

# PURPLE FASHION *magazine*

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**TERENCE KOH's** *Life Masks*: Two artists talking in a pitch-black room, share some secrets about art, God, Hermès, jellyfish, Michael Jackson, penetration, perfection.... Interview by Maurizio Cattelan, portrait by Hedi Slimane, introduction by Jeff Rian.

*Pictures of GOD, a performance at GALERIE DE PURY & LUXEMBOURG, Zurich, june 2007*



DEATH IS ART'S most natural subject. It fulfills the role of both succubus and incubus, guides the passions and neuroses of artists, and influences their behavior and dress. The worlds of art are fraught with death, and in those worlds, it is treated with the care and control of clockmakers. For many artists, a dandy's fetishistic obsession imbues the leitmotif of death in a camouflage of carefully constructed presentations and projections.

Terence Koh's photographs, performances, and presentations are infused with gothic sensitivity and emblematic matter. Koh, who was born in Beijing, but raised in Vancouver, once published amateur magazines under the pseudonym *Asianpunkboy*. He now lives in New York, and makes artworks using skulls, hair, glass, fire, wax, sperm, blood, piss, shit, rope, religious figures, erotic objects, and extension chords, among other things. His work is often dramatized in either white or black and might be viewed as trophies celebrating death: the ultimate discontinuity, which is everything human procreation is not about, and a lot of what our art is about.

Koh whitewashed his entire Canal Street workspace to better highlight every object inside. Many of his artworks are colored black and set in white backgrounds. *These Decades that We Never Sleep* (2004) for example, features a drum kit and a chandelier drenched in black wax, crushed insects, and his own blood and sperm. It was included in a show at the Saatchi Gallery in

London along with *Crackhead* (2006) a work consisting of 222 glass tanks, each one containing a plaster skull, and *Big White Cock* (2004) a rooster outlined in white neon. Their titles accommodate the poetic sensitivity of a no-man's-lander, an art world's brooding Hamlet.

A similar aesthetic was a leitmotif in much of Andy Warhol's work. Not just in his electric chair, car crashes, and skulls, but also in the celebrity pictures, and in his manner of representation, of using repeated silk-screened images like enlarged stamps. Warhol treated images as clichés, echoing the way people, death, and fame become fetish-masks — the media's death masks — of life. Death is treated aesthetically in newspaper images as well, but for specific shock value, not as an accepted leitmotif. Koh's immediate predecessors, Robert Mapplethorpe, Robert Gober, and Félix Gonzáles-Torres, also dressed up death in theatrical presentations. Like them, rather than denying death, Koh employs death's accoutrements as symbolic acceptance.

JEFF RIAN



TERENCE KOH — Wow! You're much better looking than I thought you were! MAURIZIO CATTOLAN — *Pictures can lie, you know. They're like naughty gremlins. [Laughs]* — It's like looking at yourself in the mirror: the most truthful lie in the world. — *I like looking at myself in the mirror.*

— Me too! — *Do you have a mirror around?* — I think so. Let me look. Thanks for coming tonight. I wanted to do an interview in the dark. I like night visitors, and I think the night has more possibilities than the day. There's something magical about the sky turning from dark purple to black. That's why we're here, sitting together in total blackness. — *It's funny, talking here in the dark.* — I think it's beyond funny. I also have something special for us to wear for our interview. A surprise. — *I love surprises.* — I had a friend make us matching, custom women's undergarments. The bra and panties are made out of see-through black chiffon. Super tight silk panty hose and leather garter belt straps. Very S&M. — *I love dressing in drag. I get my best ideas in drag. These panties are so tight.* — There, I think I've got everything on. And you?

— *Oh, yes. I know how to put these things on!* — I'll look for that mirror. Mirrors make me feel safe. They're like safety blankets for me. I always wear this necklace that has a real mirror with polished edges. I made it myself. It sits next to my heart, and gives me a sense of comfort. Like a force field protecting me from the world. I'm supersensitive. Bright lights scare me. Sounds scare me. Going

out scares me. Almost everybody scares me. I think I'm hypersensitive to the supernatural. I can sense spirits and the spirits of things. When I was a child I had the ability to hone in on the spirit of things. Sitting upstairs in my bedroom I'd know that my father was in the library reading, or that my mother was in the dining room cleaning the table. They'd just appear to me visually, absolutely clear. Here's a spirit. It glows. I know it's a mirror. I sense its silvery shimmer even in the dark.

— *Let's have a talk with it.* — Will it tell us the truth? — *Only if we behave. We have to be good boys.* — But we never behave. I know you don't, even though we've never met. You're like a long lost brother. You like to disrupt things, the same way I do. — *No, I hate to disturb the peace. I love peace. Riding my bike all alone, as if no one else matters, is pure bliss.* — It's about being selfish.

— *Like buying clothes for yourself, or getting clothes for free.* — I always shop alone. It's the only way to shop. Do you get a discount? Fashion likes art these days. It's great. I got a huge discount at Margiela today. — *I always cut their labels out.* — That's the first thing I do, too. Make it look like something cheap. When I started sewing labels on my boyfriend's boxers, his dirty boxers suddenly looked expensive. Instant chic. Those sweaters with that X on them make me want to puke! — *We must try to puke before we finish talking tonight.* — Definitely. Want some Patrón tequila? My drink of choice. Best straight from the bottle. Drink it straight up and fast. Puke-

fest within the hour. Take this with the Patrón. I just took one. We'll be having lots of fun soon. — *What is it?* — You don't need to know. Trust me, it's good for you. I think it's vitamin B12. — *I have an idea. I'll say the first word that comes into my head and you answer with the very first thought that comes into your head.* — All right. — *God.* — God... For me, everybody is God. I came to the conclusion that in the end no one else exists but me. So, Maurizio, you're just a part of me. I'm just talking to myself here in the dark. — *Potato.*

— A potato pancake was walking up the street and met a chicken. The chicken ate it. Immediately the chicken laid an egg. The egg cracked and a potato in the shape of an egg came out. — *Donatella.* — Raphael. Raphael painting Donatella Versace. She's wearing a golden dress and posing as Athena. Flying above her are two doves that don't have any feathers. Truly naked birds. Above the doves is a gray cloud with the faint face of a man with a beard. It looks like he's crying. It must be God crying. God crying on Athena. — *Hermès.* — I love shopping at Hermès. It's instant gratification. Every time I make a big art sale I go shopping at Hermès. Everything they have looks like something you could get on Canal Street. Mary Boone and I are kindred spirits. I wanted to go shopping with her at Hermès. She loves it, too. I wanted to make a movie with her and call it *Lunch with Mary Boone*. But it had been snowing. We were watching the weather forecast everyday for two

weeks. One day the forecast said it would snow and the next day it did! Mary sent her driver, Constantine, over to fetch me, and this black Jaguar pulls up in the snow. My assistant, Alex, who was doing the filming, and I jumped into the car. I had on all the white furs I own: my angora bunny sweater, my white Alaïa coat, my rabbit mink shawl, my white llama shawl, and my white mink hat. I was a vision. Mary has the coolest car. In a compartment in the door is a little alligator skin box filled with bon-bons, and another filled with sugar cubes for her morning coffee. When we picked her up she was wearing the same white mink hat that I was. We had lunch at The Four Seasons. Just cucumber sandwiches and soup. We filmed the cucumbers. Then we went to Tiffany & Co. It was very "Breakfast at Tiffany's," actually. The whole store was staring at us because we were both in so much fur. I told my assistant not to film us, so he just took shots of diamonds and jewels and sparkly stuff. Mary and I just stood by and gossiped. Then we went to Hermès. Everybody there was so sweet to us. I tried on lots of alligator things. When we left it was still snowing. The film ends with the snow falling down on the sidewalk outside of Hermès. Pitter patter poo. — *Mask.* — Oscar Wilde said "Man is the most unlike himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth." I collect African masks. They're just so beautiful. My favorites are from the Fang tribe. They rub their sweat on their masks. That's why the masks always shine. Sometimes at night I walk around the house with these masks on. Turn off the lights and put candles on and talk to myself. Or I talk to the mask. Free therapy. — *Daaf.* — Our cars look like flowers. So our brains must be the roots. All the people and things we encounter in the world are bees. Golden honeybees that exist so

that they can feed our flowers. Within the stems they change the pollen into gold, so inside we're all encrusted in a secret layer of gold. Humans have shells of gold inside. We play music within ourselves, like bronze bells clanging in the wind. The sound we make is always silent. That's why we keep on breathing. When the golden bells stop, we die. These are first thoughts coming out of my brain, my golden root. Maybe they don't make sense. — *Nothing has to make sense. OK, then: Penetration.* — Anus! Oops! That wasn't very original. But I love nothing better than having my anus penetrated. Could be anybody. Anybody. That's why they invented doggie style. Your imagination can do the rest. — *Same.* — Spaceship. When I can't sleep — which is pretty much every night — I imagine I'm inside this white spaceship speeding through space. The interior of the spaceship is all white. Like the Michael Jackson video *Scream*. The one he did with Janet Jackson. Inside this all-white spaceship I'm protected in a total cocoon. It calms me down. I think of stars zipping by outside the window and inside of me time stops. So I can no longer think. Enter the sandman. — *Michael.* — Jackson. — *Pop.* — Michael Jackson! I think so much about Michael these days. He's my biggest hero. The first piece of art I ever did was a painting of Michael from the *Thriller* video. Michael as a werewolf. I think it's great. [Laughs] Actually, it still hangs above my bed. He inspires me. Michael Jackson is my idea of a perfect human being. I'd like curls like he had in the 80s. When my hair is long enough I want to go to one of those ghetto fab salons and get it tiny-curled and oiled. I always wondered if he ever had a penis. I want to make a video of me, dressed up like Michael Jackson from his "Bad" period, dry humping a taxidermist's albino white peacock. Cock shots and all. The video would end with a zoom to a close-up of the eyes of

the peacock. From white to black. His videos were genius. The one Spike Lee did for "They Don't Care About Us" was beyond reality. That's why he's perfect. His songs cut into the true nature of humanity. If you really listen to them, they'll make your skin crawl. Every time I listen to "Man in the Mirror" — my favorite song in the world — I get goose bumps. "I'm gonna make a change, for once in my life, it's gonna feel real real good, gonna make a difference, gonna make it right, ta da ta da da." — *You can sing! You should start a band. Call it Pop. Do you feel a bit weird? Did this room get hotter or something? It's like my skin is tickly.* — Don't worry about it. Must be the drinks. — *But it really tickles.* — It's just the bra, Maurizio. Onward we must go, like a ship sailing towards the dying pink sun. Gimme words. Gimme words. — *OK. But it's getting too hot in here.* — Suffering is one step towards gaining divinity, Maurizio. A word, please. — *Colony.* — A colony is a jungle. A jungle is a desert. And the desert becomes the sea. Do you like to swim? I sometimes have the fantasy that I'm a jellyfish drifting alone in the sea at St. Barths. What a perfect existence. You never have to think. Thinking is pure suffering. It's God's greatest punishment for humanity, because we can't escape from it. Think, think, think! It never ends. But if you're a jellyfish, you drift with the tides and just kind of wobble. Pure bliss. You're a transparent bubble! It's perfect. — *Perfect. Perfect. Everything feels perfect.* — Because you're a jellyfish, Maurizio! — *Yes, I am a jellyfish. A hot jellyfish. And this jellyfish just ran out of words.* — Maybe if I sing to the jellyfish. "Once so long ago a butterfly flew into the moon/And the moon whispered into the butterfly's wings/Honey, honey is the color of your soul/Diamonds are your feet/And your proboscis reaches out forever/Far far far into the heavens." Does the jellyfish feel better now? — *Much better. You have a buttery voice. Can we just sit here*

*for a while? No, actually I feel like dancing. Is there music here? I suddenly want to listen to The Beatles.* — Sometimes wishes do come true. I have a wee little speaker somewhere and an iPod. Last time we threw a party down here we put it on the shelf. Ouch. Ouch. Wheee! Here it is. Here we go. "We all live in a yellow submarine..." — *Can I be the pirate of the yellow submarine? I want to go where the seaborse live, and roam the land of the starfishes. I want to be a starfish. A tiny little one that bides, under the sand.* — I'll build a sandcastle and Maurizio the Starfish will live in the highest tower. We'll be the best of friends. Let's be best friends forever. — *You'll be my best friend forever.* — Forever and ever. We'll live to be one hundred and twelve and be neighbors in Vancouver, Canada. We'll build a white house with a picket fence and plant white roses in the garden. We'll have bonfires for our grandchildren. They'll roast marshmallows and we'll burn all our books. "Hansel and Gretel" burning up. *The Odyssey* disappearing into flames. I want to stop reading when I turn 35. I love reading but I said to myself a few years ago, Terence, you must stop reading at 35. There's no reason for it. One must stop doing the things one loves to do. It's the secret to living. Life must be sad. It must be about denial. I'm constantly suicidal anyways. I don't think I'm depressed but I think dying must just be the most beautiful thing. If you Google the word "suicide," in Japan one of the first sites you get is a suicide bulletin board. A friend told me that in Tokyo groups of teenagers meet on Internet chat rooms and decide together on a place to commit mass suicide. It really happens. I think they take sleeping pills and seal a room up with a charcoal stove on and slowly die together. The image of a bunch of raven-haired Japanese teenagers slowly dying together in this haze of white smoke is absolutely beautiful. It's like a piece I would do. The perfect performance. —



*The Japanese are the cutest. They even make suicide sound cute. If not a starfish, in my next life I want to be reborn as a Japanese high school girl. I'll have pig-tails and knee-high white socks, and a boyfriend who's the lead singer of a Japanese pop band. We'll live in an all pink apartment.* — Pink! My favorite color! — *Pink is the color of power. Together we'll write lyrics for Japanese pop songs. Music is so powerful. It's like a rainbow. Everybody understands a rainbow; so making pop music is like creating rainbows for the most people possible. I have a fear of being alone. I need to be loved. I want to be a pop star just like my Japanese pop-star boyfriend. But even more famous! I'll call my group Super Silver Shit. We'll sing songs about tigers and moonbeams and giant rubies. To sing for love is bliss. When I was a kid a priest at my church wanted me to join the choir. My aunt was a fanatical catholic and brought me to her church a few times. I was living in Sicily then. But my parents wouldn't let me join. They hated the idea of religion. But I so badly wanted to join that choir. I didn't have any friends as a child and looking at a group of kids singing together was magical. Terence, shall we start a choir together?* — Absolutely. I love singing. But I have a terrible singing voice so I only sing when I'm alone. Well, I do sing to my two cats. They actually like my singing. Their tails go straight up. That's how you know when a cat is happy. But I could do background humming for our choir. We should have custom costumes. I'll make them. Did you know that I can sew? I went to fashion school for two years. It's kind of a secret. We should wear capes made up of real human hair. The blackest and nicest comes from Indian women. Wouldn't that be divine? Singing from a forest of black hair. Who should we ask to join our choir? — *Only art stars. Richard Prince, Jeff Koons, John Currin, Douglas Gordon, John Baldessari and Isa Genzken.* — We must get Louise Bourgeois. She's a hoot. That would be completely, ridiculously super. We'll do a concert in Central Park. No — on top of the Empire State Building. We'll be like gorillas in our capes. Should we use lasers? Yes, we'll have white lasers and fog machines. — *And sing violent songs — violent songs about a brave new world. Make little boys cry.* — That's funny. When you did the piece with the boys hanging from a tree, I thought it was like boys crying. My first thought was that those boys hung themselves so they could cry. Singing without breath. Singing as ghosts. Those boys were making music hanging there. It wasn't shocking to me. I thought that it was completely natural. Children shouldn't grow up. It destroys everything. We all become evil after the age of sixteen. Well, I think we're all born evil, but when you become an adult it's a different kind of evil. It's directed evil. Being a child and evil

is okay because it's nonobjective evil. It's evil as innocence, children not understanding what the concept of evil is. So if the world was only made up of children, I think there would still be wars. Like in *Lord of the Flies*, which is the perfect example of innocent evil. It was all right precisely because those children didn't understand who they were. They were just being natural. When you become an adult you begin to understand yourself too much. That's when you start to lose your innocence. In a way, that's why I make art. When I make art I'm a child again. I create innocent objects. But they're naturally evil. It's like creating a talisman. It's ritualistic. Not like African rituals or things like that. It's more like the ritual of making sandcastles. You build them higher and higher to try to reach the sky. But in the end you know the waves will eventually wash them away. They'll disappear and become part of nature again. — *You make me feel like crawling back into my mother's womb. I want to be a baby again inside all that warm liquid. I feel like a baby now. I'm still warm and tickly feeling, and it's still all black in here. Don't you feel happy too?* — No. I'm never happy. I'm serially sad. I was born an unhappy baby. My mom told me I didn't stop crying at night for the few months after I was born. It drove her crazy. But why can't we be sad? Being sad is as natural as being happy. It would be all right if we were all sad people, a whole society made up of only sad people. We wouldn't need politicians, because politics is about creating the illusion of happiness. If there were no politics in this world there wouldn't be wars. No poverty or class either because sadness has no need for ambition. So everybody in the world would be happy! But sad! — *There wouldn't be any murders anymore then either?* — No. Only happy funerals. It was so shocking to hear about the Virginia Tech shootings. Because I think that guy was just a super sad person. But his was a sadness that took the step from being simply a feeling to being pure lunacy. Lunacy being the final evolutionary stage of sadness. I was fascinated and shocked by the news of that shooting. It scared me so much because I really could visualize it almost like a movie happening in real time. A super real movie about humanity. — *Like the leap Yves Klein made into the void.* — Yes. Art is about madness. Breakage. Falling. Ultimately, all art is violent. Art should have the potential to kill you. Not physically, but really kill your soul. Seeing great art is the worst way to die. I want to create art that kills people that way. — *I only make art so I can go shopping for expensive things.* — So do I, but I think you can make money while making a real change. I think that those gold robotic

Balenciaga pants I just bought will make a big impact on my life. I think I'm the only person in America that has those pants. I'm just going to wear them with dirty sneakers and a dirty T-shirt though. It's the only way to wear pants like those, or else I would look like the biggest faggot. They're so gorgeous. Beyond gorgeous. They're pants for riding your bike in the sun. Don't you still ride your bike around too, even though you probably make a lot more money than I do? — *Sure I do. It's the best way to get around in New York. But didn't those pants cost a fortune?* — It wasn't too bad. About \$20,000. But I'm not too good at handling money. It's not about the value of an object, it's about the happiness it brings. There's a scene in the movie I saw about the very first tea master, Rikyu. His patron was a vain and powerful warlord. One day he commanded Rikyu to make him a tearoom totally out of pure gold. When Rikyu finished the tearoom he was initially disgusted about it because the art of tea is about modesty and finding the spirit of things. But when he sat in the tearoom it dawned on him that if you took away the idea of the monetary value of the room, it was actually a very spiritual space. Gold only becomes obscene because your mind is locked into the idea that it's this precious expensive material. But once you ignore that and take it only for it's spiritual qualities, you realize that gold gives off a warm encompassing allure that is almost spiritual. I'm not sure if this in any way justifies my spending that amount of money on gold pants, but if you ignore how much they cost, they become like a ritualistic uniform. Like ancient samurai armor. You're temporarily transformed into something special, a golden dragon or something. You can't do that with a pair of H&M jeans. — *I only shop at H&M.* — No, you don't! I recognize that jacket you're wearing. It's Comme des Garçons. From the Gold collection. I have the golden motorcycle jacket. Très gay. Très très gay. — *All you Chinese people love gold.* — Yes, we do. It's a genetic thing. I'm making a piece in Beijing using shiny gold public toilets — 88 of them because it's a lucky number: 88 shiny golden toilets will look like a sea of golden ingots glimmering in the sun. Like golden terracotta soldiers. I'm also recreating a full scale replica of Leonardo's "The Last Supper" in gold-plated bronze. I made the twelve disciples as skeletons. Jesus is sitting in the middle and his two hands are resting on two life-size casts of my body. The disciples are eating my genitals because they're hungry. The cock is the juiciest part! Inside Jesus I'm building a honeybee colony. But they'll be trapped inside forever and will all die eventual-

ly. I like to use insects in my pieces because they imbue the object with their life force. You really can feel all the ghosts of those dying honeybees. I hope Dakis Joannou buys it because I kind of went broke buying those pants. Aren't you good friends with him? Put in a good word for me, will you? — *Anything for my new best friend. So you do make art to buy clothes!* — I don't see anything wrong in that. I don't think it's shallow. I still make art. I just happen to make more expensive art that lets me buy more expensive clothes. — *Such as?* — Should I list them? Let's see: besides the Balenciaga pants, I bought some kimono-like black tops from the same collection and a really S&M looking leather skirt. I also bought this shiny black-leather Azzedine Alaïa coat but everybody told me Carine Roitfeld was wearing the same coat all during fashion week. But I bought it first. I didn't buy it because she was wearing it. I'm not a fashion victim! Just a major supporter of the fashion industry. I've got a few tutus from Comme des Garçons. I only buy the woman's line. And these amazing Yohji sweaters that look like chain mail. The cape from Margiela that looks like a fish net. And the gigantic hoop of black fur that's really beyond words. But I have so much clothing. Oh, and I also I bought this super-amazing black goat-hair coat from Gareth Pugh's last collection. It was the show-stopping stunner, the last piece in the show. And you know what? I was the only person in the world that actually bought it. So they're making a custom one for me! Incredible. I can't wait to wear it when I go to Peru this summer. Fur is made for summer, not winter. Our actions shouldn't be practical. That's boring! — *It's about the spectacular. You're the spectacle!* — Not at all. I'm shy, and don't crave to be watched, but if I am perceived as a spectacle it's only because the world doesn't expect to see beauty. I'm not afraid of beauty, just other people. Leigh Bowery was incredibly shy but he knew that he had to put beauty out there. It wasn't a matter of choice. I understand that. Or David Bowie from his Ziggy Stardust days. Absolutely beautiful. — *Well, you're very beautiful yourself. You're just a stunning person to look at. Do you feel guilty that you were born so beautiful?* — I don't really think I'm beautiful. I'm weird looking. I would hate to be beautiful. To be surreal looking is the best. I strive to be that. I was born strange looking. That's it, really. I'm just a strange looking person, to the point of being ugly. It's a blessed fortune because dressing up is more fun. Clothes become armor that I use to make myself more dramatic. I don't mean dramatic fabulous. I mean that when I dress up, it's theater. It's like I'm acting on stage every waking moment. I wake up and think: What character shall I be today? What will I put on that represents my character? I've long forgotten who my real self is, anyways. — *I wonder which of us has more clothes. I think you must. I've seen so many shots of you on style.com* — Do you Google yourself? Do you Google Image yourself? — *Of course I do. Once in the morning and once before bed.* — Googling yourself is so much fun. I especially love to read the things people write about me in their blogs. I read once that some guy tried to jerk off in one of my installations. That was the ultimate positive review. It made me so happy. I'm going to make more installations so people can jerk off in them. Jerk-off rooms. I'm doing this piece together with my friend Bruce la Bruce. It's called The Cave. Basically we're building a wooden platform that people can slide under or climb on top of with a ladder. We're going to drill all these glory holes through the floor and the roof. We'll give away Viagra. Men will get hard and put their cocks through the holes. When they jut down from the ceiling they'll be like stalactites, and when they poke up through the floor they'll be like stalagmites. Hence, "The Cave." I can't wait! Bruce is so much fun. I'm helping him produce his next movie. It's a zombie porn flick! — *I love his movies!* — They're smokin! *No Skin Up My Ass* made me gay! In his new movie, zombies eat and fuck people and vice versa. Rick Owens is designing the costumes for it. It's such a perfect

movie for today because we're all eating each other up. In the movie it will just be more physical. We're in the golden age of consumption. I want to start making porn movies myself and sell them for \$9.99. You just have to do it. — *May I have a role?* — Definitely. One hundred Japanese girls will be masturbating around you while you're kneeling down in your garter belt and panties. It'll be the inverse of those Japanese Bukkake videos. But without the notion of an ending because there'll be no money shots. You really can't see a girl's money shot, can you? — *No, it'll end with all the girls enveloping me. I'll disappear in a circle of girls' butts. You can peek between their legs and see that I'm crying. My tears washing down their thighs.* — You are a naughty naughty boy! But that is a beautiful image. Doesn't everything feel beautiful right now? — *Just like ice cream and chocolate mint fudge.* — Vanilla milkshakes. The red cherry in your vodka. I don't think anybody else likes eating those cherries the way I do. But they taste great because they're the most fake tasting things you can eat. When I first came to New York and was really poor my only indulgence was buying a bottle of those cherries. I was surviving on rice and free soy sauce packets. And in Starbucks they have the free milk and honey. That was lunch. That was a tough time. It wasn't even that long ago. I'm really glad I experienced that. I always found a way to survive. When you have experiences like that, deep down this permanent scar reminds you that everything could tumble down. But you'll always have those primal survival instincts. It's okay to be a cockroach. To be down, low in the gutter. I'm planning a performance at the Guggenheim this summer in which I'll dress up in a super realistic cockroach costume. I'll slowly climb up the circular ramps inside the museum. It's called *The King of the Cockroaches Stands in the Middle of the World and Controls All Art Forever*. I'm also making these little sculptures out of cockroach shit. I've been raising giant roaches. Madagascar hissing cockroaches. They're really big, like two or three inches long. They're actually quite popular pets. You can buy them in pet stores. They do make a hissing noise. But I've been slowly collecting their shit to make the little labyrinth mazes. I mean really small ones because there is only so much shit I can collect. I'm making three of these mazes. It's about getting lost. But getting lost in cockroach shit. I think they relate to primitive African sculpture because they're like ancient magic. — *So you like insects and animals. I have a pet mouse named Ernie.* — That's so cute. You have a history of using animals in your art too. Like the mouse on the desk. I love taxidermist's animals. My favorite place to escape to in New York is the Natural History Museum. Whenever I feel depressed or hung-over, I just pop a Vicodin and go there. It's so wonderful looking at those fake dioramas behind the glass, the rhinos and the lions and the fake scenes of Indian tribes. You can spend hours in there. On the top floor they have all these taxidermist's monkeys and baboons, and you can see their willies. But my favorite exhibition is the one in the basement with the sperm whale fighting with the giant squid. It's dark because it's supposed to be happening deep down in the ocean. There's this little corner of blackness just behind the whale. It freaks me out, thinking of the total darkness deep down in the sea. Getting swallowed into dark water is my worst nightmare. — *You're afraid you'll die.* — No, it's not the fear of death. I don't think I will ever die. I'm immortal. Okay, no. Death haunts me everyday. I don't want to die. There's so much to do and see in life. It's so simple, but life is so full of eventualities and light. — *What do you want to accomplish before you die?* — Find the truth, maybe? I hope they find a way to clone people soon so I can have an exact clone of myself made. The same age as myself. Then I'd ask him to fuck me. That explains everything. Perfect. Perfection is a broken mirror that you've cracked yourself.





THE REFINED SUISHIN  
SUISHIN YAMANEHONTEN

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AWARDED HONORABLE PRIZES  
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