

HOSOE EIKOH

MASTER OF MASTERS

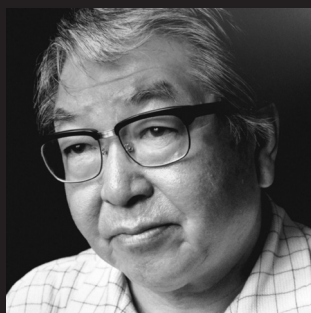


Photo © Jean-Baptiste Huynh

ORDEAL by ROSES (BA-RA-KEI)

with YUKIO MISHIMA
(on the centenary of his birth)

1. Hosoe Eikoh is the Master of Masters of post-war Japanese photography. It is therefore with particular pride, but also with immense responsibility, that Ochre Space presents, for the first time in Portugal, an exhibition of an artist who has influenced generations of photographers and won a prominent place in the pantheon of photographers.

2. In 1961 Hosoe was asked by Mishima to photograph him for a book of essays

he was about to publish. He wanted a less conventional cover photograph. When they met, Hosoe asked: 'Mr Mishima, do you mean I can photograph you in my own way?'

'I'm your object of study. Photograph me any way you like, Mr Hosoe,' replied Mishima. The series of photographs taken were totally unexpected: Mishima wrapped in a hose in various positions, standing or lying down in the garden of his house. One of these photographs ended up becoming the cover of the book of essays published in 1961 under the title *The Attack of Beauty*. That photograph and series also marked an important step for the

start of the book *BARAKEI*.

3. The exhibition shows a selection of images from the famous book *BARAKEI*, published in 1963 in Japan and originally titled *Killed by Roses* in English.

As Hosoe explains in the text accompanying the third edition of the book in Japanese, 'BARA' means rose and 'KEI' means punishment. As the original Japanese title is not so much about death for death's sake as about hardship and torture, about punishment, Mishima suggested the English title be changed to *Ordeal by Roses* when the second edition of the book was conceived, thus creating a greater correspondence with the original intention. And indeed it was the process that Mishima had in mind, not just the result. As with his own death, Mishima also chose the form, the ritual, because everything in it had a meaning...

4. *Ordeal by Roses* (*BARAKEI*) was printed in four editions, with the first and third being the object of reprints.

While each edition of Ordeal by Roses starts from a common base, they all innovate and recreate the initial project, becoming a new book. None of the four editions shares the same format.

What makes each of these four editions unique is the creative role given to the designers who conceived them, allowing them to add an innovative stamp to Hosoe's work. In this respect too, BARAKEI was visionary and revolutionary.

Artists themselves, the graphic designers behind Ordeal by Roses were among the most important in Japan. The preludes or the first chapter of the book in each edition are proof of their genius. By way of example, the three paintings by Tadanori Yokoo for the second edition were exhibited at MoMa, outside the context of the BARAKEI book, as part of Yokoo's own solo show.

5. Systematising, editions and reprints of the book BARAKEI include the following:

- a) **First edition:** design by Kouhei Sugiura (1963). Publisher: Shueisha, Tokyo. Contains 44 photographs. (Note: the English title was Killed by Roses.)
- b) **Second edition:** design by Tadanori Yokoo (30 January, 1971). Publisher: Shueisha, Tokyo (International edition) (Note: at Mishima's suggestion the English title was changed to Ordeal by Roses.)
- c) **Third edition:** design by Kiyoshi Awadu (1984). It has 7 illustrations and 39 photographs.
- d) **Reprint of the third edition.**

Publisher: Aperture, New York, (2005). This edition had two slightly different dust jackets: one for the American and British markets, and one for the European market.

- e) **Reprint of the first Japanese edition** (limited edition of 500 copies), 2008. Publisher: NADiff, Tokyo. NADiff consulted Eikoh Hosoe and designer Kohei Sugiura to recreate the original 1963 publication as faithfully as possible. The blacks from the original 1963 gravure printing were reproduced in a modern offset printing.
- f) **Reprint of the first edition in Japanese, with a booklet containing the texts translated into English** (limited edition of 500 copies) 1 February 2009. Publisher: Aperture, New York.
- g) **Fourth edition** (21st century edition, 2015). Design by Katsumi Asaba. Publisher: Asuka International. 47 photographs. New photographs were added to this edition.

6. BARAKEI is a work about life and suffering, centred on the figure of Yukio Mishima, the centenary of whose birth is celebrated on 14 January 2025, symbolically the day this exhibition opens.

It is a complex work, full of meanings, which implies long study and meditation. But, it must be said, it is a creative work by Hosoe Eikoh. It is not a joint work, though Mishima, with his complexity, his charisma, his intellectuality, created an atmosphere that certainly influenced Hosoe.

Hosoe said:

"My intentions in photographing Mishima were gradually becoming clearer. I thought I would use

*everything Mishima loved or owned to form a document about the writer. However, the interpretation and expression would be mine. After the first photograph, I referred to an iconoclastic act, but in reality I was suggesting a creative process through destruction. I wanted to create a new image of Yukio Mishima through my photography."*¹

7. In the introduction to BARAKEI (reproduced below), Mishima writes: *"Before that camera, as I soon realized, my own spirit, the workings of my mind, had become totally redundant. It was an exhilarating experience, a state of affairs I had long dreamed of. (...) A first requirement for this process, of course, is that the objects photographed should have some meaning of which they can be stripped. This is why it was necessary that the human model should be a novelist of sorts, and that the background should consist of Renaissance paintings and Spanish baroque furniture."*

Hosoe says that Mishima showed him *"a series of reproductions of Italian Renaissance paintings, including works by Botticelli and Raphael. In particular, I remember him showing me Bernard Berenson's book on the Renaissance and several paintings of St Sebastian, including one by Raphael, after which he said to me: 'Isn't it beautiful, Mr Hosoe?'"*²

In fact, in the book Ordeal by Roses, there is a significant set of photographs in which Mishima dialogues with Renaissance paintings. The examples opposite show Renaissance

paintings referred to by Hosoe Eikoh in the context of his creative fusions with Mishima.

8. An ultimate example of testimonial photography, BARAKEI is also a significant dialogue between two geniuses. Despite the age difference, Mishima had a singular admiration for Hosoe, so much so that before his death he wrote a preface to another important book that Hosoe published in 1971, *Embrace*. This relationship and collaboration would always be unrepeatable, not only because of Mishima's death in 1970 and now also Hosoe's in September 2024, but also because geniuses never take two steps in the same direction.

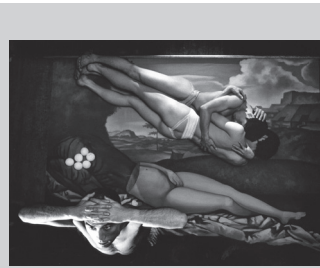
João Miguel Barros
January 2025

¹ Hosoe Eikoh, Photographer's note to the third edition.

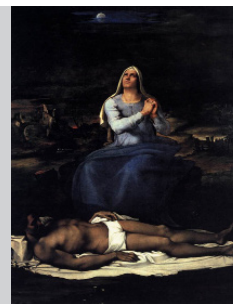
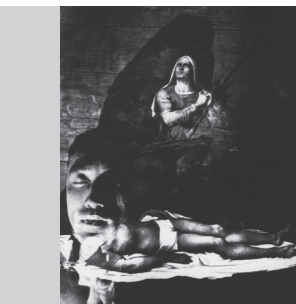
² Hosoe Eikoh, Photographer's note to the third edition.

List of some Renaissance paintings included in the book BARAKEI

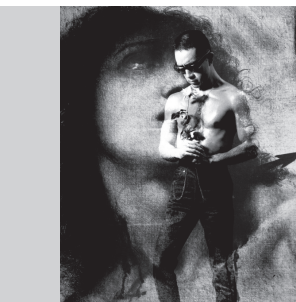
(From the photographs presented in this exhibition)



Barakei #16 | The female body is inspired by Giorgione's painting *Sleeping Venus*



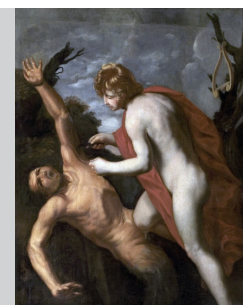
Barakei #23 | The photograph is based on the painting *Pietà* by Sebastiano del Piombo



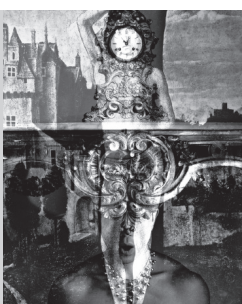
Barakei #25 | The background is an enlarged image of Giovanne Sodoma, *San Sebastian*



Barakei #26 | On top is Botticelli's painting *Pallas and the Centaur*



Barakei #27 | On top of Mishima's image Guido Reni's painting, *Apollo and Marsia*



Barakei #29 | Superimposed on the image are a Baroque piece of furniture and the painting *St. Sebastian* by Jacometto Veneziano.



Barakei #33 | In the background, but in a raised position, Giorgione's painting *Sleeping Venus*

薔薇刑

BARAKEI

PREFACE BY YUKIO MISHIMA

One day, without warning, Eikoh Hosoe appeared and transported me bodily to a strange world. Even before this, I had seen some of the magical work produced with the camera, but Hosoe's work is not so much simple magic as a kind of mechanical sorcery; it is the use of this civilized precision instrument for purposes utterly opposed to civilization. The world to which I was abducted under the spell of his lens was abnormal, warped, sarcastic, grotesque, savage, and promiscuous ... yet there was a clear undercurrent of lyricism murmuring gently through its unseen conduits. It was, in a sense, the reverse of the world we live in, where our worship of social appearances and our concern for public morality and hygiene create foul, filthy sewers winding beneath the surface. Unlike ours, the world to which I was escorted was a weird, repellent city — naked, comic, wretched, cruel, and overdecorative into the bargain — yet in its underground channels there flowed, inexhaustible, a pellucid stream of unsullied feeling.

Yes, it was a strange city to which I was taken . . .

A city not to be found on the map of any land, a city of awesome silences, where Death and Eros frolicked wantonly in broad daylight on the squares ... We stayed in that city from the

autumn of 1961 until the summer of 1962. This is the record of our stay, as told by Hosoe's camera. Before that camera, as I soon realized, my own spirit and psychology had become totally redundant. It was an exhilarating experience, a state of affairs I had long dreamed of. Hosoe merely explored via the medium of his camera — much as the novelist uses words and the composer sounds — the various combinations in which the objects to be photographed could be placed, and the light and shadow which made those combinations possible. For him, in short, the objects correspond to words and sounds. The objects are stripped of their various meanings, which are flung into a meaningless arrangement where their meaningless reflection of each other eventually restores a certain order to the light and shadow. It is only by such means that the elements with which he composes can acquire an abstract quality similar to that of words and sounds.

A first requirement for this process, of course, is that the objects photographed should have some meaning of which they can be stripped. This is why it was necessary that the human model should be a novelist of sorts, and that the background should consist of Renaissance paintings and Spanish baroque furniture. These were not, thus, a way of effecting satire or parody, but

of achieving the photographer's unique type of abstraction. The use, for example, of Giorgione's Sleeping Venus and Botticelli's Birth of Venus has a quite different significance from Dali's monomaniacal parody of Evening Bells. If the photographer is to create works that will stand for his spirit in the same way as artists in other genres, he must first — having no ready-made, abstract components such as words and sounds — supply other means to abstraction instead.

First of all, thus, the externals of the objects to be photographed must be precisely defined and a state of affairs established where, for instance, the model's eye can be, quite simply, an eye and his back a back. Before Hosoe's camera, I was trained until it meant exactly the same to me whether I stared into the lens or turned my back on it completely. If the flesh of my back and the retina of my eye were both treated simply as externals, what sense could there be to looking?

Yet I was not the only one who was placed in a position where he did not rely on his own eyes.

It was the same for Hosoe, too, as the photographer. Quite obviously, as he peered into the viewfinder, he was waiting for some metamorphosis to overtake the objects he saw there. From beginning to end, his operations

were aimed at preparing a state of affairs where his own eyes might be successfully betrayed, where a successful reversion to the kind of primary images already seen in his subconscious world would be achieved. Thus the objects to be photographed were decided on, placed — sometimes, literally, bound fast — and, together with the photographer himself, consecrated to the uncertain metamorphosis which was supposed to occur as a result of the ritual situation so assiduously arranged. For myself, I was in an objective world where staring eyes and closed, rejection and affirmation, were reduced to precisely the same significance. It seems to me that before the photograph can exist as art it must, by its very nature, choose whether it is to be a record or a testimony. Whatever special lens are used, and however the subject is thereby distorted, the camera only knows how to relate things directly. However abstract the composition, therefore, the individual meaning of the objects related inevitably remains as a kind of indispensable precipitate. The photographer's whole job is to filter this off by one of two methods. These alternatives are the record and the testimony. The masterpieces of press photography belong to the former class. The images which the photographer has filtered from reality, whether particular events or the anguish of human

reactions to them, already bear a stamp of authenticity which the photographer is powerless to alter by one jot or tittle; the meaning of the objects, by a process of purification, itself becomes the theme of the work. One might say that the photograph that chooses to record takes the absolute authenticity of the object photographed as its form and the purification of the meaning as its theme. On the other hand, when the photograph chooses to testify, the meaning of the objects related by the camera loses some parts in the process of being filtered off, while other parts are distorted and fitted into a new environment so as to serve as formal elements for the work ; as for the theme of the work, it lies solely in the expression of the photographer's subjective judgement. His testimony is everything: This is true... This is a photograph, so it is as you see: there are no lies and no deceptions. Hosoe's art is, supremely, that of the "testimony", the definition of which just given can be fitted to actual examples in his work. In the way he treats a single rose, for example ... This particular flower embodies the general concept of the thing called "rose" which most men harbor in their brains, along with various special meanings implicit in the place of origin, the species, the form, and the color. The lens of the camera relates, not just the rose, but its

meaning as well. It is, indeed, only this meaning — and not the image — which can be twisted and toyed with in the process of filtering out the testimony. In a documentary photograph, the meaning would itself be the theme of the work, but here the meaning of the rose is transformed and worked into the composition as a formal element. It is here that it can become, for the first time, a rose in the form of a palace building, a rose like an elephant, a womb-rose, a phallic rose ... And yet the elephant and the womb remain, not the theme of the work, but mere formal elements. The theme consists solely of Hosoe's testimony:

***This is the true rose.
This is a photograph, so it is
as you see: there are no lies
and no deceptions.***

One can detect here, elevated to an incomparably higher level, the same pathetic emotional appeal that lies concealed in every fake spiritualist photograph, every pornographic photograph; one comes to suspect that the strange, disturbing emotional appeal of the photographic art consists solely in that same, repeated refrain: this is a true ghost ... this is a photograph, so it is as you see: there are no lies, no deceptions. This plea, this testimony, I feel, constitute the whole of Hosoe's personal message. It is, surely,

only via this same monotonous refrain that any self-revelation is possible to the photographer at all?

Yet his works are vibrant with a frail yet intense tremolo of emotion — the emotion of the testimony that cannot partake of the slightest objective credibility. Why do you not believe, when this is a photograph?

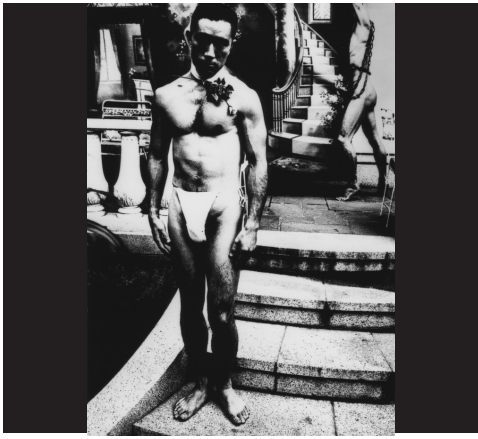
Why do you not believe, when this is something that actually occurred before my eyes? Little did the photographers of old, with their box-like contraptions covered with real-lined material, dream that the photograph — that product of the machine civilization, that all-mighty monarch of realism, more realistic than the most realistic of painters — would be used for such an ironic testimony! The loneliness of these works stems from this, from the repetition of the same testimony each time in different keys; it is here, I would assert without hesitation, that the poetry of the photograph lies. The photographer has gazed clearly, with his own eyes, on unheard-of metamorphoses, and has testified to them. These things did, in fact, happen: as the doubtless unnecessary account of the works I append will show.

The collection begins with a Prelude, part 1, which first presents a number of variations on a constant theme. Part 2, The Citizen's Daily Round, tells of the madness of the solid worthy

average citizen. Yet who can laugh at this madness? As Mauriac so admirably put it, "men are all mad when they are alone". They put collars round their naked necks, with roses for ties, and stand gazing vacantly into space, or they lie on zodiacs of marble mosaic, their bodies wrapped in rubber hoses. It is a ritual that every solid citizen without fail, unknow to others, on one day out of seven, for a few seconds out of the twenty-four hours. Without a single exception...

The Part 3, The Laughing Clock or the Idle Witness, the model is required to changed completely and become a scoffer and a witness. He acquires the right to stand on a child's chair holding a large wall clock and a tennis ball, and a mock at the whole of human life. For the eternity market by the stopped clock, he becomes a creature that merely watches; torture alternately by his own shrill laughter that rings among the rafters and a nagging, indeterminate pain, he is forced to assist at human pleasures and suffering in their most naked forms. Yet he merely laughs scornfully, watches, and does nothing. His retribution will come in due course, but before that he is turned loose in a strange, wanton world, which we see in Part 4, Divers Desecrations. Plunging into the midst of ancient esthetic styles, he kicks them about, he is born from them as a child from the womb, and he

is buried in them as a corpse, till eventually these blasphemous sports create in him the illusion that his body has become transparent. He feels that he is the wind. He feels that he can come and go at will through every artistic style, transcending time and space, free to shift from one existence to another, from one life to another, released from all civic responsibilities. Yet beyond this joyous dalliance lies Part 5, The Retribution of the Rose and the protracted torment of his execution. Now the symbol of the rose with its cruel thorns emerges to the fore, and he is confronted with torture and extinction infinitely delayed. So the collection draws to its close, with death, and ascension to a dark sun.



Ordeal by Roses
#1, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#2, 1962 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#5, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



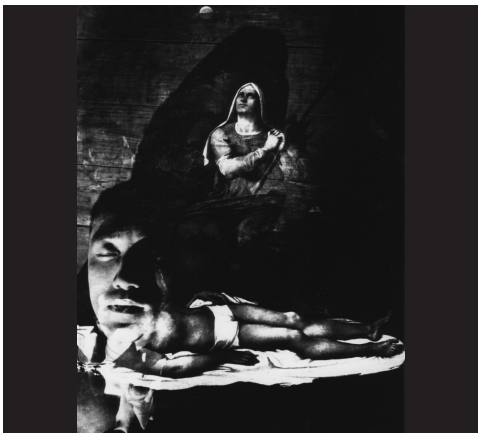
Ordeal by Roses
#6, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#7, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



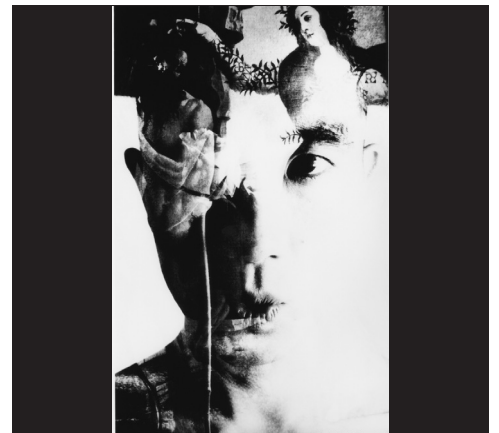
Ordeal by Roses
#16, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



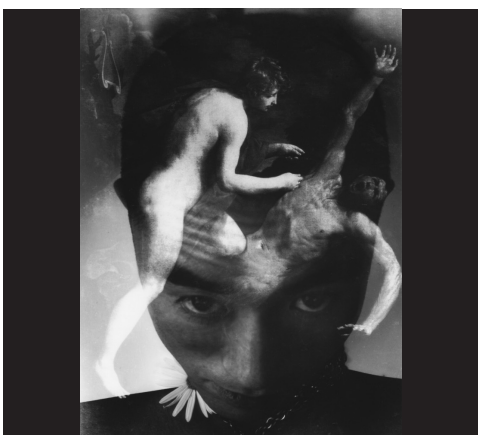
Ordeal by Roses
#23, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



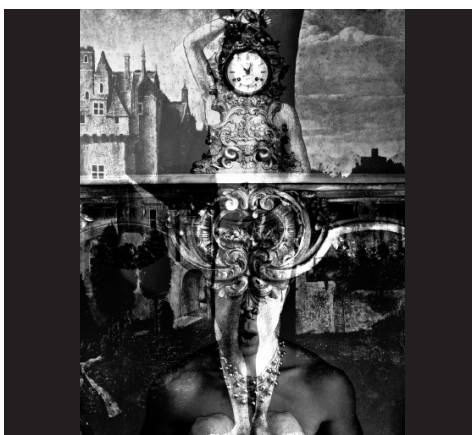
Ordeal by Roses
#25, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



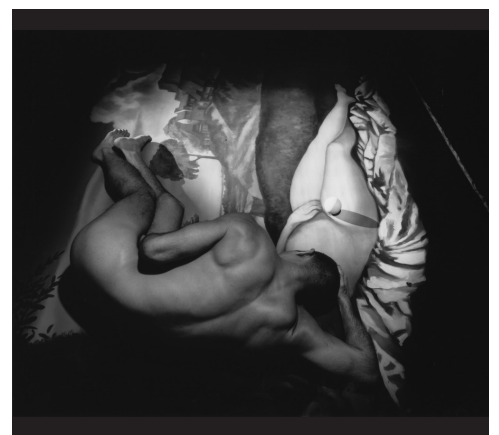
Ordeal by Roses
#26, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#27, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#29, 1962 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#33, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



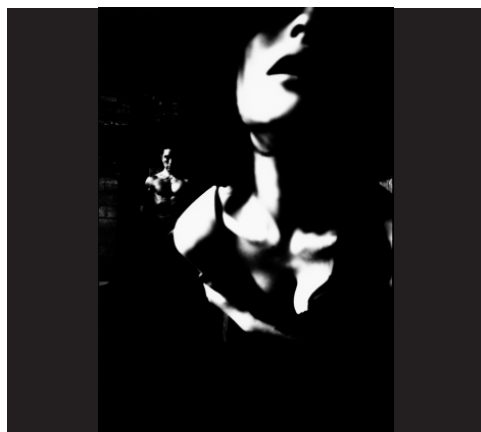
Ordeal by Roses
#32, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



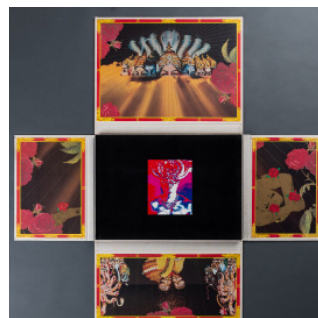
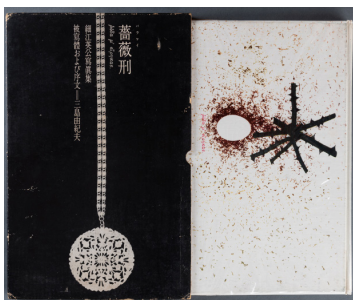
Ordeal by Roses
#34, 1962 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#42, 1962 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Ordeal by Roses
#45, 1961 ©Hosoe Eikoh



Covers of the four editions of *Ordeal by Roses*

1st edition design by Kouhei Sugiura (1963);

2nd edition design by Tadanori Yokoo
(January 30, 1971);

3rd edition design by Kiyoshi Awadu (1984);

4th edition design by Katsumi Asaba (2015).

HOSOE EIKOH

Master of Masters of Japanese Photography

ORDEAL by ROSES (BA-RA-KEI)

com YUKIO MISHIMA
(on the centenary of his birth)

JANUARY 14 → 8 FEBRUARY 2025

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