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I met him a little under two years ago.
We got along very well from the beginning.
I visited him several times in Europe.
He was very generous to me.
He took me around, explained everything, translated anything.
I think he saw himself as my mentor.
He also saw how the relationship was more dynamic.
This summer I met his brother.
This summer I have spent a considerable amount of time with both of them.
His brother has HIV and some serious complications because of it.
His brother has been living with intense pain for two years.
His brother is stabilized in some ways, but, overall, the stability is at a level far less than with which he was familiar.
It is very painful for him to go about his daily life.
My friend and his brother are twins.
I want to say they were twins, but they still are.
My friend is full of life, knowledge, generosity, compassion, love and inquisitiveness.
His brother is full of pain.
They are both beautiful caring sensitive men.
I told my friend that I was interested in taking a portrait photo of the two of them.
As soon as I said it, I realized it was perhaps inappropriate.
Part of the beauty in his brother, to me, is the waif-like quality of his current appearance.
This can be mistaken for a purely cold appreciation of the death-be-upon-him look.
It is not.
It is an appreciation for the strength with which his brother has fought a war within his own body.
It is an appreciation for the strength with which he thinks and feels and fights every day.
It is an appreciation for the resulting reaction that his appearance has taken and the strength it signifies.
This is hard to convey between languages.
I think my friend was actually pained by my interest in the physical presence.
It, perhaps to him, is a reminder of how their lives are not now what they used to be.
I left it up to my friend to decide whether he thought his brother would have interest.
I am not sure if my friend is thinking about his brother's thoughts on the matter or his own.
My friend has been asked by his brother to help him die.
This process involves many things and is very difficult for my friend.
My friend's brother engaged me in a conversation about pain, suffering, and dying.
Three of us were with him: my friend, a friend of his and myself.
We sat at a table in front of a window, eating breakfast as he was talking.
He was wearing a white t-shirt and a white sarong.
The window he was sitting in front of let in the whitest most pure light.
It illuminated him.
As he was talking, we ate.
As he was talking, I wished I could photograph him.
As he was talking, I felt shame for thinking of art when this man was talking about pain, suffering and death.
He was talking with such forcefulness, such determination, but also with such serenity.
It was not the time or place to be thinking about art but the topic, his appearance, his clothing and the light all kept me thinking about art.
It was so clear to him what he was talking about that I began to feel it was ok to think in terms of documents.
He was an artist.
There were remnants of this practice everywhere - pigments, palettes, paintings, etc.
At the moment that I became more comfortable with my thoughts on photographing him, he spoke of his final performance.
Initially, I was horrified.
It felt so petty.
It felt so weak.
It felt so weird that he would think of pain, suffering and death in terms of art.
It made me question my thoughts on my thoughts of the situation, which I had found beautiful enough to photograph.
He explained his mentality of his death as a performance.
Abstract but to the point, it made sense to me.
It was saddening because I could see the pain on my friend's face.
I had no interest in photographing that sadness.