

Press Release

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American Duane Michals is the recipient of this year's DGPh Culture Award

New York-based Duane Michals is honoured with the 2017 Culture Award by the German Photographic Association (DGPh), a distinction that marks the association's recognition of one of America's most significant contemporary artists. The award ceremony will take place on 21 October 2017 at the Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur in Cologne. The laudatory speech will be made by Dr. Söke Dinkla, director of Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg. The award, which has been handed out annually by the DGPh since 1959, honours significant photographic achievements, particularly in the artistic, humanitarian, social, technical, educational or scientific field.

Highly active to this day, the artist Duane Michals has been working with the medium of photography since the end of the 1950s. Born in 1932 in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, USA, he studied Graphic Design at the University of Denver between 1949 and 1953; after that, he served in the US Army and was stationed in Germany, among other places. From 1956 onwards he built on his studies at the Parsons School of Design.

Michals took his first shots in 1958 on a journey to Russia. From that moment on, the medium of photography was to become an important means of expression for him, and continues to be so to the present day. He chooses different forms of presentation, while lending particular importance to the serial-narrative aspect. In 1966, Michals took part alongside Bruce Davidson, Lee Friedlander, Danny Lyon and Garry Winogrand in the seminal exhibition *Towards a Social Landscape* at George Eastman House, Rochester. "Stories by Duane Michals" was the title in 1970 of his first solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

It became evident early on that the description "photographer" alone does not justice to Michals's complex approach, with his imaginatively staged image production. For his concern, again and again, is the staging and heightening of impressions of reality that go beyond the concretely documentary. What chiefly attracts him is not the single image, but, right from the 1960s, the sequence created in black-and-white images, a specific form of visual narrative or

photographic "stage play". Famous examples are the image series "The Woman is Frightened by a Door" (1966), "A Man is Going to Heaven" (1967), "The Fallen Angel" (1968). Along the way the beholder repeatedly encounters psychologically dense and existential interrogations, which have been visualised in all forcefulness but also often in a refreshingly humorous, bizarrely surreal way. For example, "The Things are Queer" (1973) or "Alice's Mirror" (1974), in which the planes of reality are reflected over and over again, ultimately allow the arising of new visual spaces and temporal planes. Since the 1970s, Michals has also included texts in his photographs, mostly written by hand on the photographs' white margins. They are lyrical lines, kept simple but turning out to be just as enigmatic as his photographs. Michals's themes are interpersonal encounters, magic and illusion, time and memory, religion, love and sexuality.

Michals's artistic precedents lie – as much as he admires Robert Frank – less in the photographic than in painting. René Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico, for instance, have been his inspirations not only in terms of motifs, but also in terms of encouraging him to paint himself. Michals pursues the combination of painting and photography to this day. And, not least, he collaborated on the 2012 film, made in partnership with Camille Guichard, "Duane Michals – The Man Who Invented Himself". Here, too, it can be seen that he, as a maverick, repeatedly questions conventions, that he breaks his own rules and seeks new territory. His idiosyncratic realisations in the field of the portrait, in particular, have also brought Duane Michals assignments for renowned clients such as Nancy Reagan, Sting, Willem de Kooning, Neimann Marcus and GAP, as well as for magazines such as *Vogue*, *Mirabella* and *Esquire*.

Presiding over all this is a highly reflective artistic personality. In many cases Duane Michals presents his work very sensitively with wit and understatement – to quote: "I don't trust reality. So all of the writing on and painting on the photographs is born out of the frustration to express what you do not see." With his creativity, Duane Michals has substantially widened the photographic field, has coined, alongside the journalistic and artistic documentary concept, an interdisciplinarily aesthetic style. Duane Michals has elaborated more than 30 books and hundreds of exhibitions and attained high distinctions. In 2004 he took part in the Duisburger Akzente and on that occasion published: "The theatre of real life. Photo stories in Duisburg". In 2014/15 the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, showed a comprehensive retrospective of the artist; shortly before that, in partnership with the Clara Maria Sels Gallery, a major solo exhibition was shown at the NRW Forum, Düsseldorf.

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