

# THE NEW YORKER

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

## THE COLLECTOR

by Vince Aletti

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Although Sam Wagstaff was a prescient, adventurous curator and connoisseur—a man who helped shape the current boom market for photography—he is much better known as the lover and mentor of Robert Mapplethorpe. When Mapplethorpe died, in 1989, two years after Wagstaff, his fame, inflated by his notoriety, had all but eclipsed his mentor's. James Crump's fascinating documentary, "Black White + Gray," opening Oct. 19 at Cinema Village, aims to redress that imbalance by providing a vivid portrait of Wagstaff, largely through interviews with his surviving friends and colleagues, but even more tellingly through the photographs that he amassed. "The first bold and brave collector to use photographs as a way of constructing a kind of self-portrait," one observer calls him. Savvy, charismatic, and devilishly handsome, Wagstaff found the perfect foil and goad in Mapplethorpe, but it was the collector, not the photographer, who left the most indelible and idiosyncratic mark on the medium they shared. ♦

ILLUSTRATION: DIVYA SRINIVASAN

