

## ecstatic tendencies

Sweat

c  
a  
s  
c  
a  
d  
i  
n  
g

Eyes

Wide

d                    d  
r                    r  
r d                d i  
i r d d d r p  
p i r r r i p  
  p i i i p i  
  p p p            n  
                    g

d                    d  
r                    r  
i d                d i  
p r d d d r p  
p i r r r i  
i p i i i p  
n    p p p  
g

from a dying face - as it does from a figure in Ecstasy

*Drips*

from a dancer performing Agony...

*Drips...*

Isolated in a Black space, a figure raises their hand towards a protruding emerald leaf, as if to collect water gushing from it. From behind his head, a chandelier of white flowers meditates, petals cascading. The figure's cheek is smudged with black and crimson red paint. A white substance, maybe water, maybe light (maybe *something else*) is wetting the figure's open mouth.

The symbols and icons that embellish Rotimi Fani-Kayode's portraits are unknown to me. Some feel familiar - I try to grasp at their meaning, but they trickle from my mind - perhaps distant ancestral memories forgotten by centuries, oceans and raptures. Marooned by these raptures, of vast distances and dislocations, of the inability to *return*. To origins in lands that bare the names of the greedy colonial imagination, tensions flamed, land scorched.

In Fani-Kayode's work, the Black body is creation itself - the Black body blooms, it desires, it gives life, it agonises. While white photographers used the Black body only as a prop, a curiosity, a site of reaction, as the antithesis of whiteness - Fani-Kayode's work presents it as the origin. The African mask, usually seen only as a prop, inanimate, a museum curiosity, becomes a consoling and affirming figure. Not human, nor an apparition, but an ecstatic anti-body.

They are figures that keep watch -

over a *body*  
over the *living*  
over the *returning*  
over the *dying*

While the work keeps watch over the dead.

It is the harrowing archive. Despite the certainty of death, the photographs drip, surge, overflow with everything that permeates life - desire, sex, beauty and rage. The work is a document - in stasis - of the artist himself, and of the queer Black body suspended in a different kind of pandemic - one that ravaged the vilified, the demonised and the vulnerable.

He sits

solitary

knife pointing down, resting against his knee - it glimmers

in the same way the gold paint swoops across his face.

Curling leaves and crimson cascade a crown.

He closes his eyes, and looks up, allowing his face to swallow the light.