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Seeing the Human Spirit, Through Body and Soul

Distorted bodies, photos of tribal peoples and surreal portraits

By WILLIAM MEYERS
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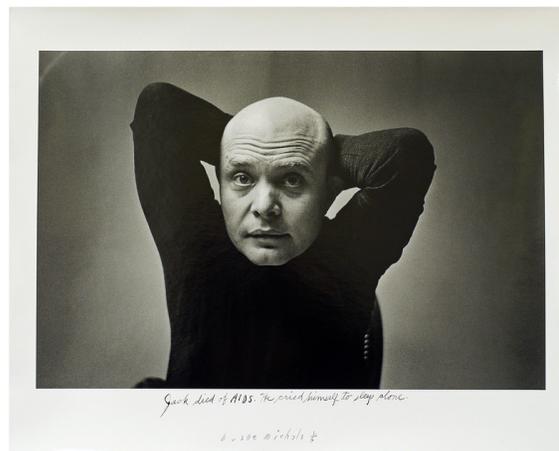
Duane Michals : The Portraitist

DC Moore Gallery 535 W. 22nd St. 212-247-2111 Through March 21

The first of Duane Michals's portraits at DC Moore is one of his witty, surreal sequences, "Duane Photographs Anthony Red" (2015). In the first of five black-and-white photos, Mr. Michals is seen in profile peering through the viewfinder of a tripod-mounted 35mm camera at his subject, who is only inches from the lens; the photographer holds up a paintbrush tipped, on the print, with red paint. In the next three images, Mr. Michals progressively paints the camera red, and as he does so the subject's face correspondingly becomes red, until in the fifth image a confounded Mr. Michals contemplates the camera and face, the two entirely red.

"Andy Warhol" and "Jasper Johns," both c. 1975-1980, are sequences of a different sort; the subject begins with his back to the camera and rotates so that by the fifth image he is facing the camera front-on and then continues turning to face completely away at image nine. Some pictures, such as "E.L. Doctorow" (c. 1970s) and "Funny Girl" (1962), a picture of Barbra Streisand, have multiple exposures in one frame, and an aged "Eartha Kitt" (c. 2008) is reflected in a backstage makeup mirror so we see her twice. But many of the best of the 64 works on display are straight portraits; the young "Mary Frank" (c. 1970s) is moving, as is "Jack Died of AIDS" (c. 1960s). "Eugene Ionesco" (c. 1990-95) has the wry, sad-eyed face of a clown; Mr. Michals quotes the playwright in his handwritten subscription: "The end of childhood is when things cease to astonish us."

Mr. Meyers writes on photography for the Journal. His photo book "Outer Boroughs: New York Beyond Manhattan" was published this year by Damiani.



Duane Michals's 'Jack Died of AIDS' (c. 1960s) is on display at DC Moore Gallery. PHOTO: DUANE MICHALS/DC MOORE GALLERY, NEW YORK