

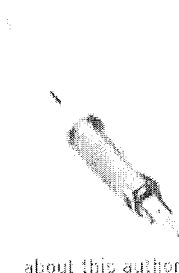
## Just Kids by Patti Smith

### Book Group Discussion Questions

1. Patti Smith's father told her she was not attractive enough to marry; Robert Mapplethorpe said he was a parent pleaser making "girl art" against his family's wishes. How did these affect their relationship and their lives as artists?
2. Patti Smith served as nurse, caretaker, and money lender to male artists and supported some female artists like Janis Joplin. Who helped Patti Smith? Talk about the roles of artist and muse.
3. Victor Hugo describes Arthur Rimbaud as "an infant Shakespeare" when in his teens. He was known as a libertine and restless soul, traveling extensively before his death from cancer at 37. What was the significance of Patti Smith's love of Rimbaud? Of Bob Dylan?
4. Patti Smith felt her fame came too quickly and Robert Mapplethorpe couldn't get his quickly enough. Why the different attitudes?
5. The book says that Andy Warhol had defaced Madonna and Christ and Robert Mapplethorpe followed in his footsteps. Who else has continued this since the 1970's?
6. There was a lot of loss in the book – suicide, death, burglary. How did that affect the artists?
7. Patti Smith writes that people assumed she was a speed freak and a lesbian because of the way she looked. Do you think there was any attempt to re-write or edit history in the book?
8. Patti Smith felt that Robert Mapplethorpe saw God as universal love when she met him but the battle between Catholic good and evil took over. Robert gave Patti a Joan of Arc medal on the opening of his first Polaroid show. How did religion affect their relationship, their lives, their art?
9. What happened to the Chelsea hotel? Does it still exist?
10. Do you think it's true (per Patti Smith mother's "wives tale")- that what you do on New Year's Day sets the tone for the rest of the year?



## About the Author



about this author

### Full text biography:

#### Patti Smith (American singer)

Birth Date : 1946

Place of Birth : United States, Illinois, Chicago

Nationality : American

Occupation : Singer

### Table of Contents:

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### Awards:

Numerous awards from publications, including *Creem*, for performances in concerts and on recordings; named commander, French Order of Arts and Letters, 2005; inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 2007; National Book Award for nonfiction, 2010, for *Just Kids*.

### Personal Information:

Born 1946, in Chicago, IL; daughter of Grant and Beverly Smith; married Fred Smith (a musician under name Fred Sonic), 1979 (died, 1994); children: Jackson, Jesse. **Addresses:** Home: Ann Arbor, MI.

### Career Information:

Poet, musician, artist, and performer. Worked in factory, c. 1964; clerk for Scribner's (bookstore), c. 1970; staff writer for *Rock*, c. 1971; associated with Arista Records, 1975-2002; associated with Columbia Records, 2002--. **Exhibitions:** Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA.

### Writings:

#### POETRY

- *Kodak*, Middle Earth Bookshop (Philadelphia, PA), 1972.
- *Seventh Heaven*, Telegraph Books (Boston, MA), 1972.
- *Witt*, Gotham Book Mart (New York, NY), 1973.
- (With Tom Verlaine) *The Night*, Aloes Books (London, England), 1976.
- *Ha! Ha! Houdini*, Gotham Book Mart (New York, NY), 1977.
- *Babel*, Putnam (New York, NY), 1978.
- *Early Work, 1970-1979*, W.W. Norton (New York, NY), 1994.
- *The Coral Sea*, W.W. Norton (New York, NY), 1996, reprinted, W.W. Norton & Co. (New York, NY), 2011.
- *Patti Smith Complete: Lyrics, Reflections, and Notes for the Future*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1998, updated and revised as *Patti Smith Complete 1975-2006: Lyrics, Reflections & Notes for the Future*, Harper Perennial (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Wild Leaves*, W.W. Norton (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Auguries of Innocence*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Patti Smith: Dream of Life*, Rizzoli (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Trois*, Thames & Hudson (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Land 250*, Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain (Paris, France), 2008.
- (Author of dedication) Robert Mapplethorpe, *Robert Mapplethorpe: Perfection in Form = La Perfezione Nella Forma*, teNeues (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Woolgathering*, New Directions (New York, NY), 2011.

## LYRICIST; SOUND RECORDINGS

- *Horses*, Arista Records, 1975.
- *Radio Ethiopia*, Arista Records, 1976.
- *Easter*, Arista Records, 1978.
- *Wave*, Arista Records, 1979.
- *Dream of Life*, Arista Records, 1988.
- *Gone Again*, Arista Records, 1996.
- *Peace and Noise*, Arista Records, 1997.
- *Gung Ho*, Arista Records, 2000.
- *Trampin'*, Columbia Records, 2004.

## OTHER

*Twelve  
Bangs, 2013*

- (Author of foreword) *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters of Gregory Corso*, New Directions (New York, NY), 2003.
- (Compiler, with David Greenberg and John W. Smith) *Strange Messenger: The Work of Patti Smith* (exhibition catalog), Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh, PA), 2003.
- *Just Kids* (memoir), Ecco (New York, NY), 2010.

Contributor to numerous collections of poetry, photography, and plays. Contributor to periodicals, including *Creem*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Rock*.

## Sidelights:

Patti Smith is sometimes referred to as the "godmother of punk" for her seminal 1975 album *Horses*. Since the mid-1970s, she has earned a reputation as an important countercultural figure, drawing inspiration from poets and musicians such as Jimi Hendrix, Arthur Rimbaud, and Robert Bresson, and influencing a generation of rockers such as U2 and R.E.M.

Smith was a poet before she took to the stage, and her verse stands out as the defining strength of her music. Her 1975 debut album, *Horses*, was marketed as "three chord rock merged with the power of the word," a phrase that resonated as an antidote to a music scene dominated by what Smith characterized in an interview with *Guardian Online* reporter Laura Barton as "pyrotechnics and pseudo rock stars [with] ... limousines and a bunch of broads hangin' around." The album quickly became a milestone work of the early punk rock movement, and it propelled Smith to stardom.

Following the release of her second album, *Radio Ethiopia*, Smith embarked on a concert and promotion tour. Her schedule, though, ended abruptly in Florida when she pitched headfirst into the orchestra pit during a performance and broke her neck. While incapacitated, Smith worked on writing poetry and drawing. Some of her poems from this period were published in the 1978 collection *Babel*. Jonathan Cott described the collection in *Rolling Stone* as "an alternately dazzling, uneven, arousing, annoying, imitative, original work." In the book, noted Cott, "she contacts ghosts, makes love with the dead and transforms herself into animals (a ... skunk dog in one poem)."

During the 1980s, Smith virtually disappeared from the entertainment scene. She and her husband, Fred "Sonic" Smith (who was also a musician), moved to a Detroit suburb, where they raised their son, Jackson, and daughter, Jesse. In 1988 Smith released one album, *Dream of Life*, but chose not to tour in support of it.

Smith and her husband were collaborating on their next album in 1994 when Fred Smith died of a heart attack. Devastated, Patti Smith turned to her brother, Todd, for support. But less than a month after Todd had moved into Smith's house to help her finish her album, he too died suddenly. Smith observed that she was unsure whether her professional and personal life could go on following these two tragedies. "I would go in to record songs, and I would have to stop and run off because I needed to cry or throw up," she told *Chicago Tribune* reporter Greg Kot. "I had to shelve songs because I couldn't handle them—they were just too heartbreaking. But I felt I owed something to Fred and Todd and my family. I felt a sense of duty to finish the album." The album was eventually released in 1996, under the title *Gone Again*.

As a way to further cope with her loss, Smith released a book of her early poems titled *Early Work, 1970-1979*. "This compilation attests she could have been a valuable writer even had she never entered a recording studio," wrote *Booklist* contributor Aaron Cohen. While Margot Mifflin noted in *Entertainment Weekly* that Smith's verse is more

appealing "through the lens of youth," she admired how the book portrays a "galvanizing sense of faith and transcendence."

Smith's next volume of poems, *Auguries of Innocence*, was hailed as her first major collection of new work since 1979. Critical reactions, however, were mixed. Jeff Minick, writing for the *Smoky Mountain News Online*, thought that the collection "reflect[s] the dismal state of the craft [of poetry] in our time," and he called it "turgid, overly personal and private." Many, however, remained enchanted with Smith's lyricism, including Donna Seaman, who praised the volume in *Booklist* for its "lithe works unsettling in their spiritual inquiry, archetypal imagery, and dissonant juxtapositions." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor summed up Smith's appeal by noting that *Auguries of Innocence* "effectively transmits the affect and aura, as well as the innocence, that make her a rock star."

Smith's 2010 work *Just Kids* is a memoir of her lifelong relationship with the legendary photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Smith and Mapplethorpe met in New York in the late 1960s, immediately connected, and made a vow to take care of each other. They were lovers until Mapplethorpe discovered he was gay, but they continued to live together and create art. Though they eventually moved on to different partners, they remained close friends until Mapplethorpe's death in 1989. *Just Kids* is Smith's loving account of their relationship.

Although reviews of the work were overwhelmingly positive, *Library Journal* contributor Ned Resnikoff claimed that "the renowned poet and lyricist's storytelling is just disappointing." However, many critics' views greatly varied from this assessment. Reviewing the work in the *New Statesman*, contributor Jude Rogers observed: "*Just Kids* has a very different focus from other stories about rock stars and their lives before they became famous, such as Bob Dylan's *Chronicles* or *Nowhere Boy*, the film about John Lennon's adolescence. This is essentially a love story, and a reminder that the deepest relationships need not have perfect resolutions." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted: "Smith's elegant eulogy helps to explain the chaos and the creativity so embedded in that earlier time and in Mapplethorpe's life and work." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor lauded: "Writing with wonderful immediacy, Smith tells the affecting story of their entwined young lives as lovers, friends and muses to one another."

#### Related Information:

##### BOOKS

- *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Volume 12, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1980.
- Smith, Patti, *Babel*, Putnam (New York, NY), 1978.

##### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, April 1, 1978, review of *Babel*, p. 1236; January 15, 1994, Aaron Cohen, review of *Early Work, 1970-1979*, p. 895; September 15, 2005, Donna Seaman, review of *Auguries of Innocence*, p. 20.
- *Chicago Tribune*, June 17, 1996, Greg Kot, interview with Smith.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, May 20, 1994, Margot Mifflin, review of *Early Work, 1970-1979*.
- *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, September-October, 2010, Steven Dansky, "Mapplethorpe's Muse," p. 31.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, December 1, 1977, review of *Babel*, p. 1313; December 1, 2009, review of *Just Kids*.
- *Library Journal*, February 15, 1978, review of *Babel*, p. 463; January, 1994, Rochelle Ratner, review of *Early Work, 1970-1979*, p. 120; August 1, 2005, review of *Auguries of Innocence*, p. 91; November 20, 2009, Ned Resnikoff, review of *Just Kids*.
- *New Statesman*, March 1, 2010, Jude Rogers, "The Boy Looked at Patti," p. 47.
- *New York Times Book Review*, February 19, 1978, review of *Babel*, p. 9; April 3, 1994, David Kelly, review of *Early Work, 1970-1979*, p. 18.
- *Publishers Weekly*, November 28, 1977, review of *Babel*, p. 44; January 3, 1994, review of *Early Work, 1970-1979*, p. 72; June 27, 2005, review of *Auguries of Innocence*, p. 53; December 7, 2009, review of *Just Kids*, p. 43.
- *Rolling Stone*, July 27, 1978, Jonathan Cott, review of *Babel*; May 19, 1994, Evelyn McDonnell, review of *Early Work, 1970-1979*, p. 9.

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- *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/> (October 25, 2011), author profile.
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- *Rolling Stone*, <http://www.rollingstone.com/> (October 25, 2011), author profile.
- *Smoky Mountain News Online*, <http://www.smokymountainnews.com/> (March 4, 2007), Jeff Minick, "Cupid's Reading List," review of *Auguries of Innocence*.
- *Time*, <http://www.time.com/> (April 21, 2011), Michael Stipe, author profile.\*

**Source:** *Contemporary Authors Online*, 2012

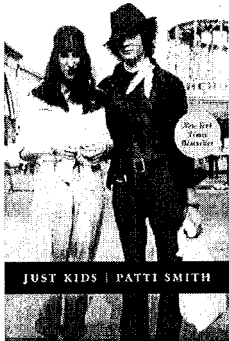
**Gale Database:** Contemporary Authors Online

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|H13002854

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## Read-a-Likes



Community Rating ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Hardcover**

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9780747548409 Trade Cloth  
9780066211312 Trade Cloth

### Just Kids (2010)



### We Owe You Nothing: Punk Planet: the Collected Interviews (2001) AWARD WINNER

We Owe You Nothing: Punk Planet: The Collected Interviews , edited by Daniel Sinker, is a collection



### Lobotomy: Surviving the Ramones (2000)

Lobotomy: Surviving the Ramones is a candid and personal memoir written by the Ramones' bassist and



### Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music (2010)

In Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music , Marisa Meltzer offers both a history of the punk rock



### New York Dolls: Photographs (2008)

New York Dolls: Photographs is a collection of photographs of the iconic band from Bob Gruen with commentaries



### New York Rocker: My Life in the Blank Generation with Blondie, Iggy Pop, and Others, 1974-1981 (2002)

New York Rocker: My Life in the Blank Generation with Blondie, Iggy Pop, and Others, 1974-1981 is a



### Some Women (1989)

null

### The Petting Zoo (2010)

In The Petting Zoo: A Novel , the late Jim Carroll presents the story of an unforgettable artist who



### **Chronicles: Volume One (2004)**

Bob Dylan sets forth a narrative focusing primarily on his personal path to knowledge in the first volume



### **Between a Heart and a Rock Place (2010)**

In the 1980s, no one rocked like Pat Benatar. Her string of hits defined a generation and won her the



### **CBGB and OMFUG: Thirty Years from the Home of Underground Rock (2005)**


CBGB and OMFUG: Thirty Years from the Home of Underground Rock is a comprehensive history on the prolific



### **Mapplethorpe: A Biography (1995)**

Written by Patricia Morrisroe, Mapplethorpe: A Biography is a comprehensive examination of the life,

# Patti Smith

 *Contemporary Musicians*, October 28, 1996

Updated: February 04, 2010

**Born:** December 30, 1946 in Chicago, Illinois, United States

**Nationality:** American

**Occupation:** Singer

## Selective Works

- Horses, Arista, 1975.
- Radio Ethiopia, Arista, 1976.
- Easter, Arista, 1978.
- Wave, Arista, 1979.
- Dream of Life, Arista, 1988.
- Gone Again, Arista, 1996.
- Peace & Noise, 1997.
- Gung Ho, 2000.
- Land, 2002.
- Trampin,' 2004.
- Twelve, 2007.
- The Coral Sea, 2008.

## Writings

- Witt: A Book of Poems, Gotham, 1972.
- Seventh Heaven, Telegraph, 1973.
- Ha! Ha! Houdini, Gotham, 1977.
- Babel, Putnam, 1978.
- Also author of Kodak.

Gave poetry readings during early 1970s; singer, songwriter, recording artist, 1975-79, 1988--.

Raised in Pitman, NJ; daughter of a factory worker and a waitress; married Fred "Sonic" Smith (a musician; died 1994); Children: Jackson, Jesse. **Addresses:** Record Company--Arista Records, 6 West 57th St., New York, NY 10019.

"My design was to shake things up," Patti Smith proclaimed in a 1996 Rolling Stone interview, to motivate people and bring a different type of work ethic back into rock & roll. The period she was referring to, the mid-1970s, had seen the demise of immediacy and artistic fire in mainstream rock, which was becoming overrun by spectacle. The birth of what would come to be known as punk, the raw, revolutionary music that challenged rock's complacency, is often traced to Smith and a handful of other pioneers. Hearing Smith's classic album *Horses*, said alternative rock hero and REM singer Michael Stipe in *Spin*, was for him a virtual rebirth. "I'd never heard anything like it in my life," Stipe recalled, "like someone had torn my head off and slapped it back on for me. From then on my life was changed." Stipe's experience was typical; many of alternative rock's leading lights were



strongly influenced by Smith's work. Though she took a hiatus for much of the 1980s, she returned once during that decade and again in 1996 with albums that summarized her ongoing growth as an artist.

Smith was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1946 and grew up in Pitman, a lower-class, melting-pot town in New Jersey. Until she saw the Rolling Stones on an Ed Sullivan show, she was a huge fan of the popular black groups of the early sixties. "I was just one of a million girls who could sing Ronettes records almost as good as the Ronettes," she told Rolling Stone. After high school she began working in a factory around the same time she discovered the poetry of the French symbolist Arthur Rimbaud. While in junior college, Smith became pregnant and gave up the child for adoption. She moved to New York for a brief period and eventually took off for Paris with her sister to study art. In France she began to have premonitions of Rolling Stones guitarist Brian Jones's death just days before he actually died.

She moved back to New York, living at the Chelsea Hotel, a veritable hotbed of musicians, writers, actors, and artists during the early seventies. She began working at a local bookstore where she befriended rock historian/guitarist Lenny Kaye. She also started writing for magazines like Rolling Stone, Rock, and Creem, offering poetry and critical essays. By 1973, three of her poetry books had been published: *Seventh Heaven*, *Kodak* and *Witt*. Friends persuaded her to read her works in public, and, with the accompaniment of Kaye on guitar, she could be heard at New York clubs like Max's and CBGB's, opening for bands like the New York Dolls. After the addition of Richard Sohl on piano, the trio even performed at San Francisco's Winterland.

Clive Davis of Arista Records signed Smith to a recording contract and in 1975 she entered the studio to record her debut LP, *Horses*. She personally picked the producer, ex-Velvet Underground member, John Cale, "All I was really looking for was a technical person," Smith told Rolling Stone's Dave Marsh. "Instead, I got a total maniac artist." Cale pushed Smith and her band--Kaye and Ivan Kral on guitars and bass, Jay Dee Daugherty on drums, and Sohl on piano--to their artistic limits. *Horses* is a compilation of Smith's influences. The surrealism of Rimbaud, the violent prose of William Burroughs, and the simple, yet masterful rhythms of the Velvets are all in some way represented on the album.

*Horses* features six songs co-written by Smith, her band, Blue Oyster Cult guitarist Alan Lanier (her boyfriend at the time), and Television's Tom Verlaine. The other two songs are reworkings of the soul hit "Land of a Thousand Dances" and the Them/Van Morrison tune, "Gloria", both restructured around Smith's poetic vision. Smith became the darling of the in-crowd from coast to coast. Complimentary reviews appeared in *Time*, *Knight* newspapers, *Mademoiselle*, and even *Rolling Stone*, in which Smith told of another premonition she once had. "I've known I was gonna be a big shot since I was four. I just didn't know it had anything to do with my throat."

Smith charged back into the studio after a triumphant tour of the States to make her follow-up LP, *Radio Ethiopia*. Unfortunately, the album ended up sounding more like a showcase for a garage band than for Smith's poetry; the result was a sound that often overpowered the nuances of her singing and lyrics. As Charles M. Young observed in *Rolling Stone*, "The punks present their instrumental incompetence in the spirit of farce and satire. The Patti Smith Group presents it as a holy sacrament."

The album was a financial flop and the band members were forced to find other means to support themselves. Tragically, during the tour to support *Radio Ethiopia*, Smith fell off the stage in Tampa, Florida, on January 23, 1977, and broke her neck. She spent the following year wearing a neck brace and undergoing physical therapy. She was, however, able to complete another book of poetry, *Babel*, during the time off.

Smith was back in 1978 and determined to make her music more communicative (i.e. commercial) this time around. Her third album, *Easter*, contained her only Top 20 hit, "Because The Night", co-written by fellow New Jersey rocker Bruce Springsteen. *Easter* makes good on Patti Smith's biggest boast--that she is one of the great figures of Seventies rock & roll, wrote Dave Marsh in *Rolling Stone*. "More importantly perhaps, it focuses her

mystical and musical visions in a way that makes her the most profoundly religious American popular performer since Jim Morrison."

Smith released her fourth album, *Wave*, in 1979, but the magic seemed to be gone. It was a directionless effort with only one real gem, the song "Dancing Barefoot." The rest of the album, according to Robert Christgau in Christgau's Record Guide, was "as listenable as Radio Ethiopia." Her creative well appeared to have dried up and, after her marriage to former MC5 guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith, she went into retirement for nine years to raise a family.

In 1988 Smith re-emerged with the album *Dream of Life*. Fred provided guitar layers and co-produced the album with Jimmy Iovine; former band members Daugherty and Sohl also appeared. In the age of MTV and record executives pushing everything off as 'the next big thing,' Robert Palmer observed in *Rolling Stone*: "What may be most striking about *Dream Of Life* is that there is no product here at all, only music."

*Dream of Life* fared poorly in the marketplace, but it was an important album for Smith, who told *Spin* that during its creation, "Fred taught me a lot about singing and he instilled a lot of confidence in me." She added that "What I achieved in the 80s out of the public eye was the development of my skills." These skills-- particularly her ability to crystallize painful experiences in prose--were put to the test over the next few years. Smith lost a number of the people who mattered most to her, starting with her artistic soulmate and dear friend Robert Mapplethorpe, a celebrated and controversial photographer who died of AIDS. His passing motivated a novel, as well as parts of songs that would end up on her next album, as did the 1994 suicide of musician Kurt Cobain of the group Nirvana. Smith told *Spin* that Cobain's was "the first band in years that I really loved. Its just kind of typical of me to pick the band that would be beautifully tragic. They were the band I felt a lot of hope for, for the whole music scene." She added that she and Fred wept like parents upon hearing of Cobain's demise. An anthology of Smith's poetry from the 1970s was published that same year by Norton.

Smith began work on a new album, but was devastated by her husband's death of a heart attack in 1994, as well as by the loss of keyboardist and close friend Sohl. Yet with the encouragement of her brother Todd, who also died shortly thereafter, Smith returned to the album, much of which had been co-written with Fred. The result was 1996's *Gone Again*. "While this is unquestionably Smith's most heartfelt album," wrote Tom Carson in *Rolling Stone*, "the core of *Gone Again* isn't sorrow, it's resilience." Smith seemed to second this judgment when she told *Details*, "I don't want to talk to the people while merely burdened with grief and sorrow. I want to bring them something positive."

Smith's return to the spotlight brought several positive things to light: one was that her work--and her late husband's--had inspired a whole generation of artists, including Stipe of REM, Courtney Love of Hole, PJ Harvey, and Sonic Youth. Smith was able to honor the Velvet Underground during their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996 by reading a poem and performing one of their songs. And most of all, her continued artistic vitality and grace after so much loss suggested she would inspire anew. "I've experienced a lot of personal sorrow," she insisted in *Spin*, "but I still feel constant amazement at how beautiful life is."

While working on the album Smith performed some opening dates with Bob Dylan in 1995. She released an epic prose poem dedicated to Mapplethorpe, *The Coral Sea*, and sang with R.E.M. on "E-Bow the Letter." Smith built upon the skills she learned from her husband, including basic guitar chords, and released two albums in four years, *Peace and Noise* and *Gung Ho*. Both delivered political messages, touching upon AIDS, the Vietnam War, and other topics. Her teenage son, Jackson, played guitar on the song "Persuasion" on the latter album. Doubleday published *Patti Smith Complete: Lyrics, Reflections & Notes for the Future*, in 1998.

Smith continued to make her views known when she aided Ralph Nader's Green Party leading up to the 2000 presidential election; her "People Have the Power" became a rally song of the campaign. Arista released a double-disc compilation, *Land (1975-2002)*, after she left the label. Two years later she signed with Columbia

Records. She soon released *Trampin*, a collection of anti-war songs and poetry, and performed rallies against President Bush and the Iraq War. She specifically railed against the Israeli strike on Lebanon and actions at Guantanamo Bay, where detainees were held.

The singer and writer was honored as Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture in 2005. On October 16, 2006, she bade farewell to the famed CBGB on its closing night. Smith was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, as was R.E.M., on March 12, 2007. She accepted in memory of her late husband. *Patti Smith: Dream of Life*, a documentary by Steven Sebring, was shown at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008.

Smith campaigned for Barack Obama leading up to the presidential election in 2008 and at concerts. She encouraged fans to register to vote. Smith continued to honor the memory of her former lover, Mapplethorpe, with the release of a live tribute, *The Coral Sea*, in 2008 and in January of 2010 released her memoir, *Just Kids*, which chronicled her early years in New York City and her relationship with the late artist.

Smith and the Kronos Quartet were awarded the 2011 Polar Music Prize, the highest award in Swedish music. The San Francisco, California-based Kronos Quartet was known for incorporating world music and avant-garde rock into its work. Smith thanked fans and her band, and asked the audience to "turn their hearts, minds and resources" to the famine in Africa. That year *Outside Society*, a collection of chronologically arranged Arista and Columbia songs, was released. A booklet enclosed in the CD package included Smith's comments and recollections of the songs, newly remastered for the compilation. That year the audio book of *Just Kids*, read by Smith, was also released.

## Further Readings

### Books

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- *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Rock*, compiled by Nick Logan and Bob Woffinden, Harmony Books, 1977.
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- *Newsweek*, June, 17, 1996.
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- *Spin*, June 1996.

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- "Patti Smith, Kronos Quartet Awarded Polar Music Prize," Patti Smith.net, <http://www.pattismith.net/news.html> (September 2, 2011).

#### Source Citation

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#### Document URL

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# Robert Mapplethorpe

🏠 *Gay & Lesbian Biography*, 1997

**Born:** November 04, 1946 in Floral Park, New York, United States

**Died:** March 09, 1989 in Boston, Massachusetts, United States

**Nationality:** American

**Occupation:** Photographer

It is unfortunate that Robert Mapplethorpe is probably remembered more for the controversy that surrounded his photographs than he is for the work itself. The photos with a theme of homosexual sadomasochism, which are unflinching in their stark reality and at the same time tempered by their classical arrangement, sparked a national debate over censorship and national funding of the arts. There was also debate among critics, some of whom felt Mapplethorpe's popularity was due to his notoriety rather than a technical or artistic complexity. Those photographs represent only a small portion of the work he produced, however, and his photos of flowers and celebrities are often quite beautiful in their straightforward simplicity.

One of six children, Robert Mapplethorpe was born in Floral Park, New York, to Harry and Joan Mapplethorpe on 4 November 1946. He had a rather strict Catholic upbringing that, according to the photographer, accounted for the symmetry that appeared in the arrangement of so many of his photos. Wanting to be free of his parents' judgement, Mapplethorpe left home at the age of 16 to begin studying drawing, painting, and sculpture at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute.

It was while he was a student that Mapplethorpe met Patti Smith, who was accidentally given directions to his apartment when looking for another Pratt student. It was the beginning of a long and strangely symbiotic relationship. Smith's androgynous looks appealed to Mapplethorpe, who had already begun struggling with his sexuality. After a second chance meeting, Smith moved into Mapplethorpe's apartment, and eventually the pair found a place together in Brooklyn.

## Smith: Mapplethorpe's Missing Half

Although their relationship was unrewarding sexually, Mapplethorpe and Smith helped to fuel each other's creativity. When Mapplethorpe declared that working at the F. A. O. Schwarz toy store was leaving him too drained to work on his art projects, Smith took on the responsibility of supporting them both with her job at the Scribner's bookstore. For his part, Mapplethorpe thought Smith was a genius, and his admiration infused her with confidence.

Smith had begun to see another man, informing Mapplethorpe that she was moving out. There was now nothing to keep him from pursuing the homosexual liaisons that he craved, and friends were surprised at the rapidity with which he embraced a gay lifestyle. When Smith's relationship fell apart, however, the pair moved back in together, although they continued to lead separate sex lives.

Mapplethorpe did not begin taking traditional photographs until later in his career. Instead, he initially incorporated images from magazines into collages that were influenced by the work of such artists as Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp as well as the photographer Man Ray. Mapplethorpe became impatient, however, with the length of time it took to produce one of his pieces and began to think of taking his own photos.

Mapplethorpe and Smith met the filmmaker Sandy Daley at the Chelsea Hotel, to which the pair fled when they were unable to pay their rent, knowing that it was a place hospitable to the poor, arty set. Daley, who later made a film about Mapplethorpe titled *Robert Having His Nipple Pierced* for which Smith served as narrator, was responsible for encouraging Mapplethorpe to use her Polaroid camera to take his initial photographs.

## Traditional Photography, Non-Traditional Subjects

On his birthday in 1970 Mapplethorpe had his first solo show, which was held at the Stanley Amos gallery in the Chelsea Hotel and focused on his collage work. At that time he was seeing a model and illustrator, David Croland, who was acquainted with Maxime de La Falaise and her husband John McKendry, the curator of photographs and prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Croland introduced Mapplethorpe to the couple, and he and McKendry, who was bisexual, began having an affair. It was McKendry who gave Mapplethorpe a Polaroid camera of his own to work with.

In 1972 Mapplethorpe met Sam Wagstaff, a collector and former museum curator who became his patron and lover, though their relationship eventually turned to friendship. Wagstaff bought Mapplethorpe a loft near his own and used his connections in the art world to promote the budding photographer.

Smith and her four-piece band recorded her first album, *Horses*, in 1975, and she asked Mapplethorpe to take the photos for the cover. As part of her contract Smith had been given artistic control over her albums, so despite the record company's negative reaction to the black-and-white, androgynous photos, they remained. While Mapplethorpe often used Smith as the subject of his photographs, including the series *Patti Smith (Don't Touch Here)*, he had also begun to explore homosexual themes in his work, including those that touched on the world of S&M in which he had become involved.

In 1976 the Light Gallery showed some of Mapplethorpe's Polaroids, marking the first time he'd shown in this medium, and the show's opening garnered an impressive turnout. Having been introduced to the New York social set by first McKendry, then Wagstaff, Mapplethorpe also started doing portrait work for the wealthy socialites and began using a large-format camera, eventually turning to a Hasselblad. The following year Mapplethorpe was invited to show his work at the Holly Solomon Gallery in SoHo. Sensing that Solomon was uncomfortable exhibiting the S&M photos, arrangements were made for a simultaneous show of these photographs, "Erotic Pictures," at the Kitchen, and "Portraits" and "Flowers" at Solomon's space. Both shows were successful and Mapplethorpe and his work became the latest New York craze.

## Work Moves in a New Direction

Although sex and sexuality were still very important themes for Mapplethorpe, the 1980s found him beginning to focus more often on portraits and still lifes. He published several books during this time, including *Robert Mapplethorpe: Black Males* in 1980; *Lady: Lisa Lyon*, a collection of photographs of the female bodybuilder, in 1983; and *Certain People* in 1985. In addition, he started to experiment with many different printing techniques as well as elaborate matting and framing. Two other books were published after his death: *Some Women* in 1989 and *Flowers* in 1990.

Mapplethorpe found out he had AIDS in late 1986, shortly before Wagstaff died of the disease in January of the following year, leaving the majority of his estate, estimated at \$7 million, to Mapplethorpe. His health deteriorated quickly, but he managed to become involved in the AIDS awareness movement and establish the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, which provided funding for AIDS research as well as the visual arts. One of Mapplethorpe's most haunting images is a self-portrait he took after becoming ill. His gaunt face seems to float against the black ground, while his fist thrusts a skull-topped cane toward the viewer.

The first major retrospective of Mapplethorpe's work was held in 1988 at the Whitney Museum and included 110 photos. The photographer managed to attend the opening, although he was confined to a wheelchair. A somewhat larger retrospective opened later the same year at the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Titled *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*, the exhibition traveled to Chicago, Boston, and Washington, D.C. It was here that the museum's director succumbed to political pressure

and canceled the show after the public outcry of a few conservative congressmen who were angry that public tax dollars (just \$40,000) from the National Endowment for the Arts had helped to support the show. This set the stage for the legal action taken in Cincinnati against the Contemporary Arts Center and its director after the exhibition appeared there. The case went to trial, but the prosecution failed to provide witnesses that could adequately counter the defense witnesses, who intelligently and plainly explained why the photographs should be considered art and not pornography. Sadly, Robert Mapplethorpe died on 9 March 1989, before learning that the jury in Cincinnati had decided his work was most definitely art.

## Further Readings

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