where he was dining with friends—not knowing that mint tossing, which George enjoyed, was a light-hearted social custom in the restaurant.

Perhaps thinking Albright was flirting with him—and so what if he was?—the Texan allegedly followed him out of the restaurant and attacked him who fell and fractured his skull causing permanent brain damage that required the doctor be hospitalized for two months and under care for the last twelve years of his long life

(1934-2017). When a settlement was reached in 2006 after Albright requested the court drop second-degree battery charges against Tony Creme who had filed for bankruptcy protection, the Dallas, Texas, *D Magazine*, saluting the forgiving Albright as "a mensch," could not resist the pun headlining the fiasco, which was no laughing matter in New Orleans, as the "Creme de Mint Affair."[14] George, suffering the onset of Alzheimer's, was not amused.

"I had my humanistic needs," George told me. "I just had all these needs to talk about people, tell their stories, and help them solve their problems, and it all ultimately led to a real patriarchal kind of lifestyle where I'm the Big Daddy who knows how to paint pictures about you. Sometimes looking for interesting models, I'd place my photos on the back seat of my Jeep so hitchhikers would ask if I could shoot pictures like that of them. They pose for me because they want to record their youth and good looks. I may, or may not, have sex with the models, but when I finish a shoot, I collapse."

George nicknamed his Jeep "Clara" after his mother who was, according to Don Dureau, "the love of his life. He constantly talked about her to everyone."

George grinned. "I do this wonderful thing where I just go out to the streets and ride and ride around the city on my bicycle," always in black, sometimes wearing a gay leatherman's peaked Muir Biker Cap, "until I can't ride anymore and then I come home and I just lie on the floor and beat my meat or let the air blow over me and just lie there until a new creative thought comes into my head."

"Dureau's paintings and drawings are, for me," the British critic Edward "Ted" Lucie-Smith wrote for the Arthur Roger Gallery in 1983, "prolix, turbulent and simultaneously indulgent and self-indulgent. One would use the same word to try and give the flavour of William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. And this is not perhaps so surprising when one considers that Dureau comes from a similar cultural background. What makes Dureau's art work is a kind of

14 Adam McGill, "Crème de Mint Affair No More?," *D Magazine*, online, December 19, 2006

over spilling abundance, a gift for rhetoric. The cultural flotsam is carried along by a torrent of visual energy. The same thing happens in Tennessee Williams' long speeches, where the words coalesce in baroque clusters, till the subject becomes language itself. Dureau the painter, like Williams the playwright, is a celebrator of the medium which is being used."[15]

In 2013, the last full year of George's life, the Arthur Roger Gallery, Dureau's gallery since 1988, celebrated George's Southern DNA in its show, *Southern Gothic: An Insider's View with Paintings and Drawings by Willie Birch* [African-American born New Orleans 1942], *and Paintings, Drawings, and Photographs by George Dureau*.

When Arthur Roger, whose father was a transit conductor on the ancient streetcar line named *Desire,* opened his 2018 postmortem exhibit, *Mapplethorpe and Dureau: Photographs,* the first-ever exhibition of the two artists co-starring together, Dureau's friend John D'Addario, arts professor at the University of New Orleans, noted that while there was the 2016 HBO documentary *Mapplethorpe: Look at the Pictures*, "Dureau's death [from Alzheimer's] in 2014 did not even merit an obituary in *The New York Times*…the full story of Mapplethorpe and Dureau is still one that needs to be told."[16]

Like Robert, George Dureau was a solo act. "I'm not," George told me about group exhibits, "going to play second fiddle to anyone. Especially when I think of all the images that [Joel-Peter] Witkin and Mapplethorpe lifted from me. I don't like people sipping wine at a group exhibit coming up and asking me, "Now who are you, dear?' I'm not going to take that. I don't need an exhibit where I'm just another photographer who happened to have done certain images before Mapplethorpe. That doesn't say anything about me. When the *New York Times* did Gene Thornton's major piece about me ["Critics' Choice," March 1, 1981], I look back now and see Wagstaff and Mapplethorpe pulling strings."

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15 Edward Lucie-Smith, "George Dureau: Classical Variations," *New Orleans Art Review*, May 1, 1983. https://arthurrogergallery.com/1983/05/george-dureau-classical-variations-n-o-a-r/

16 John D'Addario, "Side by Side: Dureau and Mapplethorpe Shared Friendship and Art, but Not Fame," *The Advocate*, New Orleans, January 16, 2018

Like a proverb around George and Robert, Flannery O'Connor, the Catholic Southern Gothic novelist of disability, wrote in 1965 what could be the tagline of the Dureau-Mapplethorpe relationship and movie. "Everything that rises must converge."

In a split-screen montage of queer convergence, both George and Robert had brothers who were many years younger and caught up in family drama. George was turning twelve when Don Dureau, his only sibling, was born in 1942. Robert was fourteen when his brother Edward Maxey Mapplethorpe, one of his three brothers and two sisters, was born in 1960.

When Don was a boy, his mother tried to keep him away from George because George was gay. Because of this, the teenage Don did not really see much of George even before George was recruited into the U.S. Army in 1955 until Don came out as gay in 1986. Edward said when he was a little boy of three, and Robert age sixteen began commuting to Pratt, he felt his cool and remote brother was "magical."[17]

With his own successful career in business computing, Don, closeted and married nineteen years with wife and two sons, became close to George after Don came out and took courses in photography as did Edward who studied photography at SUNY and graduated in 1981. As Edward built his own career as a photographer, Robert forbade him to use the Mapplethorpe name. So, for the next twenty years, the kid brother became "Edward Maxey" before he became Edward Mapplethorpe with his own successful photography career.

While Robert disconnected from Edward by denying him his identifying surname, George with disabled memory lost the identity of his half-brother. When Don would call on the phone around the time of Hurricane Katrina, George would say, "I don't have a brother," and would hang up. In the care home, George would introduce himself to his visiting brother saying, "Hello, I'm George Dureau." Both Don and Edward expressed how their gay older brothers' open

17 Edward Mapplethorpe, "My Life as Robert Mapplethorpe's Assistant, Adversary, Baby Brother," as told to Justine Harman, *ELLE* Magazine, April 4, 2016

lifestyles and freedom helped keep them as younger brothers from being "ordinary" in New Orleans and Queens.

Did it mean anything that both the Dureau and Mapplethorpe fathers were athletic tennis players? George was not fond of his father for divorcing his mother. Robert was estranged from his Republican father who was too "ordinary" for words. Desperately seeking signs of heterosexuality in their artistic sons before Stonewall in 1969, George's family believed he was always about to be engaged to a woman he dated and Robert's parents presumed and feared he and Patti were married.

In the kind of thrust-and-parry Freudian rivalry George had with his father, Robert told his father who was an engineer and amateur photographer who had his own basement darkroom that he was going to become "New York's greatest photographer."[18] He rarely returned from Manhattan to the family home only twenty miles away where his father who never accepted him told him he couldn't care less about Patti Smith. Robert cut him and his mother out of his will and left his estate to his Foundation which has donated millions to AIDS research and the Robert Mapplethorpe Residential Treatment Facility in Manhattan. George died without wallet or will and his longtime business lawyer worked pro bono to sort out the disposition of his drawings, paintings, and photographs. Both artists died disabled after long illnesses with incurable diseases.

While George cared for his elderly parents who both lived until 1994, the Mapplethorpe family from 1986 to 1989, lost two sons, and a mother. Joan Maxey Mapplethorpe died May 25, 1989, two months after Robert passed on March 9. George's father, according to Jonathan Webb, was an Archie-Bunker loudmouth who, Don Dureau said, was "very artistic and made pottery and plaster figures of David and Goliath and biblical and Greek figures in his backyard workshop that he sold all over town while running his Dureau Rental Service catering party supplies and tableware.

"Whenever George would talk about our father," Don said, "he'd say, 'YOUR father did this today.' He was not that fond of

18 Kim Masters, "Harry Mapplethorpe, A Father's Tale," *The Washington Post*, May 3, 1990

our father because he thought he didn't do right by his mother. He thought our dad was rather harsh and rigid in his thinking and always right. But my father was never harsh like that to me. My parents were party people, and New Orleans is a party town, and I was the only child at home. So they were not very strict with me. My parents had rules for me, but I had a lot of leeway. In grade school, I was a little bitty thing and began riding my bicycle to the park, where my grandfather had donated a lot of land, because I knew places in the bushes to have sex. No doubt George knew them too.

"The worst thing our father ever did was always know more than anyone else. Even before the internet, he knew everything. He read a lot: the paper, always looking up stuff, the dictionary seven to nineteen times a day. My father had a love of reading. George didn't care that much for him, but was always there for him maybe because George with his big opinions was so like him. He also helped take care of my mother in her nursing home."

Don later recalled their own Big Daddy's sissyphobia and amateur gay conversion therapies that kept Don in the closet and drove George out. "Back in those days [the 1930s, 40s, and 50s of the brothers' boyhoods], if you had a limp wrist and walked with a limp wrist, well, I thought that was a game, but anytime I did that my dad would slap my hand. I remember the two of them locking horns. George wouldn't do anything he said."

Perhaps homophobic slaps like these from George, Senior, caused George, Junior, who may have been slapped into presenting as masculine, to resent their father whose second wife seconded his homophobia by warning their "straight" son away from his gay half-brother. Perhaps this abuse was one of the reasons George's mother divorced his father to save her beloved son who early on estranged himself intermittently from his father, even while caring for him on into his old age. Is there a satisfying ironic slap-back at his father that London's Barbican featured George's work in its 2020 landmark exhibit *Masculinities: Liberation through Photography*?

"So after I came out," Don said, "George told me he wanted to shoot a picture of our father slapping my hand, and we did. The

three of us grownups. And it came out really good because you can tell what's happening. I don't know what happened to that picture."

George, shooting a verbal selfie, pulled no punches when he told me, "There's a lot of rather flamboyant, womanish behavior in me sometimes. I get a little like a woman when I get really mean."

George's typical kindnesses as Big Daddy-big brother extended to warm family scenes with Don who on a 1983 visit to San Francisco became startled and scared when a trick alerted the thirty-nine-year-old Texan to the reality of the AIDS epidemic. When Don turned on the local TV news and saw people dying on stretchers in hospital hallways, he immediately flew home to Dallas and asked a fundamentalist preacher to cure him. Three years later when Don finally told his wife he was gay, he said, "She held my hand and said, 'So, that's what's been bothering you? There's nothing wrong with you being gay. Stop that church. You know better than that. You know you can't do anything about being gay. There's nothing wrong about being gay. I'm not happy about this, but I understand.' She understood, but she was still blown away. She always understood about George. The day after I came out, my now ex-wife said I had to call George. 'Go visit him.' I told him and he said, "Well, it's about time. I've known since you were a little boy, all those curls you had!'

"I stayed a week with him and he was wonderful. He told me I could stay as long as I wanted unless he was getting ready for a show. I brought my boyfriends to meet him, and they came back and one bought a painting. In the 1970s George had a longtime friend. They never lived together, but they were always together. I asked him why he didn't have a lover, and he said, 'Donald, you must know if you want to hang on to someone, you have to let them go.' He had close longtime friends and he had lots of sexual relationships. Most were good. But at the end, his model [white muse and lover since 1982] Troy stole paintings during George's last months in the studio."

George took nostalgic pleasure telling my camera about his sex life. "In 1971, I started photographing blacks. I picked up my camera as a kind of 'proof of life' about my amputee models because

people thought I was doing special effects with trick photography. So I was in my very black period, but I've always had white lovers, maybe eight or nine great loves over the years, especially when spring is in the air. I should be dead now from all the sex. [He was HIV-negative.] Oh, those lovers were such difficult numbers. They were all white, and I didn't photograph them much."

When the 1960s counterculture revived Tod Browning's 1932 movie *Freaks*—beloved by the Surrealists and the Quorum club—with eye-opening midnight campus screenings, students fashioning their own alternative hippie anti-war lifestyle as "freaks" wanted to discuss the powerful film that de-stigmatized disability and was cut to confetti by censors because its first audiences fled to the exits triggered by the mindfuck of seeing its cast of atypical-looking actors portrayed as humans whose nonconformity challenged their body images of normality.

"Some people," the nondisabled George told me, "respond foolishly to the handicapped. Sam Wagstaff was one of them. Some people don't know how to respond to the beauty of deformity and missing parts. I think gay men respond well."

"Because of gay body dysmorphia, gay body fascism, and our boyhoods when people informed us flawed beauties we were broken freaks?"

"Yes," he said. "But sometimes they're embarrassed about their hidden attraction and affection for deformed people. I'm not particularly interested in sorting their psychology."

"Does grooving on a guy because he's handicapped or black or straight reduce him to a fetish? Like Tennessee Williams' hunger for blonds?"

"I often tell people that because some people who are beautiful and sexy have a stump on one side doesn't mar their sexiness or their beauty. I often tell people who don't get it that you don't say, 'Let's just throw out this little Roman sculpture because it's part broken.' It's still there. We're still here."

Perhaps some people responding to Dureau's pictures of disability are triggered ambivalently with lust and guilt around his eye-opening work. Not feeling whole themselves, they are pleased but

shocked to find erotic attraction and psychic awakening in fantasies around amputation, castration, paralysis, blindness, and prostheses. Like Stoics imagining the worst to overcome their fears, they graduate from Dureau's literal pictures of "born freaks" to Mapplethorpe's metaphorical pictures of "made freaks." The endlessly perversatile find sexual pleasure, rebel power, and counterphobic healing in Robert's designer pictures of men made physically challenged by sadomasochistic fetish-sex rituals: immobile in bondage, blind in blindfolds, disfigured by scarification, helpless by infantilism, penetrated by prosthetic sex toys of artificial body parts, penises and fists, made from silicone, rubber, and plastic.

In the origin story of Dureau half-eclipsed by Mapplethorpe, Dureau DNA can be traced in Tod Browning, the 1930s movie director who at sixteen had run away with a traveling circus freak show. Dureau as a child was a fan of Browning's daring vision. As an artist shooting the challenged men with whom he identified emotionally, George actually lived the equality of the movie's punch line of inclusion in which a whole-bodied person surrounded by other-bodied persons is told by the freaks: "Now you are one of us." Taking on his models' burdens and support, something Mapplethorpe rarely did one-on-one, George became "one of them." Browning's empathy tutored Dureau's empathy for the diversity of differently abled humans.

"When I was eight," George said, "my parents took me to a sideshow, a freak show—that was acceptable then—across Canal Street where I saw an armless artist, a very nice looking man, who held a pencil in his toes to draw pictures. I desperately wanted him to draw me. He stared at me twice. He must have thought I was worth drawing, but my parents moved us on to see a movie at the Saenger Theater where I loved watching Busby Berkeley, Lana Turner, and Judy Garland."[19]

Mapplethorpe was also entranced by freak shows. As a child, Robert visited Coney Island freak shows as did Arthur Tress and

19 *New Orleans Artists John Burton Harter and George Dureau*, Film Tribute, Jarret Lofstead, editor/producer, The Bend Media + Production for Saints+Sinners LBGTQ Literary Festival, March 2021, with support of the John Burton Harter Foundation

Joel-Peter Witkin who as a boy took his camera into a Coney freak show. As a curious teen hanging out in seedy Times Square in the 1960s, Robert was fascinated by Hubert's Freak Show and Museum of "born freaks" and "made freaks" where Diane Arbus was taking pictures while he was studying the faces cruising in the 24/7 Mardi Gras parade of motley freaks walking bawdy 42nd Street.

"Later," George said, "a girl in my school asked me to go home with her to study, and in her living room her uncle was sitting on a chair. It was the armless artist and he drew me. I'm an artist who grew up thinking about what an artist is supposed to be—living a warm involved humanist sort of life with lots of people around me. If I contribute something strong to photography, it's probably my ability to picture the model's sexuality in their brain or their life as told through their human face."[20]

Digging through George's archives, Jarret Loftstead addressed the raconteur's *Rashomon* repertoire. George was not unreliable in his twice-told tales because, he, "insistent on telling stories my way," was fabulous like a standup improv actor tailoring his performances to his audience. "George," Lofstead said, "reports two stories about the armless painter, both fairly apocryphal. In both, George sees *Zeigfeld Girl* with his aunt and her friend, and then they go to the circus. In one version, weeks later, George walks home with a friend, and the painter is the friend's uncle. In the other, following the film, George's aunt takes him to her friend's apartment. The painter is brother to the friend, and George is left with the painter while George's aunt and friend go out to get a bottle. The painter asks George to help him in the bathroom."[21]

"For the show *Drawing Monuments II*," George told me, "I drew a tall drawing of a statuesque guy, with the head of a dwarf snuggled up under him, with the dwarf's hand wrapped around the perfect leg and the dwarf's arm pointing up directing this big beautiful Indian-looking creature. It's this dwarf directing this big gorgeous monster to look at the stars."

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20 *Ibid.*

21 Jarret Lofstead, email, *op. cit*.

George, who studied Velázquez, and loathed deformity as entertainment, genuflected to the sassy power of Diego's bold portrait of dwarf Court Jester Sebastián de Morra painted with defiant eye contact and an attitude of body self-rule: *The Dwarf, Sebastián de Morra, at the Court of Felipe IV* (1644).

"I'm pretty much aware of art history with my camera, but I wasn't interested in the history of photography. I mean I knew of nice pictures by Avedon and Irving Penn. But when I make an adjustment or insert a comment during a shoot, I jump the bridge into art history. I say, 'This boy is through-and-through Velázquez.' And, jumping the bridge, I'll make the light even stronger, or sometimes I make a comment to myself that will cross in from another medium. My model Troy, for instance, a beautiful blond with long curly hair is from North Carolina, but when I draw him, he's a total Michelangelo. That's all he can be. His proportions are about the same proportions as Michelangelo's dream boys: a thick square body and big square shoulders and a head just a little too small. My Troy pictures were all Michelangelo because he had what Michelangelo's boys had. But I never think about other photographers.

"Everyone knows Robert's photography is distilled from other photographers's work. It's hysterical how many of Robert's poses and attitudes and mock poetic postures are not real 'Mapplethorpe' photos because they are really 'George Platt Lynes' photos. For all his creativity, Robert seemed to have lifted everything. It's very strange. He wasn't comfortable with just the object or the person in front of his camera. He had to frame it in terms of a style of someone else. I guess I might think that because I'm so styleless."

When I asked George if photography is as good as painting, he said, "As a painter I have to tell you, 'No. It ain't.' Photography is an editorial art. It's not a creative art in the sense that painting and drawing are in which you start with nothing. You're given a lot. The camera will give you too much so all you have to do is shut it up by editing it. The camera is just a mindless lunatic. You have to edit down what it's going to take in. You don't have to tell it, like you do a paint brush, how to make something look like a finger."

"The camera is a mindless lunatic. I'm going to quote you."

"That's why I'm talking. For posterity. I must tell you that blacks are the first people I shot. Before the blacks, I never shot a white person. Before Robert saw my work he had never shot a black person. I was one of the peculiar people who get to the age of forty without knowing anything about cameras. I would hold up a camera and say, 'What button do I push?' I started out with a used $65 Vermeer Lens and an eleven-year-old 2-1/4 square camera [a Mamiyaflex before his Hasselblad]. I photographed for three years with natural light and two fill lights before I bought a light meter. Essentially, Robert—who bought some of my earliest pictures dating back to 1972—and I used the same camera, film, paper, and format which gives us a similar velvety quality.

"Robert was not drawn as I was to people who are handicapped, particularly to people who are triumphant while handicapped. I've always loved tough dwarfs. I've always been attracted to little people who act strong and big—like the triumphs of superheroes.

"Often times, his photographs, like his picture of a mean-looking tough little Spanish guy, maybe a kickboxer, making a fist, look like a mockery of my style."

George juggled themes of ability and disability. Don Dureau recalled "George liked wrestlers and boxers for their form. He had piles of books with pictures of classical athletes from Greece and elegantly dressed Roman women. He'd have a book laid open when he was painting. When he'd get stuck, he'd go to those books and his videos to find images to inspire him. It was wonderful to watch him work.

"One time I was sleeping in a corner of his big room where he had put a circle of easels up around my bed to give me some privacy and some of them were paintings he was working on. One morning I felt my bed shaking and it was this little guy Peanut who used to clean George's place hitting my bed with a push broom. The easels had moved. I said, 'What happened to that one painting?'

"Peanut said, 'George was up early two hours painting while you were still asleep and you didn't hear him.'

"I said, 'Well what happened to that painting? It's changed. The subject was facing me. Now he's not.'

"George had moved the shoulder around.

"When I asked George, he showed me his process, how he does it. He said, 'That's why I do oils because you can change it. You just pick up the oils and move them around.' George was not structured around time. He worked late into the night and worked a lot in the mornings when the light was good. Sometimes he didn't work for months, and then he'd paint a lot.

"He loved people, even the ones on the artist tours of the Quarter. He'd have food out for them. Cooking was his ritual. If someone was visiting, he was always cooking with loud music, usually opera and the blues. He loved the blues. He loved Nina Simone. His favorite was her 'I Want a Little Sugar in My Bowl.'"

George said about his always-open house, "It's so interesting when tourists come in to see my drawings and photographs. A process. A man, very often with the wife, will ponder which one they're going to buy. Frequently it's a drawing that's going over their bed. Whatever that all means, I don't know. Very often they are very intellectual straight people who worry and ponder such things like they are psychiatrists. Very often with the photographs they will line up three amputees, and they'll talk about them, go home and ponder, and come back again. So it's kind of delicious to sell things out of my home instead of a gallery. It's kind of a bother to have people come into my home, but it's kind of delicious because we have time to talk, no pressure, and it's interesting to hear their worrying and reasoning and help them choose the right one."

Both Mapplethorpe and Dureau grew up to be masculine-identified gay men shooting heteromasculine men and homomasculine men. While Robert shot some women, George shot mostly men. His gay gaze boldly exchanged the straight male gaze in New Orleans by switching the gender of sitters shot by his famous New Orleans predecessor, E. J. Bellocq (1873-1949). After seeing Bellocq's hidden work about women exhibited for the first time in 1971, George took up the camera to shoot figure studies for his male paintings. He said he had no interest in becoming a famous photographer.

Bellocq, the subject of Louis Malle's controversial 1978 film *Pretty Baby*, pictured women of the streets in Storyville in the 1910s

the way George after Stonewall pictured men of the streets from the 1970s onward. (George turned down a cameo in the movie.) While Bellocq's pictures seem shot for his own private spank bank, Robert and George, two able-bodied white artists, wanted to reveal to the world the hidden beauty inherent in the race and abilities of their sitters.

In pursuit of the platonic ideal of the human body, Robert sought perfect models like ballet dancer *Peter Reed*, 1980, and *Ken Moody*, 1984, for ice-cold perfect moments. George also sought perfect men like *Byron Robinson*, 1985, but he favored the perfect moments of "imperfect' men like *B.J. Robinson*, 1983, a goodlooking "human torso" born without legs and sitting on hips, to whom he could draw warm attention in his unflinching pictures.

Twenty-five years after Robert's death and ten years after George's, those who don't know or remember the last midcentury might fancy a little sidebar of parallel history to compare and contrast how George pollinated Robert.

While George in his thirties, nearly twice as old as Robert, was thriving as his own man with brush and canvas in 1960s New Orleans, he was unaware he'd become the French Quarter connection to one of the matched pair of New York performative characters in their early twenties trying to invent themselves in the Manhattan pop-culture of Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls* (1966).

It was a Hollywood story as old as Broadway tap-dancing down 42nd Street. The girl from New Jersey who had not yet sung had given up her newborn for adoption. The boy from Floral Park who had not yet touched a camera had given up his soul for success. So in 1969, the two "young, young, young" Tennessee Williams characters, the fugitive kind, in search of a lifestyle took lodging from 1969 to 1972 in the tiny inner sanctum of 1017, a room of their own, in the arts-immigrant sanctuary hotel that was the Chelsea where they sought and found their first access to influence and money.

That maze of backstairs art fusions was, in the unities of time, place, and action, its own Vieux Carré. "From the outside," *Vanity*

Fair observed, "the Chelsea Hotel looks as if it were the only building in New York that was flown in from New Orleans."[22]

In a quick movie montage of what happened almost sixty years ago, the ambitious androgynies guised themselves as just kids slouching from Yeats to Didion to be born as artists.

They made themselves available busking the hallways and taking door-to-door master classes in *La Vie Bohème*. On fire escapes and stairwells where Isadora Duncan danced, they rehearsed and performed their breathless starving-artist act with waif gravitas for gonzo photographers slumming through the twelve stories of the legendary dump of tenants and transients that I entered as an academic pilgrim writer on the road in search of Jack Kerouac over the weekend of October 20, 1968, made memorable as the shocking day Jackie Kennedy married Onassis. A bit too much of a good thing, the Chelsea was an unsafe vertical skid row, a boho freak show of robberies, room fires, celebrity sex, and murder.

Playing at being self-propelled Chelsea girls, the pals made themselves camera-ready, playing themselves the way Warhol actors played themselves in New York and George played himself in the French Quarter. They posed for Gerard Malanga from Warhol's Silver Factory and German filmmaker Albert Scopin in 1970 at the same time Stanley Amos gave *pauvre* Robert his first collage exhibit at Amos's "gallery" inside Amos's tiny room at the Chelsea, and Sandy Daley gave Robert his first camera, a Polaroid, just as George was buying his first camera, a used 1962 Mamiya C3 twin lens reflex. In 1971, the year Diane Arbus died, Daley shot Robert in her all-white room in her thirty-three-minute Warholian film of Robert's personal masochism, *Robert Having His Nipple Pierced*.

By 1970, the Chelsea couple changed partners. The liberated girl took the straight and married playwright Sam Shepard as her lover. The beautiful boy took fashion model David Croland who would soon introduce him to Sam Wagstaff as his.

"I lived in New York once for about nine months in 1965," George said. After his first solo exhibit that year at New Orleans's

22 Alex Beggs, "The Chelsea Hotel: We Knew It Well," *Vanity Fair*, October 8, 2013

Delgado Museum of Art (now the New Orleans Museum of Art), he flew to Manhattan making the rounds of galleries peddling his portfolio of drawings and paintings like *Reception with a Waiter* (1962) and *Nude Beach* (1965). "I liked it while I was there."

"Why did you leave? While Robert stayed?"

"To remain human. As soon as I got home, I thought, "Oh, thank God, I'm home. I'm not aggressive. I don't like to knock on doors and have to go tell someone that they're supposed to love my art like Robert did. I'm not aggressive the way he was. I'm not a traveling salesman."

After the Swinging Sixties when assassination, civil rights, the French New Wave, Warhol, the peace movement, The Beatles, the moon landing, feminism, and the glitter bomb of the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion broke the *status quo*, Robert and George both took up the camera for their post-Stonewall work. At the same time, the entrepreneur businessman Sam Wagstaff was strategically planning to market and sell photography by declaring it a fine art.

Sam in his visionary evangelism to position photography as an institutionally legitimate art invoked F. Holland Day, Alfred Stieglitz, Ansel Adams, and painter-photographer Edward Steichen who all declared photography a fine art. He also took a pop-culture-changing strategy from silent-film director D. W. Griffith who adapted books into moving pictures more controversial and racial than Mapplethorpe's images. Griffith assailing the strict norms of art was the first American to insist as Warhol did that movie photography be regarded as art. And then he made films about sex, race, and gender to prove his point the way Robert, with Sam as his marketing director, shot ambitious silent pictures of sex, race, and gender to prove himself an artist who was a photographer which—a surprise to wannabe Mapplethorpes—is quite different from photographers who are not artists.

Holly Solomon who exhibited Robert in her Manhattan gallery in 1977 told me what she and George witnessed around Sam Wagstaff, Robert's Pygmalion, whom George called a fascist. "Sam," Holly said, "was the great curatorial person who helped photography achieve its identity as art. Other photographers, of course, had

presented their work as art, but Robert was determined to legitimize the camera through a kind of aesthetic assault on the art establishment. I was trying to introduce Robert as an artist, not just a photographer."[23]

Robert collected and pursued George because George was an artist who was a photographer capturing the French Quarter the way Robert wanted to conquer Manhattan. Dureau, who said "My drawing is handwriting," was also with canvas and camera "writing" the narrative of the Quarter that Tennessee Williams was penning on paper. Williams who was a teenager when Dureau was born in New Orleans in 1930 said about himself that he learned so much in New Orleans he should have paid tuition. Just so, Robert, the undercover student with a spy camera flying reconnaissance into New Orleans, learned so much at George's knee, the tormentor should have paid his mentor.

Williams and Dureau and Mapplethorpe created the homosurreal mythology of their statuesque satyrs and horse-hung centaurs out of their own variously beautiful and offbeat gentleman callers. George said of one of those gentlemen, "Along with my models Wilbert and Oscar, Robert liked my little friend Jeffrey [*Jeffrey Cook*, 1984] which is really funny because Jeffrey who is my protégé is a gorgeous little mulatto boy and karate person with washboard abs. Robert loved Jeffrey so much that he bought four pictures of him to give to people over the years."

Dureau fostered a French Quarter repertory company around his most frequent core models, the whole-bodied athletes, the deformed, and the amputees whom people often think must be Photoshopped: Troy Brown, B.J. Robinson, Glen Thompson, Terrell Hopkins, and Earl Levell. Men like Troy Brown (*Troy Brown*, 1979) or Christopher Fisher (*Christopher Fisher,* 1985) or Glen Thompson (*Glen Thompson*, 1983) could be cast as the platonic ideal of any number of Williams' males from Stanley Kowalski, Brick Pollitt, and Chance Wayne to the hearty Black Masseur—while Robert's flowers could illustrate Sebastian's French Quarter garden in

23 Jack Fritscher, "Holly Solomon Interview 1990," *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, Hastings House, New York, 1994, page 137

Suddenly Last Summer or the *flores para los muertos* in *A Streetcar Named Desire.*

Williams wrote in his poem, "Carrousel Tune," that "the freaks of the cosmic circus are men." He was outing the disabling fact that some gay men in pursuit of the platonic ideal of beauty in themselves and others, feeling they are not in the right or best queer body, suffer greater body dissatisfaction than do straight men.[24]

Both the maimed men of Dureau and the fetish freaks of Mapplethorpe's leather period in which his pictures of bondage and scarification are metaphors of literal movement-and-body impairment also illustrate Williams' comic and cosmic circus of broken male specimens in his books of Southern-Gothic short stories, *One Arm* and *Hard Candy*.

Tennessee who tried to write screenplays at MGM in 1943 was swimming laps in local N'awlins color in 1947 when he was finishing *A Streetcar Named Desire* at "632 St. Peter Street" dramatizing Stanley shouting his barbaric yawp for "Stella-a-a-a-a!" outside their tenement at "632 Elysian Fields." That "632 St. Peter Street" address was only five minutes from the future *atelier* on Dauphine of the then seventeen-year-old Dureau.

As a queer rite of passage, every gay man alive during Williams' long life (1911-1983) has his own "Meeting Tennessee Story." In the way Wagstaff picked up the twenty-six-year-old Robert by walking up to him at a cocktail party saying a line worthy of Williams, "I'm looking for someone to spoil," it's credible in the six degrees of cruising culture what photo-journalist Jason Storm reported in *The Rolling Storm*, October 18, 2014, that George told him about "being picked up by Tennessee Williams as a young man."[25]

After trying to reach Jason Storm to no avail, I asked Jarret Lofstead about this ambitious gay urban rumor. He said, "Getting picked up by Tennessee Williams for sex sounds specious. According to Kenneth Holditch, George never met Tennessee, even though

24 Tennessee Williams, "Carrousel Tune," *In the Winter of Cities*, New Directions, 1956, page 95

25 Jason Storm, "George Dureau," *The Rolling Storm*, October 18. 2014. https://therollingstorm.com/ramble/george-dureau/

he had the opportunity to do so at a party at Marti's Restaurant. But George was too drunk and nervous to meet the writer whom Holditch himself had only met twice." While neither Dureau nor Mapplethorpe shot a formal portrait of Williams, Don Dureau told me he remembers a candid photo George had snapped like a paparazzo of Tennessee socializing at a party at Marti's or at some gallery or museum. Don gave that photo to the wife of the attorney who handled George's estate.

Had Dureau, an avowed top, met Tennessee, an avowed top, in the six degrees of cruising for gay sex, what a "meet-cute" moment in gay history. "Icons collide in 20th-century art." If it didn't happen, it should have, and indeed, may have—never to be mentioned if the sex spark between the two authorial men (who would submit to no one) misfired. Two tops fighting for the top in a world of eager bottoms. What a Samuel Beckett sex comedy. Much can be learned from apocryphal juxtapositions like the urban legend that Albert Einstein met Marilyn Monroe. Having shot two Dureau documentaries, if I were scripting a Hollywood film about him, I'd remember he told me, "Any movie about me needs to be big and baroque and operatic exactly like my life, an extension of my life."

So, indulging an expressionist "aside" like Romeo's first thoughts on first seeing Juliet, I might at George's insistence for the "baroque and operatic," tease open the wide-screen Technicolor biopic of events—changed for dramatic purposes to suggest the Dureau-Williams gestalt—in 1947 when George, who won his first art prize as a pre-teen, was a hot *beignet* of sixteen and Tennessee, who was writing *Streetcar* upstairs, was a hot daddy of thirty-six. The one-minute establishing shot would be golden footage of quiet beauty portraying Tennessee *being* Tennessee soaking up streetlife, standing, smoking a cigarette in the doorway at "632 St. Peter Street," watching a man like Stanley and then a woman like Blanche pass by, when the handsome young George *becoming* Dureau—sporting his first pencil moustache like Hollywood stars Zachary Scott and Clark Gable—comes riding slowly by on his bicycle cruising past once, then twice, then stopping a third time to shake out a cigarette saying to the original Big Daddy, "Got a light?"

Then there'd be a quick cut away from that ambiguity (Was that actor supposed to be Tennessee? Did they or didn't they?) to an expository montage purpose-built to introduce the audience to George's versatile public career from his cast-bronze nudes on the gates outside the New Orleans Museum of Art to his enormous 1999 bust of Artemis on the pediment gable frieze of Harrah's Casino, now Caesars New Orleans, at 8 Canal Street; his mural inside Cafe Sbisa; his painting of a Mardi Gras Parade in Callier Hall, as well as his paintings, drawings, photographs, and posters for art, jazz, and symphony events. In addition to Artemis on his monumental baroque pediment frieze, George depicted New Orleans arts figures of dancers, actors, musicians, singers, and two fauns, one playing a flute.

In November 2023, Caesars replaced the sculpture in the pediment triangle with its shiny corporate logo of Caesar's golden head wreathed with laurel. George's original is "said to be in the possession of Barry Kern, son of Mardi Gras float fabricator Blaine Kern."[26] While this removal is nothing compared to the censorship of Mapplethorpe art, the "corporate erasure" of art smacks of insult to George and to the cultural heritage of the city of New Orleans.

Doug MacCash observed in his April 8, 2014, *Times-Picayune* obituary that "At Cafe Sbisa on Decatur Street, his mural of glamorous French Quarterites has shined for decades in the spotlights above the bar. When fire broke out in an adjacent building this winter, art lovers called to express concern for the beloved painting."[27]

To script the vibe around Mapplethorpe meeting Dureau, I'd make the point that Robert—who wrote to me in a letter dated May 21, 1978, that "I want to see the Devil in us all"—would marvel at George's cocked-eyebrow satyr "look" documented in his self-portrait paintings that his close friends described as "Mephistophelean."

Robert and George were both raised Catholic and Catholics as an article of faith must believe in the Devil or go to Hell. Altar boy Robert pictured like an angel, age six, in his First Communion picture in Floral Park was a believer. Mardi-Gras boy George in

26 Jarret Lofstead, email, *op. cit.*

27 MacCash, *op. cit.*

America's most Catholic city was not. In David Zalkind's 2007 video, Zalkind chats casually with George chipper and charming, straddling his bicycle on the sunny corner sidewalk in front of the Faubourg Marigny Arts & Bookstore at 600 Frenchmen Street.[28]

A Zalkin question leads to a Dureau stand-up comedy routine. George regales the camera saying when he was a boy of eleven as America entered World War II, the idea of receiving his postponed First Holy Communion made him vomit. His father, divorcing, had left the Catholic Church for Protestantism; and George himself was not into receiving into his mouth—what Catholics must believe—the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. "I'd run outside the church and vomit. I did that three or four times. I used to do that when Jesus said to stay in that church. I have never vomited since. I escaped the nuns because my family moved to twelve different houses in Mid-City when I was young. Jesus can come and get me when he wants. I keep my bathroom clean."

George may not have believed in Catholic doctrines of Communion and Resurrection of the body, but he told me, "I believe in the renaissance of all things."

For Mardi Gras in 2008, George's friend John D'Addario snapped him, as did others, costumed as the Devil with dime-store plastic horns and a fun pitchfork for the photo: *George at the St. Ann Ball*.[29] That casually comic image matches Robert's intentionally impish *Self Portrait (with Devil Horns)*, 1985, which twins with his photo of the bust of a classical horned marble statue *Italian Devil*, 1988.

For George playing Falstaff, the Devil was camp.

For Robert playing Faust, the Devil was real.

While George who loved Mardi Gras put blue-collar men at ease with his rumpled blue-chambray work shirts, Robert who loved Halloween conjured identity and authority in his daily

28 David Zalkind, "George Dureau: The Sidewalk Interview," Faubourg Marigny Arts & Bookstore. 600 Frenchmen Street, Youtube.com, 2007

29 John D'Addario, "Remembering George Dureau," Hyperallergic.com, April 10, 2014

black-leather costume. Like Patricia Highsmith's *Ripley*, the talented Mr. Mapplethorpe appropriated whatever he needed to climb the straight social ladder all the way up to Princess Margaret. To build his gay brand all the way up to Tom of Finland, he sucked up homosurreal foundation images of leathermen, piss, whips, Christ, skulls, guns, and devils from gay Satanic Magus Kenneth Anger's brilliantly blasphemous and censored film *Scorpio Rising* (1963).

Robert struck poses on both sides of the camera like Edgar Allen Poe's "Imp of the Perverse" just to lark about. The conjure power of the camera and the wizardry of the cameraman empowered him, the sex magus who wore the occult voodoo jewelry he designed. His black-magic photo, *Snakeman*, 1981, a virtual selfie, matching Richard Avedon's *Nastassja Kinski with Serpent*, 1981, iconized a seductive white devil in a black-leather horned mask curling a huge python around his body like a serpent selling apples in Eden. He took delight knowing that ever since the dawn of photography people suspected photographers were magicians, snake charmers, freaks stealing souls with their cameras. He certainly hoped that was so.

Mapplethorpe illustrated the 1986 limited edition of Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*. Dureau created covers for *Leon Galatoire's Cookbook* (1994) and for the deluxe edition of Anne Rice's *Memnoch the Devil* (1995), the fifth book in *The Vampire Chronicles*. George's photos could also light up Williams' "French Quarter Canon" from his *Streetcar* and *Suddenly Last Summer* to his exquisite stories of amputation, "One Arm," and of inter-racial love, "Desire and the Black Masseur," and his one-act play of female mastectomy *The Mutilated* set in the French Quarter on Christmas eve. As if writing specifically about one of the broken human figures Dureau lensed, Williams compares the maimed sailor in "One Arm" to classic Greek marbles that also appealed to Mapplethorpe who studied sculpture at Pratt and turned hot models into cold statuary.

Like Dureau romancing disability, Williams wrote that his maimed hustler Oliver Winemiller had been the boxing champ of the Pacific fleet before he lost an arm. "Now he looked like a broken statue of Apollo…[with] the coolness and impassivity of a stone

figure."[30] Ted Lucie-Smith, whose own photo book, *Flesh and Stone* (2000), juxtaposed contemporary gay flesh with ancient marble statues, was one of the people who introduced me to Dureau in June 1989.

In 1985, Ted, working toward a *catalogue raisonné* for George, had written the "Introduction" to the first volume of Dureau's work to be published, *New Orleans: 50 Photographs*, Editions Aubrey Walter, London. In his essay, Ted made literary comparisons of Dureau's images of athletes and amputees to Baudelaire the way Robert and Patti connected their lives, songs, and photos to literature from Rimbaud and Verlaine to Baudelaire and William Burroughs.

George who drew "Dureaugrams" of storyboarding, a sequence of sketches, which he called "visual notetaking" for both his paintings and his photos said, "Robert's photographs were like slices out of an intimate movie—the one of him with the whip, the leather boys." He added, "Who knows? I might take up shooting video. I'm the *fin de siecle* artist. *Fin de siecle*, here I am!"

On April 9 in his studio, Mark Hemry and I handed George his first video camera and filmed him shooting his first video portraiture as he added the dimension of motion to his still pictures.

Robert left more than 120,000 negatives, 500 Polaroids, and 200 artworks of drawing, collage, sculpture, and jewelry through his Mapplethorpe Foundation to the Getty Museum.

George summing up his career told me, "I've done thousands and thousands of drawings. My drawings are my favorite things. I've always drawn and painted. When I picked up the camera and started making pictures, they looked like my paintings and drawings. So the precedents for whatever Robert got from me come from my paintings and drawings of men. I have hundreds of thousands of negatives. If someone is worth shooting, I will do ten rolls of twelve. So there's a 100 to a 150 sometimes very similar exposures of anybody I find worth photographing."

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30 Tennessee Williams, "One Arm," *One Arm and Other Stories*, A New Directions Book, 1948, page 7

Don Dureau revealed that the painter was not keen that his photographs eclipsed his paintings. "George quit taking photos in the late 1980s."

George and Robert shot photos from 1970-1988.

"He realized how good he was and never took another one and went back to drawing and painting. He said, 'I have more photographs than I need. I'm not going to drag that camera out anymore.' When he was done with something, he was done. He didn't realize that's what people are going to remember him for more than his painting."

In 2014, Don Dureau and Arthur Roger gathered up George's work in the repository of the Arthur Roger Gallery. Don told me, "At the gallery, we have at least a thousand photographs which we've sorted and cataloged." Arthur Roger noted that Don was intent on preserving the archival integrity of his brother's work. Don said, "At George's last apartment, we found boxes with stuff lying around on the floor, but he had a file cabinet with hundreds of pictures in different sizes. About ninety percent were signed." And then came a nurturing care scene. "When he was in the nursing home, Katie [Machod] sometimes took four or five photographs to prompt him to recall them and talk about them. So sometimes he'd remember who he was and want to sign them. All of his originals, signed or not, now have certificates of authenticity."

In Don Dureau's interview with the Historic New Orleans Collection, he said that George's *Mars Descending*—the painting we had bonded over the day we met and filmed him hanging at the Contemporary Arts Center, 900 Camp Street—was donated as an "unmounted painting" to the Ogden Museum, 925 Camp Street, which had requested it as important.

In 2014 and 2016, Philip Gefter crossed Robert's white calla lilies with George's black tulip magnolias in his two books *Wagstaff: Before and After Mapplethorpe* and *George Dureau, The Photographs* which spans forty years with ninety-eight images funded by friends and produced by the Aperture Foundation founded in 1952 by Dorothea Lange, Minor White, and Ansel Adams. That was as close as George ever got to 23rd Street, the ground zero of canonical

gravity for photography galleries, studios, and publishing in New York where Aperture had moved to 20 East 23rd in 1985, two minutes from the five-story building where the dying Prince of Darkrooms—who moved the same time as Aperture—held court in his new top-floor condo at 35 West 23rd Street.

In 1988, Anna Wintour, then editor of *House & Garden*, pictured Robert's carefully curated apartment as the best showplace in the best block. It was there the BBC interviewed him, and he hosted his last gala birthday party for the chauffeur-driven gowns and wallets of the limousine carriage trade he had created by double-daring them with his sales pitch: "If you don't like this photo, you may not be as avant-garde as you think." George, cracking wise about the ambitious Mapplethorpe doing "retail" and selling Dureau knockoffs told me, "Robert ran himself like a department store."

These fusions and confusions in mixed-media pop culture tighten the degrees of separation around Williams, Dureau, and Mapplethorpe. In 1977, Tennessee Williams scholar Kenneth Holditch (1933-2022) who was George's longtime champion wrote the "Introduction" to a retrospective of Dureau's work at the Contemporary Arts Center. In 1987, Holditch, a professor of English at the University of New Orleans and a high-school classmate of Elvis "King Creole" Presley, commissioned Dureau to draw the inaugural poster for the first (and second) *Tennessee Williams' New Orleans Literary Festival* started by Holditch at La Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré. In 2021, Holditch made one of his last public appearances in the fifty-minute video produced by Jarret Loftead, *New Orleans Artists: John Burton Harter and George Dureau*, paying tribute to both painters in an oral-history documentary produced during Covid in 2021 for the Virtual Saints+Sinners and LGBTQ+Literary Festival.

Offscreen, in the rooms where the women come and go speaking of George Dureau who was no hesitant J. Alfred Prufrock, they remember his kindnesses to models and other artists like his mentoring his young neighbor, African-American artist Vernon Thornberry, teaching him about painting, allegory, and nudes. Thornberry's painting *Decline of the Sun* is very Dureavian. Because Thornberry

had no heat or lights in his tin-shack studio on Esplanade, George ran electrical extension cords to him from his own home next door.[31] Don Dureau remembered George's constant neighborhood generosity casually taking him along to visit an "old lady he took care of" and to bring food to his models' families.

In the 1970s, New York exhibits and photography books, including the startling new gay photography books, were favoring Diane Arbus, Peter Hujar, and Arthur Tress with no Dureau and only minor nods to the tempestuous Mapplethorpe who was once so publicly jealous and personally censorious that he demanded that the tempestuous Hujar be removed from an upcoming group exhibit, or he'd withdraw. Neither he nor George liked group shows. When Robert got his way with Hujar, he realized by force of personality he could raise his profile through aggression. Seeking publicity beyond the closed camp of New Yorkers shunning him, he flew out of JFK to introduce himself to the power of the national gay press. He did what Evita Peron did and Dureau didn't: he went on a Rainbow Tour.

As a result of Robert's aggressive 1977 marketing campaign traveling to meet editors to promote what would become his *X Portfolio*, he had a banner year of free publicity in 1978 print media. He came to me at *Drummer* in San Francisco because I was actively promoting erotica as art which was also his goal and ultimately his signature contribution to modern art as proven by the verdict in the Cincinnati trial. He had not yet met Dureau when I commissioned him to shoot a photo of my friend leather-biker Elliot Siegal for the cover of *Drummer* and published nine of his *X* pictures in my special arts issue *Son of Drummer.* In New York, editor Michael Emory included six of his *X* pictures shuffled in almost anonymously among thirty-four other young photographers in *The Gay Picturebook*. In Paris, *Creatis* magazine devoted its entire issue seven to his work.

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31 Megan Wahn, "The Renaissance Man of Athens: Vernon Thornsberry," *The Red&Black*, August 3, 2020. https://www.redandblack.com/culture/the-renaissance-man-of-athens-vernon-thornsberry-captures-local-culture-in-new-exhibition/article_a0650f1c-855f-11e8-9996-47b6d45f00ca.html

The morning after the riotous first-class party cruising the Titanic 1970s hit the iceberg of HIV, the gay press in an AIDS frenzy of reactionary censorship tried to silence Mapplethorpe, the unrepentant champion of 1970s sex, by blacklisting his images and leathersex from its 1980s magazine and newspaper pages. At this time, while Dureau was mentoring, socializing, and dueling with Robert, George received his first coverage in the national gay press when *The Advocate* headlined him on the cover of issue 333, December 1981. Three months later in March, 1982, the same magazine took a swipe at gay leathermen like Robert with its cover story "Is the Urban Gay Lifestyle Hazardous to Your Health?" Gay censorship cost Robert fame and fortune until straight censorship added to his fame and fortune.

Dissing Robert in the *San Francisco Sentinel*, April 28, 1983, erstwhile *Drummer* contributor Steven Saylor typifying gay resistance to Robert coincidentally wrote dialogue that would have made George laugh.

"Robert Who? I've been dropping his name a lot lately, since getting hold of his first [*sic*] book of photographs, *Lady Lisa Lyon*. No one seems to recognize Mapplethorpe's name….He's a court photographer to the fashionable SoHo set, where New York literati and nameless punks in leather rub elbows with socialites in Halston drag….Yet you've probably seen his most famous work—an arresting, disturbing series of bodies trapped in latex and leather—in the artier gay magazines [*Drummer*] and in chichi card shops."[32]

Dureau was cursed with the label "Mapplethorpe's mentor." He who hated the suffocating label and refused playing second fiddle to anyone will forever be double-billed as a supporting actor in the Mapplethorpe drama in the way one can't say "Mapplethorpe" without saying "Patti Smith."

Village Voice writer and essential New Yorker Gary Indiana who knew Robert spun a clever riposte of "intellectual disability" giving the finger to politically-correct fundamentalists when he confirmed that "Robert took a lot of shit from the gay community….

32 Steven Saylor, *San Francisco Sentinel*, April 28, 1983

Mapplethorpe's work…challenged the 'sexually crippled and repressed' who see pornography as 'ipso facto evil.'"[33]

In 1991, George was shocked when I told him that in the November after Robert died in March 1989, I had such an uneasy premonition about politically-correct prejudice against the rich, white, male, leather photographer that I called *The Advocate* and suggested Robert for their "Person of the Year" cover. I was informed that the lesbian attorney and AIDS activist Urvashi Vaid was their chosen "Person." Over the next week, I suggested that this year of Robert's death was the last and only year Robert, then the most famous gay man in the world, was eligible to be their "Person." No offense to social justice warrior Vaid who could be celebrated the next year. After much friendly persuasion, the editor pictured Vaid and Mapplethorpe gendered side by side in two headshots billed on the December 19, 1990, cover of issue 566 as "Woman of the Year" and "Man of the Year." After that, *The Advocate* switched to "People of the Year."

On April 9, 2014, two days after George died, *The Advocate* posted a 186-word online notice headlined by a copy editor: "Dureau was a longtime contributor to *Drummer* magazine." By actual count over three years, George contributed only ten photos (1986) and two photos (1989) in two issues out of 214 issues from 1975-1999. Because The *Advocate* had no obituary prepared for George, arts reporter Christopher Harrity rose to the moment and made the most of the column inches allotted, and then concluded the news brief with a Youtube link to the 1991 video interview with George on his veranda.

Six months later on October 17, 2014, *The Advocate* published Nathan Smith's 1082-word Op-ed profile "After 25 years, Mapplethorpe's Photos Still Crack the Bullwhip." In a politically-correct culture disrupting norms around race, maybe George was lucky he was shunned and ignored. On May 17, 2017, *The Advocate* published an essay by Charles Stephens, the African-American founder (born 1980) of the Counter Narrative Project, titled "The

33 Joe Nalley, "S/M Activists Debate Meaning of Censorship," *OutWeek*, October 8, 1989, page 17

Sexual Objectification of Black Men from Mapplethorpe to Calvin Klein." Stephens made no mention of Dureau's cautionary mentorship of Robert around race when Stephens called Robert a racist: "The perfection sought by Mapplethorpe was inherently a sadistic enterprise…having sex with black men does not exclude a white man from racism, and in the case of Mapplethorpe, black men were not only a fetish but racism itself."[34]

George with his first pioneering exhibition at Naomi Damonte Marshall's Downtown Gallery in New Orleans in the spring of 1962 was a frontrunner for Mapplethorpe who couldn't get arrested. That's why Robert—who started his career making collages (*Leatherman #1*, 1970) from "found" photos in gay porno magazines he bought in adult bookstores on 42nd Street—flew hat in hand to San Francisco to pitch his pictures at *Drummer* to cash in on its monthly print run of 42,000 copies sent out internationally to subscribers he saw as potential models and clients.

When Robert unzipped his portfolio at my desk a few days before the Gay High Holiday of Halloween in 1977, his visions so outdistanced received gay photography that I immediately invited him into our *Drummer* salon. Would that Dureau had done the same because he could also have been swept to stardom on the immense international popularity of *Drummer* that helped create the gay culture of arts, ideas, and sex we reported on.

George said, "For a number of years, *Drummer* kept asking me for something but I said, 'I can't because, well, there's one serious problem. The men I shoot, most of my models, even though I sometimes lay them, are straight. They live a straight life. I'm attracted to people who are not flamboyant or don't have a gay lifestyle.' It seemed unfair to compromise them in a gay magazine."

Not until a dozen years later did *Drummer* finally persuade Dureau to publish ten of his conformity-disrupting photos in the April 1986 "Maimed Beauty" issue of *Drummer* 93 headlined by San Francisco photographer Mark I. Chester who wrote the cover feature. Three years later in issue 129, June 1989, *Drummer*—a first

34 Charles Stephens, "The Sexual Objectification of Black Men from Mapplethorpe to Calvin Klein," *The Advocate* online, May 17, 2017

draft of leather history and the leather magazine of record—published two more of George's photos to illustrate "Chester," a story making a sex fetish of erotic disability written by disabled-rights advocate Michael Agreve.

On the make in the 1970s, Robert, although often in group shows, managed to book very few solo shows. By 1985, his hard work, charm, and grit had scored more than forty small solo shows around the world. By his death four years later, he had logged more than two hundred solo exhibitions. Between 1965 and 1977, George had no solo shows, mostly because he retreated into himself after the "bad" 1971 review from Alberta Collier in the *Times-Picayune*.

George had his first one-man New York show at Robert Samuel Gallery in 1981 when Robert—the duelist no one knew was a secret active partner influencing the business of the gallery[35] —invited his mentor to exhibit in Manhattan. The minute Sam saw George's portfolio, he and Robert began an uptight Wagstaffian curation, picking and choosing Dureau pictures to George's chagrin. George, feeling set-up, told me sarcastically, "Sam and Robert 'cleaned up' my pictures."

Slapped repeatedly in the face, George recalled that Robert and Sam in 1981 had allegedly meddled with the *New York Times* over a feature article written by critic Gene Thornton who told him of editorial issues. "You may remember," George said, "the anecdote I told you about the *New York Times*. That peculiar incident when Gene Thornton wrote a major piece on me and it was pulled. At the time, I didn't get particularly hysterical. I thought, 'Oh, isn't that a shame.' But now that I look back at the hegemony of Wagstaff and Mapplethorpe, now I understand that there may have been something else than the *Times* saying, 'Oh, we don't want to do a piece on photographs about men, and Dureau wouldn't be the person who we would do it on if we were going to do it.' That was just the opposite of what Gene Thornton had told me. He said, 'Before I saw your work, I never even *wanted* to do a piece about men photographing men.'"

35 Frances Terpak and Michelle Brunnick, *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Archive*, Getty Publications, Getty Research Institute, 2016, page 140

The New York show drove Dureau to drink and his drinking at that time, like Mapplethorpe's drugs, presented difficulties. To survive the passive-aggressive power couple sorting his pictures and short-sheeting him on Robert Samuel Gallery walls and in the *Times*, George sought refuge sitting in front of Baudelaire's friend Manet absorbing his rebel style and life-size tableaux at the MOMA.

George told me, "When you enter a vicious mainstream like New York, you have to give up things. New York thinks it's the mainstream and I'm an eddy. In New Orleans, I'm the mainstream and they're the eddy. I don't sell my work at top New York prices. I sell at top New Orleans prices. I used to get drunk and frustrated back in the 60s by all this, but I don't do that anymore. I'm very controlled about eating and drinking."

In 2012, Higher Pictures Gallery in Manhattan opened George's touring solo exhibit, *Black 1973-1986*, which the *New York Times*, suffering from the art world's "Mapplethorpe Tourette Syndrome," gave short shrift in its 274-word review that, scrying George through the Mapplethorpe lens, could not resist mentioning "Mapplethorpe" three times, and that Dureau, named four times, was "black" which he was not. The *Times* printed a correction the next day.[36]

Is it possible that through the years, George's career was marginalized because he was thought to be black? Or because his photographs pictured blacks and disability? Or because he was regional and Southern? Or because he was gay? Or because he was presumed to have AIDS which he didn't?

In 2018, *The New York Times Style Magazine* published George's portrait of his white friend New Orleans painter Robert Gordy in a photo-spread of artists killed by AIDS.

In 2015 at the Armory Show, Higher Pictures opened its second solo Dureau exhibit, *The French Quarter, 1970s-1980s*, featuring his male nudes and street scenes. At the same moment, just a year after George, a cultural griot and gay elder, died famous and beloved as New Orleans's most significant artist of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the text artist Kenneth Goldsmith

36 Roberta Smith, "George Dureau: 'Black 1973-1986,'" *New York Times*, June 21, 2012

canonized Mapplethorpe as his protagonist in his thousand-page homage to New York City, *Capital: New York, Capital of the 20th Century*.[37] In his introduction to his thirty-six-page anchor-chapter, "Mapplethorpe," Goldsmith wrote, "Mapplethorpe, the Ultimate New Yorker, embodied New York in the 1970s in the way Baudelaire did mid-19th-century Paris."

Arthur Roger said the same about Dureau who also contained the essence of a city now changed by time: "George, the quintessential New Orleanian, had this quality that you would only see in New Orleans in that particular time."

Art critic D. Eric Bookhardt reviewing a Dureau exhibit at Arthur Roger Gallery for *Gambit* in July 2013 wrote: "It was Dureau's singular genius to be able to meld Charles Baudelaire's poetic otherworldliness with Walt Whitman's utopian American egalitarianism in singularly striking images that reflect something of the soul of his city."[38]

"Because of the circles Robert operated in," George, whose Dureau ancestors three or four generations back immigrated from Paris, said in our interview, "particularly in Europe where people knew my work, I heard from people come back from some university in Belgium or from Paris who'd say, 'Well, everyone over there knows you were Mapplethorpe's master. Everyone knows he had this master in New Orleans whom he would visit like a pilgrim.'"

Robert rushing past his mentor who was content to let the world come to Dauphine Street was well on his savvy way to global conquest creating his charitable Mapplethorpe Foundation in 1988 the same year as his triumphant first major solo museum exhibit at the Whitney *Retrospective* where Jonathan Becker photographed my once-spermatic dear friend gone gaunt and bravely receiving guests at his own wake, confined to a wheelchair, smiling, and grasping his Death's Head Cane to illustrate Dominick Dunne's article, "Robert

37 Kenneth Goldsmith, "Mapplethorpe" by Bruce Chatwin, Jack Fritscher, Patricia Morrisroe, and Edmund White, *Capital: New York, Capital of the 20th Century*, Verso, London, 2015, pages 501-537

38 D. Eric Bookhardt, "Paintings, Drawings, and Photographs by George Dureau," Arthur Roger Gallery, *Gambit*, June 17, 2013

Mapplethorpe's Proud Finale," for *Vanity Fair*, February 1989. If selling one's soul to the Devil actually worked, Robert would be alive today.

Suffering the passing of Robert, George felt sadness with no *Schadenfreude* even though his own success was trumped by Robert's *succès de scandale*.

When Robert Michael Mapplethorpe disabled by AIDS died at age 42, March 9, 1989, at Deaconess Hospital in Boston, Christie's appraised the Mapplethorpe estate at $228 million. When George Valentine Dureau disabled by Alzheimer's died twice as old as Robert at age 83, April 7, 2014, at Waldon Health Care Center in Kenner, Louisiana, he died poor, but money can't buy love of the kind Dureau elicited because he was the *mensch* Mapplethorpe could have been in America where the ultimate goal of the rich and famous is to become beloved.

During George's last impoverished days living with increasing dementia in a care home, his friend of seven years, Katie Nachod, the reference librarian at Tulane University and the Louisiana Supreme Court Law Library for whom he often prepared breakfast at his final post-Katrina home on Bienville Street, and other "Friends of George" held a fund-raising auction on July 13, 2013—*The Living Estate of George Valentine Dureau*—offering George's artistic tools and personal items like his famous four-poster bed, his kitchen table, and his photo props.

Professional appraiser Ruthie Winston said, "I know we won't have any trouble getting bids because George is such a part of our city's culture and he has left such an indelible mark; everything from the creation of his 'Professor Longhair' Jazz Fest poster or his exquisite black-and-white photos."[39] "Professor Longhair" was the black blues innovator, Henry "Roy" Byrd (1918-1980).

In the disco decade after the Stonewall riot in 1969 even as Marxist theories of class struggle were beginning to hijack popular gay liberation into the separatist fundamentalism of gay politics, Robert's business plan of resistance was to get his politically

39 Advertiser's Message, "Estate Auction to Benefit Artist George Dureau," *Uptown Messenger,* July 9, 2013

incorrect S&M pictures published in magazines as a trial balloon to pitch a book deal for his upcoming 1978 *X Portfolio*. When mainstream photo-book publishers also rejected his proposals, Robert, funded by Sam, turned to self-publishing thirty-nine of his photos in his *X*, *Y*, and *Z Portfolio* books from 1978 to 1981—even as he was studying, digesting, and cribbing Dureau.

In 1980, he and Sam engaged Galerie Jurka in Amsterdam to publish his *Black Males*. That book of fifty-eight pages, with Robert's *Bob Love*, 1979, on the cover was a vamp on Dureau's romantic blacks, specifically, George said with some pique, "My model Oscar. He kept my photo of Oscar hanging in the hall next to the bedroom when he was dying." To propel *Black Males*, Robert procured a key endorsement to catch the reflected glory he wanted from gay Manhattan mandarin and socialite Edmund White—whose middle name was *Valentine* like Dureau's—to write the brief introduction.

In the early 1980s, Robert's second influencer, not quite mentor, for his 1986 *Black Book*, was the pioneer gay white photographer Miles Everett (1912-1994) who, unknown to Dureau, had been photographing nude black men since 1931. Everett told me he had heard of Mapplethorpe through two photographers—Northern white peers of Dureau—who also influenced Robert.

One was Jim Jager (1933-1981) who, having shot his first blacks in 1958, photographed them in the 1970s for his Third World Studio which he ran in Chicago from 1976 to his murder in 1981. Word of Robert also came to Miles from Craig Anderson (1941-2014) who had been lensing blacks for his Sierra Domino studio in San Francisco since 1970. Studying Jager and Anderson in the doubly segregated world of white gay photographers and nude black men, Robert in 1981 visited the elderly Everett who was living closeted in Los Angeles with his unexhibited pictures because of his long career working for Hughes Aircraft and NASA. Robert's hunting trips with Everett describe how Robert acted on his hunting trips with Dureau.

"I didn't understand Robert then," Miles said during our interview on September 9, 1990. "I don't understand him now. He seemed extremely nervous. He smoked continuously all the time

he was here. But he took his time looking through my work, and, boy, he pulled out my best stuff. Maybe twelve or fifteen pictures. He went on to shoot my model Marty Gibson several times [*Marty Gibson, on the Beach*, 1982]. I think he was influenced, maybe in his late pictures, by my style. I feel this because some of his late pictures use a black background. Now, he didn't ever before use a black background like I did. He'd tried whites and grays and all that kind of thing. But he saw in my work a certain beauty that he probably liked, and he went back and he duplicated it."[40] And then published the recreations in his *Black Book*.

By 1986, the year Robert's AIDS was diagnosed, work by Dureau and Mapplethorpe was trending everywhere in pop culture. The similarities of existing work caused confusion, contrast, and comparison between the two artists because, as Jonathan Webb said, "I had to hide George's work when Robert visited because if Robert saw a photo in New Orleans, six weeks later he'd be exhibiting his version in New York."

Floral Park came to New Orleans like Birnam Wood to Dunsinane.

"It was the kiss of death when Robert would buy something of mine," George said. "It was like he was paying a token price for what he was going to do with that picture. Put it in the Big Time! It was funny, because he would drain the soul out of it, that big slice of soul I created out of my personal experience, and not exactly for public consumption. I mean, so many of my pictures he'd copy in his brain. He'd see something in my drawings, paintings, and photographs that he'd carry back to New York where he started cropping his pictures to re-create 'profound Dureau compositions.'"

Speaking of the design of his photos bought by Robert, George said, "Robert lifted my 'Sitting Pose,' and sentenced it to death. There were two photos I showed in New York. One was Dave Kopay [*Dave Kopay*, 1982], the [gay] football player sitting sidesaddle with his arms around his knees and his dick and balls hanging out. The other one was a nude black boy [*Leonard Frazer (with Clarinet)*] sitting

40 Jack Fritscher, "White Art, Black Men," *Mapplethorpe Assault with a Deadly Camera, op. cit.*, page 205

with dick and balls hanging out. And those sort of went together to make Robert's pictures of models sitting exposed on pedestals."

He added, "We didn't become enemies exactly. Over time, he became distant. He didn't know how to draw pictures of himself. He tried to draw me. His artwork was not very good."

The models Dureau humanized, Robert fetishized. What D. H. Lawrence, beloved by Tennessee Williams, wrote about Walt Whitman in his *Studies in Classic American Literature* may also be said about George. "Whitman came along, and saw the slave, and said to himself: 'That negro slave is a man like myself. We share the same identity.'"

Dureau called his pictures a "Family Album." As inclusive auteur, George titled his photos with the model's name and often had the model sign the photo prints next to his own signature. Robert as exclusive auteur titled his pictures with the model's first name and location as he pitched his work, signed by him only, to radical-chic white liberals.

"Robert cleaned up my pictures to make them respectable for respectable queers, especially queers with money. He wanted to give them something to talk about, bragging rights, like comparing the broken pottery of a boy to his perfect calla lilies. He was playing a game of 'Chicken' with his gay Mafia following. 'Look! I'm showing a dick with a mouth on it! Did you blink yet?' Baloney."

Robert's "Mondo Mapplethorpe" pictures of faces and fetishes were inspired by the million glossy gay sex photos he bought from bins in adult bookstores on 42nd Street. Those photos by text and subtext could have been virtual stills from the shocking international film hit *Mondo Cane* (1962). That movie which premiered at Cannes dared to turn its camera toward taboo by shooting never-before-seen cultural practices around the world. Its docu-fiction collage of bizarre visions was liberation for taboo-breaking *Mondo*-inflected photographers like Diane Arbus, Robert Mapplethorpe, George Dureau, Joel-Peter Witkin, and Arthur Tress, as well as for underground filmmakers like Andy Warhol, and Kenneth Anger with *Scorpio Rising* (1964), and John Waters with *Mondo Trasho* (1969) starring drag queen Divine of *Pink Flamingos* (1972).

In its 2017 exhibit, *Pride of Place: The Making of Contemporary Art in New Orleans*, the New Orleans Museum of Art displayed Mapplethorpe, Dureau, and Waters alone together and censored equally in an adult "private space" separated from the main show.

The Mapplethorpe-Dureau relationship had a perforated line.

"Robert would look at my photographs," Dureau told me as if Robert were the sex-starved Sebastian Venable cruising tasty teens of color in *Suddenly Last Summer*. George said, "Robert would look at my pictures of black men *devouring* them, discussing ways of making my rather romantic approach *nasty*, searching for the *shock* value." Williams wrote of Sebastian what he could have written about Robert out cruising the Quarter with George, the jolly chef, who said, "Robert devoured my art."

But drugs made the Irish-American boy, born with the Famine in his bones, anorexic. He, whose 24 Bond Street kitchen was never a place to cook, didn't like George's suppers, New Orleans cuisine, or eating.

"Robert should have eaten the food he photographed," I said. "He'd be alive today."

"His 'precious' grapes? I don't think so," George said. "All Robert wanted was an egg done his certain way and a Coca-Cola."

Grapes, 1985, was part of Robert's food photography like *Watermelon with Knife*, 1985, that suggests a summer picnic, but codes just a tad racist.

Tennessee Williams, who had his own regularly reserved window table at Galatoire's where he could eat and watch the hot dishes cruising outside on Bourbon Street, said about his insatiable sex-tourist Sebastian cannibalized by lads of color in a spasm band: "That's how he talked about people…as if they were items on the menu…delicious…appetizing…*he was really nearly half starved from living on pills and salad*."[41] (Italics added)

In the social intersections around Dureau and Mapplethorpe, when Jim McBride, the New York director of the 1986 neo-noir film, *The Big Easy*, wanted to capture authentic New Orleans locations

41 Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer, Tennessee Williams: Plays 1957-1980*, Library of America, 2000, page 118

and picturesque *bona fide* characters, he persuaded George, who had painted *Reception with a Waiter* (1962), to punctuate the picture with a cameo star turn as the "Maitre D'" acting opposite Ellen Barkin on location at Antoine's Restaurant, 713 St. Louis Street.

In the second draft of *The Big Easy* script, authors Jack Baran and Jim McBride added to the original screenplay by Daniel Petrie, Jr.

Just then the 'Maitre D' appears with the telephone.
Maitre D': Miss Osborne? Call for you.

McBride's connection to Dureau came from his earlier 1976 connection to Mapplethorpe who shot one of his most controversial pictures of the director's five-year-old son, *Jesse McBride*, described as "Blond male nude child perched on top of chair with refrigerator in background," which was one of the seven photographs put on trial in Cincinnati.

In the popular culture of 1987, while George was a photographer beloved in Southern media and books like *New Orleans Elegance and Decadence*, Mapplethorpe, an elegant leather S&M graduate of Pratt and the decadent "Mineshaft School for Lower Education," increasingly disabled with two years to live, was at the apogee of his international career.

Robert had long been shooting gay cult icons like pornstar photographer Peter Berlin (b. 1942) who is Baron Armin Hagen Freiherr von Hoyningen-Huene, and collecting photographs of black men shot in the 1930s by Peter Berlin's cousin, the Jazz Age fashion photographer George Hoyningen-Huene (1900-1968) whose crisp silent-film lighting and in-frame composition directly influenced Robert's exquisite style. As he was growing his own celebrity plowing the pertinent on each continent, he did, in fact, clean up his act, graduating from the leather photography of his "High S&M *Drummer* Period 1975-1980" to his Dureauvian portraits of his "High Black Period 1979-1988."

Unlike Mapplethorpe, George grew up woke in the black culture of the New Orleans *entrepôt* that was 70-percent white when he was born in 1930 and 70-percent black by Hurricane Katrina

in 2005. Robert grew up in the 98-percent-white calla lily that was Floral Park, New York.

While Robert was studying George's natural-born knack for racial presentation of his friendly neighbors, he set out to build his own racial street cred by waking himself to the black culture of skeptical black strangers inside black gay bars like "Blues" in Times Square. His tentative first black pictures were fetish portraits, not of black men he'd yet to approach, but of a pack of Kool Filter King menthol cigarettes, *Untitled (Kool Cigarettes*), 1975, because while white men made a cowboy fetish of Marlboros, black men smoked Kools, and so did he because they did, and he could open a conversation with the offer of a smoke.

After Wally Wallace (1938-1999), the founding manager of the iconic Mineshaft sex club (1976-1988), told me in a video interview on March 28, 1990, how Robert cruised with him in black bars in New York in the 1970s, George confirmed in 1991 that Robert cruised much the same way in New Orleans in the 1980s.

Wally said, "I knew Bob as a person. I liked Bob. He shot a portrait of Mr. Mineshaft. [*Mr. Mineshaft, David O'Brien*, 1979] We weren't close friends, but we'd talk and compare notes. I remember one time [hesitates], well, he liked black men. He had heard of a place in Times Square called 'Blues,' which was a black gay bar. One of the few places that was openly promoted as a black gay bar. And Bob was afraid to go there. I don't why, but he was.

"So I went up there with him one time. He was like a kid so eager to go, but so afraid to go alone that you might have thought it was in the depths of Harlem. The night we were there, there weren't many hot men, but only a couple of black drag queens with their white boyfriends. It was not what he imagined. I know he went back there a few times. I know he went to Keller's a lot. That has now become a black bar. It was one of the original New York leather bars. It's still there; one of the longest-running gay bars."[42]

42 Jack Fritscher, "Wally Wallace: The Mineshaft Interview," *Profiles in Gay Courage: Leatherfolk, Arts, and Ideas*, Palm Drive Publishing, San Francisco, 2022, page 75

Dureau, mentoring Mapplethorpe's photography of blacks, more importantly tried to mentor Robert's behavior around race relations.

"I must tell you about my best time with Robert," he told me. "We had an absolutely splendid time cruising through the cold of Mardi Gras. Canal Street, the main drag, was mobbed. We were wingmen playing a cruising game like we were gunners in a war bomber.

"I'd say, 'Look at three o'clock: tall, skinny, tan.'

"He'd say, 'Look at nine o'clock: mean, black, dangerous, sexy.'

"That's what we shared the most mutual joy in, the hunt. He'd talk me into going into a black gay bar, and they'd recognize me and be all over me to shoot them. Robert would find someone he thought fabulous looking, and I'd drop him home with them, but often as not, afterward, he'd say, 'Oh, they weren't any good. They didn't do the right thing.'

"I thought him petulant. He liked what he saw, but often their performance never came up to New York standards. In the bars, his leather-wear made him look like a groupie with a boy band. Robert would stand in the corner and scowl at people, then say something. He acted the same punk way in a New Orleans bar as he would in a New York bar, looking petulant. I don't do that. I ask them about their wife and kids."

"Did Robert ask them what kind of drugs they liked?"

"I suppose he offered them drugs, because he didn't have enough confidence in his own charm. Drugs are the cheap and easy way."

"What is your take on Robert's wearing a button that said, 'N-word'?"

"That was a real problem with him, that N-word thing. I'd set him up with someone I knew and the next morning, I'd ask, 'How was he?'

"'Not too good,' Robert said.

"'Not too good?' Why not?

"'Well, he didn't want to do anything.'

"'I can't believe 'he didn't want to do anything.'

"'He wouldn't say,' Robert said, "'I'm your N-word.'"

"I'd go, 'Huuuh?' I've been accused of being a colonialist, accused of keeping slaves, despite my cordial behavior with my darlings. And I'd say to Robert, 'He wouldn't say, "I'm your N-word"? Isn't there an alternate, like, "Oh my darling, I love you'?

"Robert would say, 'No! Why couldn't he say, "I'm your N-word"? I say to them, "I'm your cocksucker."

"Well, do I have to explain why it's hard to say that? The problem was on his side. He wanted a scenario that was very set, inflexible. I mean that some person had to open his mouth and say, 'I'm your N-word.' Robert could have just thought that part as a fantasy in his head. What was he thinking? I think fetish scenarios for all of us come out of our deepest past."

"There's that picture of his, the one with the big black dick hanging out of the polyester suit. I own that polyester picture."

For all its threats and promises of racial potency, Robert's pars-pro-toto *Man in Polyester Suit*—coincidentally printed and released in 1981, the same year as John Waters's satirical *Polyester*—is also, to the gay gaze, an ironic picture of the erectile dysfunction size queens from the 70s recognize from men showing and growing at the clubs and baths: the endowed have a harder time getting hard and staying hard. In the gay press of the 1980s, it could also have served as a camp advertisement for a "Before Viagra" shot even without an "After Viagra" shot of the same man and pose with penis rampant.

George owned eight Mapplethorpes. Don Dureau retained one for the Dureau family and sold seven back to the Mapplethorpe Foundation to support George in the nursing home.

"Robert," George recalled, "told me he had major plans for that polyester model [Milton Moore]. He thought that was going to be some big lifelong affair.

"One time, he said, 'I wish I could find a smart one.'

"I said, 'What do you mean, a smart one?'

"He said, 'You know, I'd like to find one as good-looking as Bryant Gumbel.' [The handsome Bryant Gumbel was the popular anchor of NBC's *Today* show from 1982 to 1997.]

"I said, 'Why?'

"He said, 'I want one that has a brain of his own.'

"'Why? So he doesn't hang on to you?'

"'Yes.'

"'But, Robert,' I said, 'if there was a black man that was brilliant and beautiful and had a successful business, why would he want to go into a corner and say, "I'm your N-word" to someone like you?'"

Rimshot.

George was a swordsman who had perfected dueling to first blood in the fencing academies of gay bars.

In 1980, with less than nine years to live, Robert took to race-play sex and to shooting pictures of black men while embracing black lovers like his model and final partner Jack Walls—also photographed by Dureau—who standing by his man till he died, called Patricia Morrisroe's biography of Robert, "Shit."[43]

As an aging senior examining his career, George who had always been the life of the party was realizing he was becoming an endangered species in the gentrifying French Quarter where for years he had volunteered with city planners and served on boards of art commissions to protect the Quarter from Disneyfication.

Writing on a sheet of drawing paper, he took stock of self-disciplines of the kind Mapplethorpe never knew because Robert never had the advantage of growing old. He wrote about himself in the third person the way he often talked about himself in the third person—the way Catherine Holly in *Suddenly Last Summer* kept her journal in the third-person—before he began to suffer from dementia after Hurricane Katrina rattled him in 2005.

Having sheltered in place during Hurricane Betsy in 1965, George in 2005 rode out Katrina shuttered in his Dauphine home with four or five friends. Don Dureau said, "Around the time of Katrina, he got strange. When busses arrived to evacuate people, he got on a bus of refugees headed to Baton Rouge where he was given a ticket to Houston, but then got set up in a carriage house in Baton Rouge for a couple of months. What happened was that

43 Tim Murphy, "Artist Jack Walls Survived His Boyfriend, Robert Mapplethorpe—and All the Haters, Too," *The Caftan Chronicles*, September 6, 2023. https://thecaftanchronicles.substack.com/p/artist-jack-walls-survived-his-boyfriend

immediately after the storm, he crossed the street to a Catholic nursing home where a priest getting on one of the evacuation busses said, 'George, you need to come along with us to Houston.' But George got off in Baton Rouge after the Red Cross asked if he was on the bus and gave him a letter from friends who were good patrons saying he was welcome to stay in their Baton Rouge guest house while they were in Europe.

"When he got there, they had set up easels and paint and food. So he stayed there quite awhile. I told him he could come stay with me, but he wouldn't say yes or no. Then without telling me, he returned to Dauphine and was shocked that he had to vacate the premises because the landlord had lost his own family home.

"I went to his new home five times and he never answered the door. I called him many many times on the phone and he never answered, until one time he did, and said that line that haunts me, "I don't have a brother," and hung up on me. I thought maybe it was one of his jokes so I didn't worry too much or make a wellness check because friends said he was doing okay. He was already suffering from Alzheimer's. Our grandfather Dureau died in 1942 of extreme dementia."

In flowing script, the dyslexic George standing outside himself, feisty with deprecating irony or fighting semantic memory loss in his long goodbye, drew the words, as perfect as a soliloquy by Tennessee Williams, picturing his elder self estranged from his younger self in the third person.

"George quit smoking, quit what did not encourage his art and talent, quit drinking, quit living with another person (marriage [*sic*]), quit unhealthy goodies, quit drawing or painting in the style of others, quit laying women in 1960, scratch that, 1965, quit laying men in 2000, scratch that, 2002, quit driving, quit drinking red wine, quit flying to other places, quit keeping secrets, quit wearing popular clothes, quit dining around, quit promoting exhibitions, quit matching the popular times in art. He draws, paints, cooks, and bicycles conservatively around the Vieux Carré, but does not often visit elsewhere."[44]

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44 *New Orleans Artists: John Burton Harter and George Dureau*, *op. cit.*

I told George when Robert asked me to write about him in 1977, he "wanted to be a story told in beds at night around the world."

George said, "Who doesn't?"

A month before Robert died in 1989, he told his first lover and model David Croland, "Tell them everything. Keep me alive."

All his life, George regaling reporters and talking to video cameras was courting the same eternity as Robert for his art. "I'm doing this interview for posterity," George told me. He wanted us writers to keep him alive. "I think my work will go on because it's loaded with humanity and stories of people's lives."

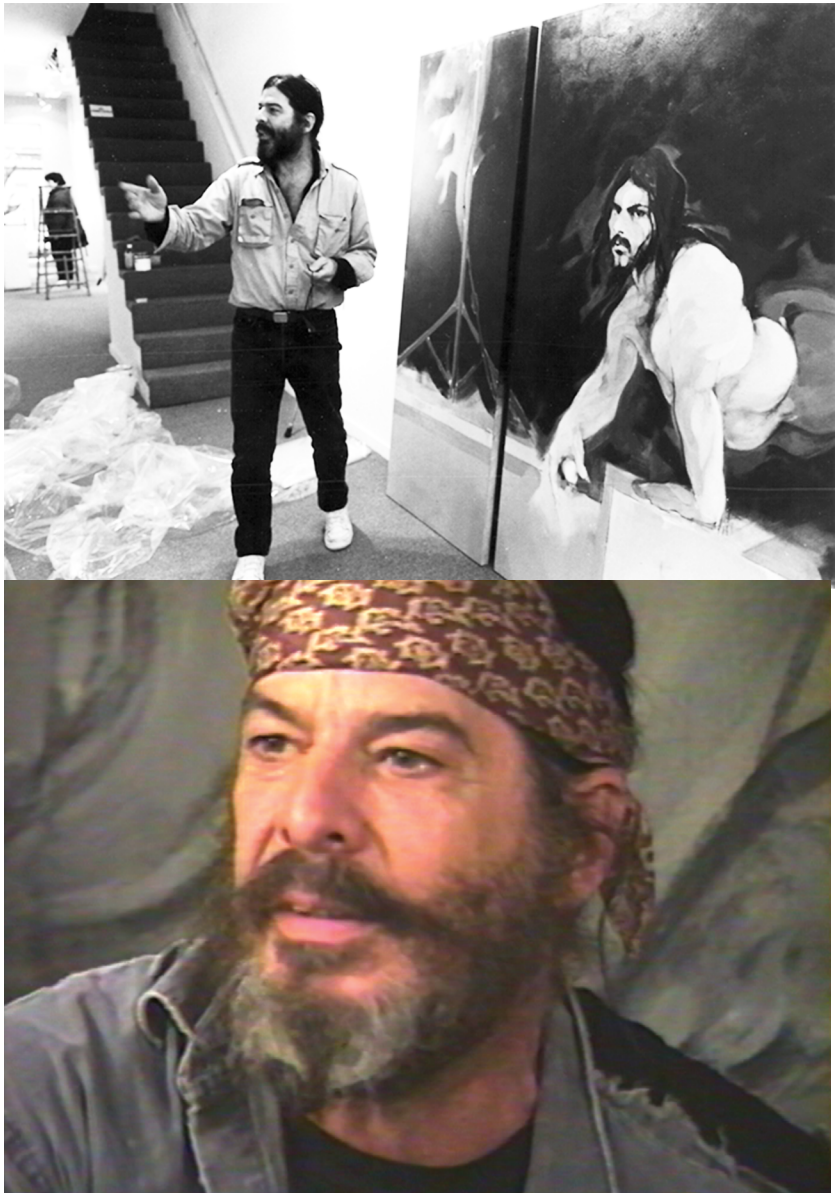
On Friday, May 3, 1996, five years after the perfect moment of our golden week together in New Orleans, George rendezvoused with Mark and me in Paris where Mark videotaped us three laughing and strolling the gravel paths of the Tuileries before we headed off for an early bite at a *brasserie* and then a quick walk to La Maison Europèenne de la Photographie at 5/7 Rue de Fourcy where that evening George was being fêted and our two Dureau documentaries were being inducted into its permanent collection. Joy remains in memories of that final Friday that was our "Sunday in the Park with George."

For the next few years we kept in contact by telephone until he no longer picked up his receiver. So that splendid springtime together cruising around Paris was the last time we saw each other in this life; but George's photographs hanging in our living room next to his handsome 4x3-foot painting *Legless Male Torso Rising Armless Off Greek Column* (1991) which he gave to my husband as a birthday gift, keep us forever mindful of him.

When beloved Big Daddy George disappeared from the French Quarter and died offstage out of town, he was sorely missed.

Katie Machod recalled, "An old man who sat for portraits by Dureau in the 1960s, teary-eyed and pleading, asked: 'Mr. George die?'"[45]

45 Steve Garbarino, "Artist George Dureau left his mark on the French Quarter like few others," *The Advocate*, April 15, 2014



(Top) George Dureau installing his torso painting of his legless friend and recurring photography model B. J. Robinson, Martin Gallery, 2427 18th St. NW, Washington, D. C., 1986. Photo by © Jim Marks, journalist, *The Washington Bladee*

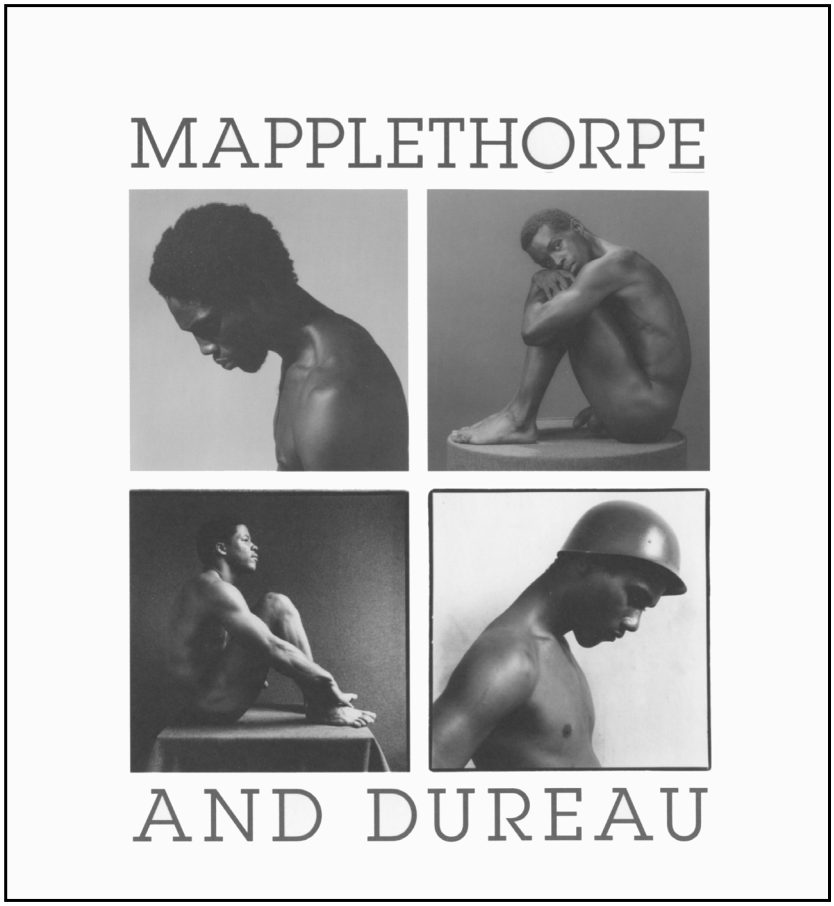
(Bottom) George Dureau in his French Quarter studio, April 8, 1991. Video photo by © Jack Fritscher

(Top) George Dureau with *Satyr* Painting. Polaroid photo by © Michael Alago

(Right) George Dureau to scale against his large painting *Mars Descending*, Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans's *War Exhibition*. April 8, 1991. Video photo by © Jack Fritscher

George Dureau at 81, French Quarter home and studio, 1307 Dauphine Street, New Orleans, 2012. Polaroid by © Michael Alago

(Opposite page) George Dureau and Don Dureau, New Orleans. 1986. Photos by © George Dureau. Courtesy of Don Dureau



Who shot what? *Mapplethorpe and Dureau: Photographs*, January 6 – February 17, 2018, Arthur Roger Galley; Opening Reception: Saturday, January 6, 6–8 pm; 434 Julia Street, New Orleans, LA 70130; in collaboration with the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Courtesy of Arthur Roger Gallery and Michael Alago