

ARTFORUM

Duane Michals

DC MOORE GALLERY
535 West 22nd Street, 2nd Floor
May 5–June 11

Duane Michals thrives when pitted against an unfamiliar medium. And having waited over four decades to approach filmmaking, he does so now with the wide-eyed sincerity and innocence of a first-timer. A theater within the gallery looks like a seedy Times Square peep show from another era. A flashy electric arrow guides you toward an entrance with a red velvet curtain. Right outside is a small handwritten note, listing all twelve of the short videos made by the artist over the last two years. Michals describes these pieces as “mini-movies,” and they are as thoughtful and as cosmic as his photos, though these works give him an expanded set of parameters for storytelling.



Duane Michals, *Tickets to Heaven*, 2016, chromogenic print with hand-applied text, mounted on board, 13 x 22”.

In the main exhibition space is a miniretrospective of Michals’s most significant photo sequences of the 1960s and ’70s. Gelatin silver print series such as “Things Are Queer,” 1973, and “Something Strange Is Happening,” 1975, remain timeless meditations on the slipperiness of reality. There are also twelve individual stills from the new movies, scribbled on like souvenir Hollywood posters, in Michals’s distinctive hand. For *Tickets to Heaven*, 2016, Michals is shown selling salvation on the streets for five bucks a pop (plus tax). Written in squiggly caps on the top-right corner of this photo is “NO SINNERS WERE INJURED IN THE MAKING OF THIS FILM.”

More than half of the shorts star Michals as a wisecracking old man, ad-libbing with slapstick humor and cheap puns. The films are clean and digital, but the production value’s rather high-school drama class. The artist blissfully embraces the campiness of his movies, balancing their tongue-in-cheek tenor with a deep poignancy in such pieces as *Are You Still a Faggot?* and *A Last Walk in the Woods* (both 2016). Grappling with familiar themes of sexuality, aging, and loss, Michals translates the qualities of his photographs into dynamic motion pictures that will linger long after you’ve left the gallery.

— Gabriel H. Sanchez, May 27, 2016