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Dominick and Elliot

1979

SORRY, NO IMAGE AVAILABLE

NOT ON DISPLAY

ARTIST	Robert Mapplethorpe 1946–1989
MEDIUM	Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper
DIMENSIONS	Support: 340 × 341 mm frame: 612 × 587 × 38 mm
COLLECTION	ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland
ACQUISITION	ARTIST ROOMS Acquired jointly with the National Galleries of Scotland through The d'Offay Donation with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund 2008
REFERENCE	AR00199

[Summary](#)



This black and white photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe depicts a sadomasochistic scene between two men named Dominick and Elliot. The figures occupy a dark interior space, with black

walls. Dominick, who is entirely naked except for the white underwear pulled down to his thighs, is strapped with leather bindings around his wrists and ankles, and is hoisted upside down in a cruciform position with his arms outstretched to the floor and his legs tied together pointing upwards. A thick chain is secured around his neck which trails up the length of his torso to his genitals. His stretched out body spans almost the entire vertical length of the picture in the centre of the composition. He stares straight at the camera while Elliot, who stands upright to the left of Dominick, loops his left arm through Dominick's legs and grabs his testicles. In contrast to Dominick's vulnerable and seemingly uncomfortable position, Elliot's pose, with his legs planted wide, is faintly aggressive. He wears no shirt and the top buttons of his jeans are undone. In his right hand he holds a cigarette and draws attention to his own crotch while looking at the camera with an assured, intense stare.

This photograph was taken in 1979 at a time when Mapplethorpe was particularly interested in taking photographs of sadomasochistic sexual practices and the individuals who practised them. Mapplethorpe first met Elliot in 1976 through Jack Fritscher, who was editor of *Drummer*, a magazine for leather enthusiasts. Fritscher was impressed by Mapplethorpe's photographs and was eager to elevate the status of the magazine by assigning him to take a picture of Elliot, a S&M call boy, for the magazine's cover, which appeared on the front of issue number twenty-four that year. This led to Mapplethorpe gaining contacts and credibility in the 'sex network', which the photographer himself described as being 'like any other kind of network' (Mapplethorpe quoted in Morrisroe 1995, p.165). It was through Elliot that Mapplethorpe met Dominick and subsequently collaborated with both of them on this image.

Mapplethorpe was actively engaged in the S&M scene himself during the mid-to-late 1970s. He photographed sadomasochistic practices as an active participant, not simply as a voyeuristic observer, producing images that were deemed by some in the art world to be shocking. For example, the writer Ingrid Sischy described these images as 'fearful' and 'intricately frightening' (Ingrid Sischy 'A Society Artist', *Robert Mapplethorpe*, London 1991, p.84), while the critic and philosopher Arthur Danto believed that this particular image is one of Mapplethorpe's most challenging photographs and that it 'outdoes anything dreamed of by Mapplethorpe' (Danto 1996, p.69). However these photographs were often seen as tame in S&M circles. Nick Biens, a S&M specialist who sat for Mapplethorpe (see Tate [AR00159](#)), referred to Mapplethorpe's images as being an 'artsified version of S&M. They're not like photographs snapped during an actual scene' (Biens cited in Morrisroe 1995, p.191).

Art historian Richard Meyer has commented on how staged Mapplethorpe's S&M photographs are. Rather than being presented with an image of sexual engagement, *Dominick and Elliot* features two figures formally arranged, presenting their erotic positions and equipment. As Meyer remarks: 'Rather than enact a pretense of photographic transparency, the couple insist upon the artifice of their pose, challenging our spectatorial power to see and freeze them by signifying their agency in allowing a prepared, patently limited view of their sadomasochistic "image".' (Meyer 1989, p.72.)

Further reading

Richard Meyer, 'Imaging Sodomasochism: Robert Mapplethorpe and the Masquerade of Photography', *Qui Parle*, vol.4, no.1, Fall 1990, pp.62–78.

Patricia Morrisroe, *Mapplethorpe. A Biography*, London 1995.

Arthur Coleman Danto, *Playing With The Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe*, Berkeley and London 1996.

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June 2013

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chain (56)

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named individuals (12,487)

Dominick (1)

Elliot (1)

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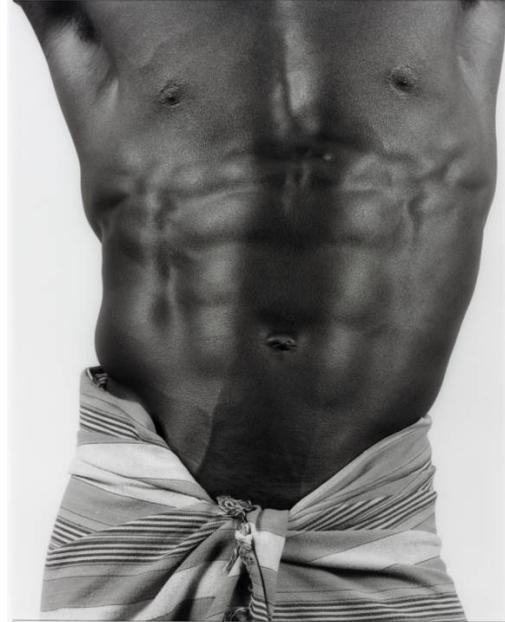
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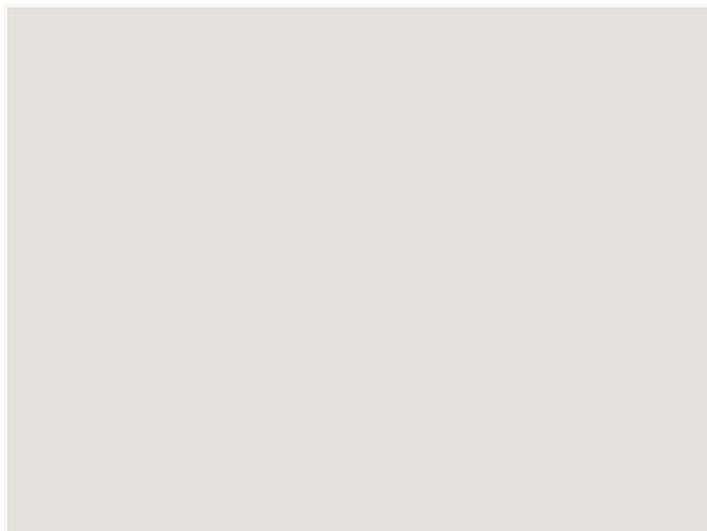
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