

I BUILD A PYRAMID



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I Build a Pyramid, 1978

JOSEPH CORNELL



DUANE MICHALS 20/25

Joseph Cornell, 1972

DUANE MICHALS

Duane Stephen Michals is an American photographer born in 1932, from Pennsylvania, USA (aged 87 years old). After service in the US military in the late 1950s, Michals travelled around the Soviet Union with a borrowed camera, taking portraits in the streets to document the “social landscape”. Upon his return, Michals received his BA from the University of Denver, working as a graphic designer until he started his career as a photographer.

Living during a period heavily influenced by photojournalism, Michals wanted to experiment with the medium to communicate his own ideas: he has staged photographs, he has drawn, painted and written on photographs, and he has constructed elaborate fictional narratives.

Michals is widely known for his sequences, which are staged scenes working with sequences of gelatin silver prints, incorporating text as a key component in his works. The series of images creates a sense of alienation and disequilibrium. In Michal’s world, the literal appearance of his subjects is less important than the communication of the concept or the story.

THIS PHOTOGRAPH IS MY PROOF



This photograph is my proof. There was that afternoon, when things were still good between us, and she embraced me, and we were so happy. It had happened. She did love me. Look, see for yourself!

This Photograph Is My Proof, 1967-74

“I believe in the imagination. What I cannot see is infinitely more important than what I can see.”

Handwritten text adds a poetic, tragic and humorous dimension to the images’ voice and meaning. Michal’s drabbles often deal with death, gender, and sexuality. As a whole, his pictures are “more about questions, not about answers.”

Contrary to his sequences, Michals’ portraiture only relies on his subjects’ appearance, establishing the idea that “we see

what we want to see” and that a photograph cannot reveal a person’s private nature.

At the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh in 2015, the exhibition “Storyteller: The Photographs of Duane Michals” displayed Michals varied pioneering contributions as a photographer. The exhibition was an opportunity to introduce younger viewers to an innovative artist who redefined the possibility of what a photograph can be.

Michal’s unique approach to the photographic medium has been highly influential, much imitated, and endlessly re-invented, never limiting himself by what has been previously done in the genre. Aspiring photographers can be inspired by Michals’ tenacity to never settle on a single technique, genre, style or voice.