

On the Muse

Jordan Richman

In 2011, at 20 years old, I moved to Paris from Philadelphia. I rented a *chambres de bonne* in a building on Rue des Beaux-Arts overlooking the École, the Seine, and across to the Right Bank. My arrival in Paris was tasked with contributing to a new publication titled *Garage*, founded by several members of the team behind *Pop* who had decamped. Most afternoons I spent at Flore sipping a chocolat chaud with my pal Marie. One cloudy day an email flashed on my iPhone from *Garage*'s editor asking if I was interested in doing a story with Yves Saint Laurent's creative director Stefano Pilati. I messaged back "oui" and went next door to La Hune for books to research Yves Saint Laurent.

I came across Alicia Drake's book *The Beautiful Fall: Fashion, Genius, and Glorious Excess in 1970s Paris* and hurried home to start reading. I was immediately engrossed reading about the bitter rivalry between Yves and Karl Lagerfeld, but also about their muse and toy, Jacques de Bascher. Later that night, bored at Montana while a famous older French philosopher made out with a beer heiress in the center of the tiny club, I pulled out the book and kept reading. I contemplated the role of the muse in the fashion system and made comparisons to others, like the stylist. The muse has all the fab bits of being in the inner circle of a fashion scene, but none of the professional responsibilities of the stylist. The stylist is in the studio all day but still expected to go out at night and be part of the scene—the muse, meanwhile, just shows up at the end of the day being fabulous, gets dressed for the evening, and serves as an "inspiration" (meaning being completely debauched with the designer). Maybe the muse is a more glamorous role, but also the most precarious since they're not cultivating professional skills like the stylist—their only job, in a way, is to perpetually style themselves, which is the ultimate form of labor. The muse may do something that slightly displeases the designer, like wearing the wrong shade of lipstick or confessing something too personal—and it's a high pedestal to fall from.

"Jacques de Bascher, An Exhibition," curated by Charles Teyssou, Kevin Bildermann, and Pierre-Alexandre Matcos, orbited me back into the world nearly a decade later with their speculative hagiographic show. I sent those old muse thoughts to Jeppe Ugelvig and he replied, "your thoughts on the muse ring true, and it made me think of the muse as an artist whose only work is his/her life—rooted in self-stylization." From there, an idea blossomed. I chatted with Pierre-Alexandre, Kevin, and Charles about continuing their exhibition into a print format. We knew so much about Jacques' style, obsessions, mythology, cruelty, but little about his feelings or vulnerability. His role and existence was so precarious; I thought only a fictional text could explore what's below the surface like the insecurity, uncertainty and pain. Basically to share *What It Feels Like For A Muse*.

The portfolio includes a speculative fiction text from the perspective of Jacques de Bascher written by the brilliant Tomasz Jedrowski, whose debut novel this summer I heard referred to as "Call Me By Your Name set in Communist Poland." Wanting to think outside the box in terms of visibility, form, materiality, and story-telling, I asked Valentin Herfray to photograph a series of images as if he was in character as Jacques taking the pictures. The concept of these two performative elements capturing how contemporary Jacques is as the muse becomes the influencer in our epoch. ☞

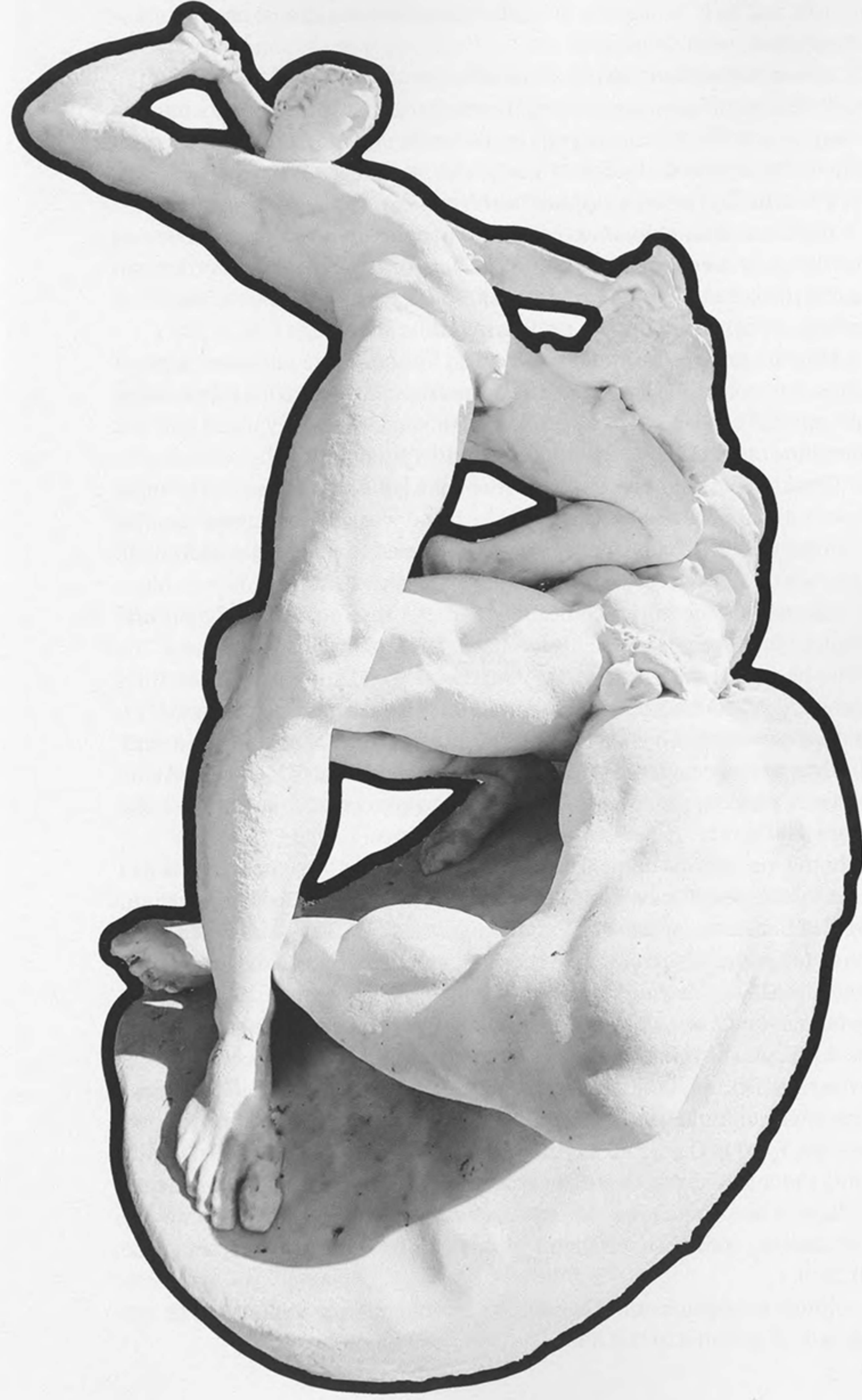
Les fleurs de Jacques

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FICTION

Tomasz Jedrowski

Photography by Valentin Herfray, creative direction by Jordan Richman.
Curated by Kévin Blinderman, Pierre-Alexandre Mateos and Charles Teyssou.



He wakes to see a man slide a needle into his arm. The man is wearing a uniform, and he is handsome, and this makes the pain almost bearable. Like something he used to ask for.

A moustache, dark and bushy; a silicone-gloved hand holds him tight. "You'll feel better soon, monsieur," the doctor says, getting up, avoiding the patient's eyes. The bin opens and the gloves join those previously disposed. With his back turned, the doctor washes his hands for a long time.

When he first arrived, he had the mirrors covered.

This room is as monstrous as me, he thought, as he look in the pale and loveless space overlooking the hospital's courtyard. He asked if they'd let him change the light bulbs, put up some tapestries. Perfume away the stench of sterilizer. They looked unsure, as if he might be joking.

Flowers were delivered. Freesias and hydrangeas, white roses, palm fronds. But most of all, lilies. Gigantic white trumpets, refracting the morning light, spreading their sickly sweet scent. For some time, they made him feel something other than just dread. Their beauty brought relief.

Outside, chestnut trees wrap the room into late summer green. The spiky conkers are almost ready to drop. But he is too weak to get up and see. The pills make him drift in and out of something meant to resemble sleep, though in fact it's closer to stupor. Stupor of pain, stupor of nausea.

Like nurses, memories come and go. They brush against his wrists and temples, place their hands on his forehead. The nights, decades of them. The bodies he sought out, flashing like disco lights. Policemen, princesses. Gifts received, compliments courted and outgrown. *Jardin des Tuileries* gravel on his tuxedo trousers. The boredom, the numbness. The dungeons he descended, down ever steeper, unlit steps. And now, the virus in his body. Piercing his bones, piercing the organs he hadn't previously considered. The liver. The kidney. The heart.

Someone calls his name. The voice is familiar, but he searches in vain to place it. He opens his eyes and sees he's wearing shorts. His legs are slight and hairless. He recognizes the large tiles on the floor, black-and-white sandstone. He's home. Poplars sway in the wind behind the great windows, down beyond the lawn. "Jacques!"

His father's voice is a whip. Heat pulses through him, like inner sweat. And yet he follows the call. He hurries, the soles of his small moccasins tapping on the floor. Through the dark, wood-paneled corridor, where the old faces stare down at him. Julien, knight of Saint Luis. Grandfather Joseph. Haughty blue eyes fixed in time, making the boy look away, hurry on. He reaches the dining room. A decked out Sunday table. His parents, his brother, his sisters.

"You're late," his father says. His face is like plaster. The light stabs the room, blazing off the signet on his pinkie. "Go upstairs. I don't want to see you until

dinner. Until you learn to behave like a young man of your age. Until you stop bringing shame to this house."

His mother's gaze averted. His older sister, eyes incensed. "But *papa* -" "Silence, Anne, or you too will be punished."

The boy mounts the stairs, hungry. He is alone in his room, tries to read, gets distracted. He looks out at the poplars. As the afternoon runs out, the light descends behind the trees, drawing their long shapes onto the great lawn. And though he doesn't hear the steps approaching, he isn't surprised when the door opens and his father enters. Without a word, the father shuts the door behind him and undoes his belt buckle. He frees the leather the boy knows so well. Suspenders fall around narrow shoulders, shorts slip to the ground. The father is on the bed, sitting at its edge. Belt in hand.

"Open your mouth."

He does, and the father shoves it in. As the boy lies down, tummy pressed against the tweed of his father's trousers, the belt becomes his communion wafer. Saliva mixes with the taste of dead animal.

The heat of August is waning. The lilies have shed their dusty stamen onto the floors and windowsills. He squints at the light coming through the gaps in the leaves, mottled like leopard fur. A woman on a plastic chair. The same defiant eyes.

"How are you feeling?" she asks. He lets the question rise, lets it fall. "How could I possibly feel?" He draws a quick breath, wishes none of this were true. "I'm tired."

"I hear they're the best."

"That's not going to be of much use now, is it."

She tries to say something, changes her mind. Takes his hand instead. They have the same fingers, long and graceful. For a moment he says nothing, only looks down at his sister's hand on top of his. Feels something crushing his chest. His eyes begin to glisten, like they're made of porcelain.

"You know, I have a lot of time to think now. And every day I tell myself I should have never -"

She squeezes his hand, shakes her head. "Don't, Jako. Please." He lets go of her hand. "You wouldn't understand, Anne. You've *achieved* something. And you're going to live." He bites his lip, looks away. "Jako." She rises, takes him into her arms. She recognizes his smell. Under his hospital gown she feels his heart beating. "You did what you could, you hear. You have to forgive yourself." She begins to rock him lightly, and though he is hot, far too hot, he lets her. Tears begin to free themselves and slide down his cheeks, wetting her ear. "I'm sorry this happened to you", she whispers, continuing to rock him. "It isn't fair. But now you have to fight, for yourself. Don't let go. Do you hear?"

He nods, opens his eyes. Begins to caress his sister's greying hair.

Later she rises and takes the silk scarf she had draped over the plastic chair. She plants a kiss on his cheeks and takes a look around the room. "Gorgeous flowers," she says.

He follows her gaze and his face lights up. "Weren't they just?" ❧