

## Experience L.A.

# BRYCE DESSNER'S *TRIPTYCH (EYES OF ONE ON ANOTHER)*

Tuesday, March 5, 2019  
Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Bryce Dessner is well known as a guitarist for the rock band The National, and is also commissioned by leading musical ensembles around the world to create orchestral, chamber, and vocal compositions. He has composed for or collaborated with organizations and artists including New York City Ballet, Kronos Quartet, New York Philharmonic, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and many others. He also wrote the score for the film *The Revenant*.
- *Triptych (Eyes of One on Another)* explores how Dessner was influenced by the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe.
- *Triptych* brings together music, photography, and text in a hybrid work that investigates the act of looking, perceiving, and interpreting—a phenomenon known as “the gaze.”
- Artist Korde Arrington Tuttle weaved texts by Essex Hemphill and Patti Smith into the libretto for *Triptych*. Hemphill, a Black gay poet, was an important part of the D.C. poetry scene of the 1980s; he died of AIDS-related complications in 1995. Smith is a legendary singer-songwriter, poet, and artist who documented her close relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe in the book *Just Kids*.
- Roomful of Teeth is a GRAMMY-winning vocal ensemble founded in 2009 by Brad Wells.

### ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989) was a major American photographer of the 20th century. He is known for photographs of flowers, celebrities, and male nudes—and for the controversies that ensued around the latter. His stark, elegant black-and-white photographs began receiving critical attention in the 1970s, and his fame grew in the 1980s, with international exhibitions, major shows at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery in London, and book publications. After he contracted HIV, Mapplethorpe chronicled his illness in an arresting series of photographs.

Just after his death, a major retrospective exhibition of Mapplethorpe's work was planned for the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. Because it was partly funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the planned exhibition became a spark that ignited a national debate about how the NEA spends its money. Conservatives in Congress railed against the use of federal funds to support an



Bryce Dessner  
Photo by Shervin Lainez

exhibition that included homoerotic imagery; they pushed for and ultimately achieved the passage of a “decency clause” that insisted the NEA must consider not only artistic merit but also “general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs of the American public” in awarding grants. In the aftermath, four performance artists (several of them queer) lost grant funding from the NEA when it decided their work did not satisfy the “decency clause.”

Today, Robert Mapplethorpe is widely regarded as one of his era’s most important photographers.

## THE GAZE

In critical theory, including psychological and art theory, “the gaze” refers to the act of seeing and being seen. The concept of the gaze is often used to provoke criticality about identity and subject-object positions—for instance, “the male gaze” is a concept of feminist theory that illuminates the fact that in many cultures, the default position is that women are seen as objects, while men are the subjects who do the seeing. “The gaze” is a way of thinking about the relationship between the viewer and that which is viewed, the observer and the observed.

Some interesting reading on the concept of the gaze:

*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* by Laura Mulvey

*Ways of Seeing* by John Berger

“The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship” by bell hooks

## WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL

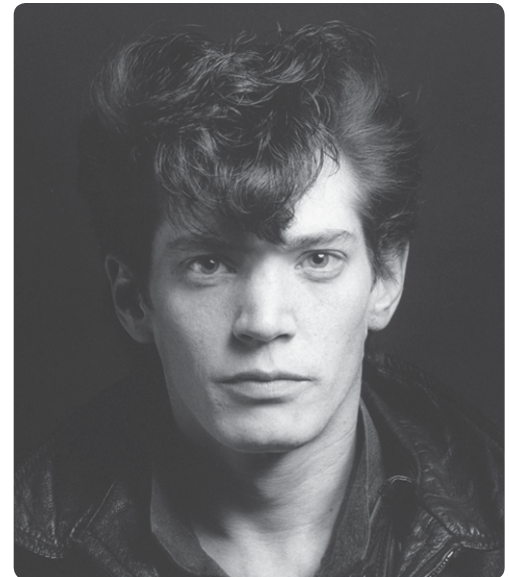
Walt Disney Concert Hall was designed by architect Frank Gehry to be one of the top acoustically conscious concert halls in the world. Construction began in 1999 and took four years to complete. It was funded by a major contribution from Walt Disney’s widow, Lillian Disney, and various other donors, totaling \$240 million. The building’s bold stainless-steel exterior makes it instantly recognizable as a Gehry building. Inside, the hardwood construction aims to perfectly funnel the sounds of music. Esa-Pekka Salonen said of the hall: “Everyone can now hear what the LA Phil is supposed to sound like.”

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

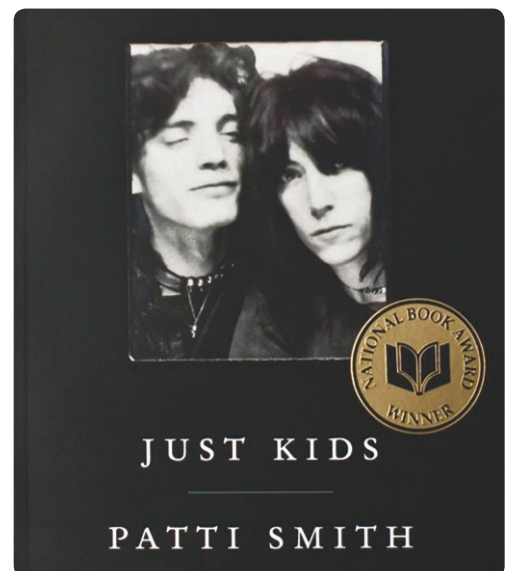
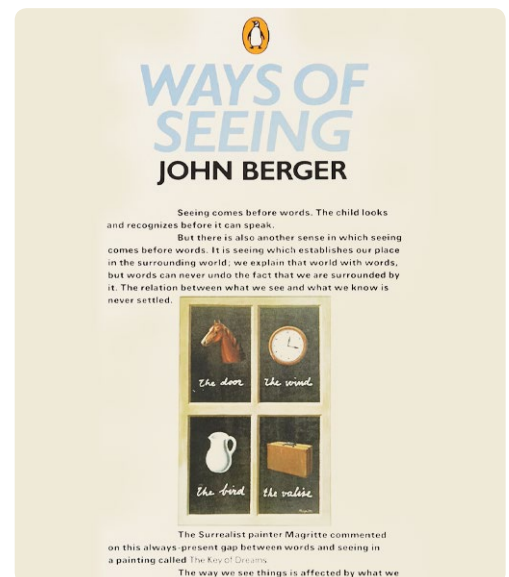
- How do you think the music and text informed how you saw Mapplethorpe’s photos? Would it have been the same to see them in silence on a gallery wall?
- What was it like to experience, and react to, Mapplethorpe’s images in public, in a group (as opposed to, say, encountering them in a book)? Is there a collective gaze that is different from an individual gaze?
- What subject matter do you think might provoke a national debate about public arts funding today?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Bryce Dessner | [www.brycedessner.com](http://www.brycedessner.com)
- Korde Arrington Tuttle | [kordearringtontuttle.com/](http://kordearringtontuttle.com/)
- Roomful of Teeth | [www.roomfulofteeth.org/](http://www.roomfulofteeth.org/)
- The LA Phil’s Green Umbrella Series | [www.laphil.com/events/series/60/](http://www.laphil.com/events/series/60/)



Robert Mapplethorpe, Self-portrait, 1980



## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

MELISSA MILLER of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about Mapplethorpe, Dessner, and tonight's performance. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. e-books, journal articles, and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu).

### BOOKS

- Marshall, Richard, Richard Howard, and Ingrid Sischy. *Robert Mapplethorpe*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with New York Graphic Society Books, 1988.  
**ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY CAGE: TR647.M362 1988**
- Mapplethorpe, Robert. *Robert Mapplethorpe*. Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2006.  
**ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY CAGE: TR647.M362 2006**
- Mapplethorpe, Robert, Paul Martineau, and Britt Salvesen. *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Photographs*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016.  
**ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY CAGE: TR647.M362 2016**

### ARTICLES

- Spelman, David. "BRYCE DESSNER." *Guitar Player* 40, no. 6 (June 1, 2006): 38.
- Dessner, Bryce. "My Music: Bryce Dessner." *Gramophone* 91 (December 1, 2013): 138-138.
- Snapes, Laura. "Bryce Dessner and the Kronos Quartet." *Uncut*, no. 199 (December 1, 2013): 67.
- Martins, Sergio. "A guitarra veste fraque: os roqueiros Bryce Dessner e Jonny Greenwood exibem suas incursoes pela musica erudita no album *St. Carolyn by the Sea*." *Veja* 47, no. 2369 (April 16, 2014).

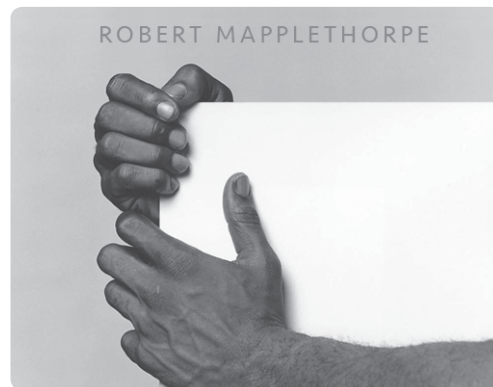
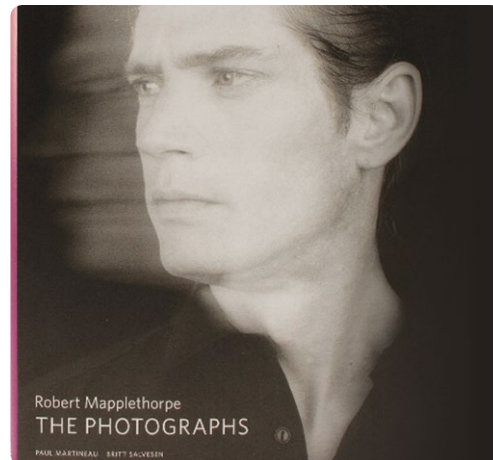
Find more articles on the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation website at [mapplethorpe.org/faq](http://mapplethorpe.org/faq).

### VIDEO

- Mapplethorpe, Robert and Nigel Finch. *Robert Mapplethorpe*. South Melbourne, Victoria: Contemporary Arts Media, 2005.  
**ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY CIRC-DESK: AFADVD 1090**
- Bryce Dessner (The National) — *St. Carolyn by the Sea* (Trailer)  
<https://youtu.be/yzqDyCQegCY>

### AUDIO

- eight blackbird. *FILAMENT*. Chicago, IL: Cedille, 2015.  
**MUSIC LIBRARY CD-AUDIO: 25316MUS**
- The National. *Sleep Well Beast*. London, England: 4AD, 2017.  
**MUSIC LIBRARY CD-AUDIO: M1630.18.N39 S54 2017**
- The National. *High Violet*. New York: 4AD, 2010.  
**AVAILABLE AT MUSIC LIBRARY CD-AUDIO: 29548MUS**
- First Watch: Kronos Quartet Plays Music by The National's Bryce Dessner by Anastasia Tsioulcas  
<https://n.pr/2EfeVAs>



### SELECTED DATABASES

OneFile (GALE)  
ProQuest Research Library  
ProQuest Discovery  
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2011)  
Arts & Humanities Full Text  
Literature Resource Center (Gale)  
Alt-PressWatch  
CBCA Complete  
Art and Architecture Archive  
International Index to Performing Arts Full Text  
JSTOR Archival Journals  
GenderWatch  
ProQuest Sociology Collection  
International Index to Music Periodicals Full Text

### SELECTED JOURNALS

*Afterimage*  
*Aperture* (Archive: 1952-2005)  
*Art Business News*  
*Art Journal*  
*Artforum International*  
*British Journal of Photography*  
*British Journal of Photography* (Archive: 1860-2005)  
*Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*  
*Guardian* (London, England)