

Notes on *Barakei*

Ignacio Adriasola

One day, Hosoe Eikoh came over and took my flesh to a strange world... The world I was taken to by the sorcery of his lens was abnormal, twisted, ridiculous, grotesque, savage, pansexual—however, one could also hear in this world the murmur of a clear and cool stream, the undercurrent from within the invisible heart of a gutter.¹

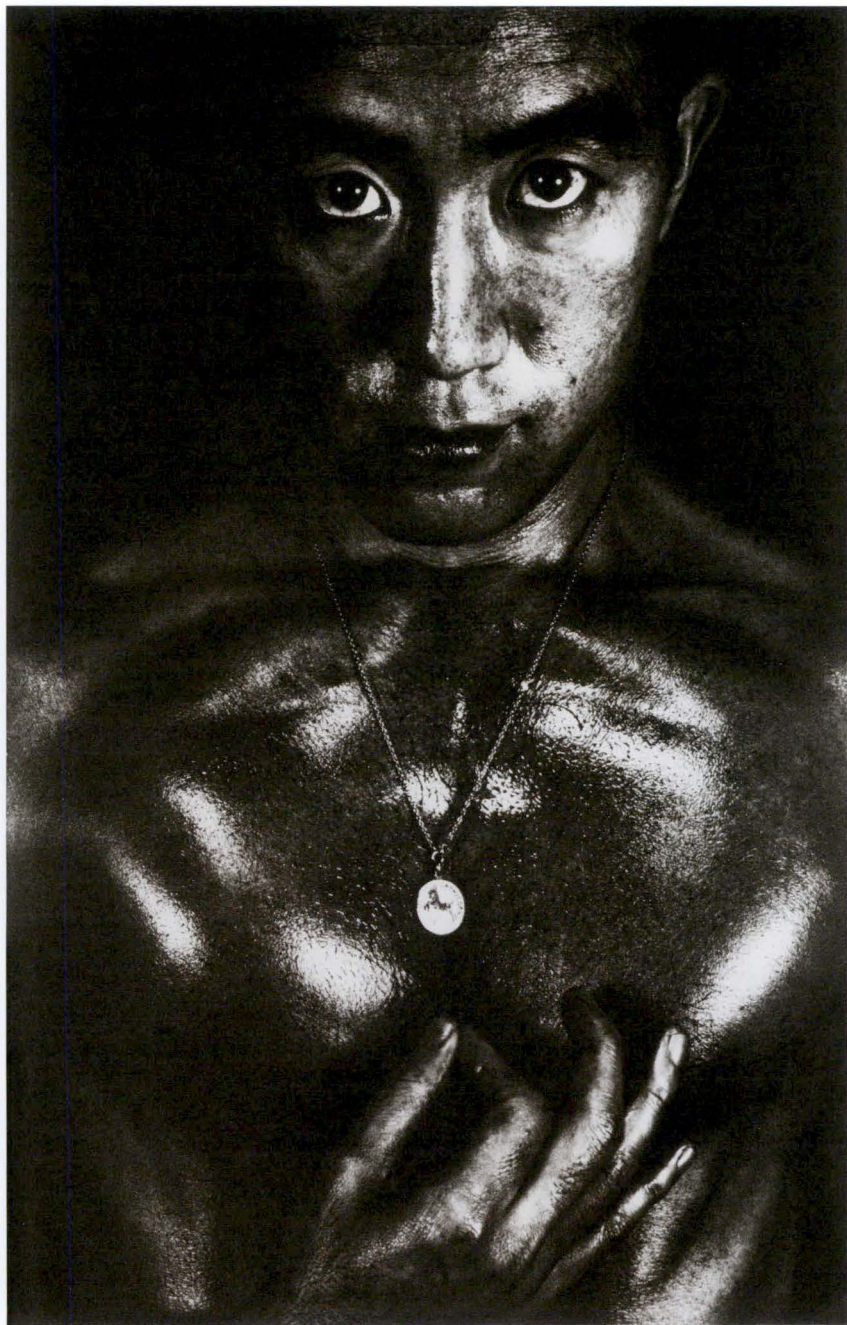
The viewer is regaled with a most refined sort of grotesquerie. A series of nudes printed in luscious black-and-white gravure. A male figure, posing alone or with others, standing, sitting, or lying down, holding various attributes. Half-tone images on vellum showing an egg, thorny stems of roses, scattered petals bleeding into each other, and a velvet-like darkness. The photographs weave an incomprehensible narrative. Lurid epigraphs drawn from ancient texts intimate the commission of a sin for which the gods now seek revenge. Photomontage renders the protagonist into *objet*, body sutured to volutes of furniture and clocks, skin merging with canvases by Botticelli, Giorgione, and Reni, in a shadowy ritual of death—but with unequivocal signs of pleasure on his terrified face. He appears bound by the frame, rose in mouth, his brow pearly with sweat, bloodshot eyes pleading like Gabriele D'Annunzio's martyr-hero Sébastien, "*Encore! Encore...!*" Exhausted, he lies on a carved stone bench over a bed of roses. Our hero rests at last—or does he?

Barakei is a record of novelist Mishima Yukio and photographer Hosoe Eikoh's journey to the Underground, an unseen place that refracts the hypocritical morality of the world above. For us aboveground citizens, it is a fiction; for Hosoe, it is a subjective documentary. The photobook's disjointed narrative, formal manipulation, and exacting depiction of the body's crevices compel us to believe that its testimony is something better than the truth. Likewise, in his prologue, Mishima denies any connection to his life or work. (This despite the leitmotifs of cyclicity, transgression, and retribution, and the knowing deployment of a semi-autobiographical register, also present, as elsewhere in his oeuvre, in his first succès de scandale, the homosexual coming-of-age novel *Confessions of a Mask*.) *Barakei* exists somewhere between fact and fiction. By deliberately restaging his biography, Mishima overdetermines the work's interpretation—he continues to haunt us from the grave...

Yet *Barakei* is all surface: the tactility of its heavy pages; the absorptive quality of its large format; the intimacy, the outrageousness, the painterly ghostliness of its images; the interplay of fragment and totality—this is High Baroque. Mishima and Hosoe give us surfaces that fold into and over themselves, like the draping marble in a Bernini, elevating photography toward the Infinite.

1 Mishima Yukio, "Hosoe Eikoh Josetsu [An Introduction to Hosoe Eikoh]," *Barakei* (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1963).







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inkjet print, 96.52 x 114.3 cm