

# ARTNEWS

## DUANE MICHALS AT CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

BY *Steven Litt* POSTED 02/24/15

Storyteller,” the Carnegie Museum of Art’s definitive Duane Michals retrospective, salutes a photographer best known for his surreal, multi-image narrative works. Organized by Linda Benedict-Jones, the Carnegie’s curator of photography, the show brings together hundreds of Michals’s pictures from the last 60 years. It ranges from early commercial portraits of Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Cornell, Meryl Streep, and Sting, taken for *Time*, *Life*, and *Vogue*, to recent geometric abstractions hand-painted on 19th-century tintype portraits.



Duane Michals, *Primavera*, 1984, gelatin silver print with oil paint, 22" x 27".

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DC MOORE GALLERY, NEW YORK/ CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART, PITTSBURGH, THE HENRY L. HILLMAN FUND

The exhibition also includes autobiographical photo-essays in which Michals explores Pittsburgh and the nearby city of McKeesport, where he was born in 1932. Its primary focus, however, is Michals’s trademark use of sequential images to tell stories of life, death, and the afterlife, sin and redemption, fear, wonder, and magic.

Michals began making these sequences—to which he added titles, descriptive prose, or poetic musings in scratchy handwriting—in the 1960s, when the standard for both documentary and fine-art photography was the single, inviolate image. Michals’s use of staged scenes and blurring of fact and fiction set his pieces even further apart from the photographic conventions of the time, while anticipating the work of artist photographers like Cindy Sherman and Lorna Simpson who emerged in the 1980s.

On view are projects such as *A Man Going to Heaven* (1967), in which a nude young man ascends a stairwell and appears to vanish through a window at the top in a blaze of light. In another seminal work, *Christ in New York* (1981), a contemporary Jesus weeps over a woman who has died during an illegal abortion, defends a homosexual from a beating, and is ultimately shot and killed by a mugger.

Through it all, Michals comes across as a thinker who uses images and words to take on big philosophical issues. Thanks to his ability to reveal the miraculous side of the quotidian, the effect is irresistible.

<http://www.artnews.com/2015/02/24/duane-michals-at-carnegie-museum-of-art/>