

## ***Triptych* Response**

**PRBC Parker Hill**

**Adapted by the ensemble from the libretto by korde arrington tuttle**

[**John** welcomes audiences members and gives context, briefly, and how and what we have created.]

[**Slide:** The word Triptych.]

**Rhoda:** A triptych is a picture or relief carving on three panels,

[**Slide:** images from *Jet* magazine]

typically hinged together side by side and used as an altarpiece

[**Slide:** images from *Jet* magazine]

**Rhoda:** A triptych is a set of three artistic, literary, or musical works intended to be presented and appreciated together.

[**Slide:** image of the Garden of Earthly Delights triptych.]

[**Slide:** the word Cincinnati.]

**Danny:** Twenty-nine years ago, art was put on trial in a highly publicized and political showdown. The Mapplethorpe obscenity trial, of the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center--the first time a museum was taken to court on criminal charges related to works on display--became one of the most heated battlefronts in the era's culture wars. Taking place over two weeks in the fall of 1990, the resulting attention challenged perceptions of art, public funding, and what constituted "obscenity."

[**Slide:** images of Milton and Mapplethorpe.]

**Nancy:** At issue was *The Perfect Moment*, an exhibition of the late photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. He had risen to national prominence through his black-and-white depictions of 1970s New York, including celebrities, nudes, and graphic depictions of sadomasochism.

[**Slide:** images of Milton and Mapplethorpe.]

[**Slide:** images of Cedric, Milton, Ajitto, and Ken Moody.]

**Tonya:** The show's approximately 175 images captured the range of Mapplethorpe's subjects over his 25-year career, grouping them into three "portfolios:" homosexual S&M, "X," flower still lifes, "Y," and nude portraits of African-American men, the "Z" portfolio.

**Danny:** Says Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center curator Steven Matijcio: "Those photos are still challenging...They continue to reverberate."

[**Slide:** Images of men in clothing advertisements, interracial couples and families from television in the 1980s and today.]

[The ensemble looks at the photos.]

[**Slide:** The words "from the boy who loved Michelangelo"]

**Rhoda:**

it was said he had the face of a god  
yet some saw a demon with rope shoes  
and a twist of vine encircling locks  
veins ran his marble arms that sang

[**Slide:** two Robert Mapplethorpe self-portraits.]

scoring mountains as a mist  
permeating mist  
a crack in the heart  
and the golden sling  
do we dare  
dare not dream

**Tonya:**

with razor scraping  
the rump of need  
exposing muscle of a love not gleaned  
we are the buffalo a dying breed

hauled in carts magnificent bone  
shame an ecstasy none can own  
slaves embrace as  
wisdom groans  
volumes of nothing written in stone

[**Slide:** Robert Mapplethorpe's eye, a self-portrait.]

**Rhoda:**

indeed love process mastery mystery

indeed love testament life force gift

indeed love

steady

point

click

[Slide: blank.]

**Danny:**

case number 'b' dash nine zero two five eight five

case number 'b' dash nine zero two five eight five

nine zero two five eight five

case number 'b' dash nine zero two

nine zero two five eight five

**Nancy:**

this right here's unusual

the nature of this case

flowers going missing

vanished from their vase

**Danny:**

three seven two fifty-eight

nineteen sixty three

seven men

wearing suits

lives the size of seeds

**Nancy:**

marigold

hyacinth

making their world safe

tide pools of rhode island

obscenity on their minds

liberties to chafe

**Danny:**

evidence  
evidence  
evidence

in cases, frames  
along the walls  
state exhibit number one  
what, do you ask, is this?

state exhibit number two  
three exhibit four  
five exhibit number six seven  
there are more

**Nancy:**

photographs depicting  
unsavory things  
What haunts the edge of the frame?  
obsession lust  
or love?

a very young male in a state of nudity  
gazing from above

a very young female on a bench  
tulips doe-eyes  
bangs cut  
knees wide

**Danny:**

state exhibit three

**Nancy:**

one man peeing into another's mouth  
trevis fountain carved from flesh  
warehouse on the westside

**Danny:**

state exhibit four

**Nancy:**

fingers thumb arm fist  
forearm elbow knuckle wrist  
the dark rooms we explore

**Danny:**

directing your attention  
to state exhibit number five  
what, do you ask, is this?

**Nancy:**

picture of a man  
with a familiar face  
bent over with a bullwhip  
in a holy place

what appears to be a man  
pleasuring himself  
dirt caked beneath his nails

**Danny:**

number six  
number seven  
three five one two four

case number 'b' dash  
nine zero two  
nine zero two  
five eight five

state exhibit three  
state exhibit four

**Danny:**

i did feel god inside me squirming on my skin  
lengthening my spine eroding my gums burning in my nostrils holy crimson

[Slide: image of flowers.]

**Rhoda:**

pumping standing at attention five-legged fawn five-legged freak veins  
ballooning with desire great grandfather trying to fun twigs snapping  
dogs barking moonlight streaming through sleepy spanish moss

**John:**

god's fat fingers laced into mine pulling me deeper into the night  
whispering comforts i feel but can't hear he wants my light lock it in a  
flammable box

[Slide: image of Dominick and Elliot.]

[Slide: image of Dominick and Elliot, with their names.]

**Nancy:**

i feel god tell me my essence cannot be contained my  
beauty transcends what can be understood i stand there letting the devil's  
messenger cloaked in stardust cloaked in dawn take his best shot

**Renee** [coming forward from the audience and joining the group]:

worship the almighty target practice tells me to flex tighten my torso  
beautiful he says sweet black rose golden celebration points the camera  
downward

[Slide: image of Man in the Polyester Suit.]

**Tonya:**

from his lips drip a syrupy sigh sweet saccharine  
orgasm it'll be painless creeps a little closer i need to cut off  
your head

[Slide: blank.]

**Danny:**

indeed love process mastery mystery

indeed love testament life force gift

steady

point

click

**Danny:**

In america,  
I place my ring  
on your cock  
where it belongs.  
No horsemen  
bearing terror,  
no soldiers of doom  
will swoop in  
and sweep us apart.  
They're too busy  
looting the land  
They don't know  
we need each other  
critically.  
They expect us to call in sick, watch television all night, die by our own hands.  
They don't know  
we are becoming powerful.  
Every time we kiss  
we confirm the new world coming.  
What the rose whispers  
before blooming  
I vow to you.  
I give you my heart,  
a safe house.  
I give you promises other than  
milk, honey, liberty.  
I assume you will always be a free man with a dream.  
In america,  
place your ring on my cock where it belongs.  
Long may we live  
to free this dream

[Slide: image of protest with the words "If you give artists freedom of expression, soon every American will want it!"

[Slide: larger image of the protest.]

[Slide: even larger image of the protest.]