

“Destroyed in 146 b.c. your poetry is dreadful, vacant and inept and ours will survive as long as our empire lasts: every present writer says. Towards changes hands of configuration each small mask is a word to cover your lack that is where language stands on no foundation but the wars it has always upheld for if your ways were destroyed and your poems broken and ploughed into the salted earth what would you be?”

- Alice Notley, *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls*

“I have invented myself entirely: a childhood, a personality, longings, dreams, and memories, all in order to enable me to tell them.”

- Federico Fellini

“This page intentionally left blank”. The start of Paris-based poet Alice Notley's book *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls* is as much prosaic as poetic. It starts with a pause; the first page being empty apart from the sentence that states it being empty. It starts with a puzzle; even when solely confirming an absence one inevitably establishes a presence. What is a simple fact nonetheless appears as a cultural construct and assumes a form of narrative.

Equally so, the photographs by Torbjørn Rødland so often place speculation in advance of facts. Not at least as a result of these photographs commonly have people appearing doing simple things that are easy to describe, but difficult to explain why. And while his most recent exhibition sees a further condensation of narrative elements, it remains more unsure than ever what sort of narratives they're inviting. There are three portraits, out of the total of eleven included in Torbjørn Rødland's show, that have the same tableau reappearing: a young woman peeling off layers of skin. Artificial skin, that is – the translucent threads of latex can be seen pinched and stretched from the chin. The eyes are looking away as the woman absent-mindedly unmask her face. The very choice of the mask, and the act of masking as well as unmasking, stirring the notions of complexity associated with any sort of portrait. The notions of psychological depth and layers of information, are here translated into sheer physicality and a keen sense of awareness that any such portrait (whether biographic writing or photographic moment) is constructed. Skin being peeled off. The skin is fake. Tears rolling down the face of another woman. The tears are fake. A grimace of suffering from a man being stepped on. The pain is fake. Rødland's photographs willingly suspend the natural contract between the photograph – its depictions, its actions and its tension – and a purpose, while sharing the viewpoint of Raymond Bellour: “Fiction becomes the only place in which to learn, to understand, what “true” stories can tell.” The logic and needs of the photograph are those of the image itself.

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