

Real Dreams by Duane Michals

Nothing is what I once thought it was. You are not what you think you are. You are nothing you can imagine.

I am a short story writer. Most often photographers are reporters. I am an orange. They are apples.

One of the biggest cliches in photography is to say that he is a personal photographer.

We must touch each other to stay human. Touch is the only thing that can save us.

I use photography to help me explain my experiences to myself.

Some photographers literally shoot everything that moves, hoping somehow, in all that confusion to discover a photograph. The difference between the artist and the amateur is a sense of control. There is a great power in knowing exactly what you are doing, even when you don't know.

We are all stars. We just don't know it.

I practice being Duane Michals everyday - that's all I know.

Most portraits are lies. People are rarely what they appear to be, especially in front of a camera. You might know me your entire lifetime and never reveal yourself to me. To interpret wrinkles as character is insult not insight.

Was there ever a 1956? What did I do in June 1971? What happened in 1956? I think that there was 1932.

The history of photography has not been written. You will write it. No one has photographed a nude until you have. No one has photographed a sequence or green pepper till you have. Nothing has been done until you do it.

There are no answers anymore.

Get (Edward) Weston off your back, forget (Diane) Arbus, (Robert) Frank, (Ansel) Adams, (Clarence) White, don't look at photographs. Kill the Buddha.

I am my own hero.

Photography books have titles like "The Photographer's Eye" or "The Vision of So and So" or "Seeing Photographers" - as if photographers didn't have minds, only eyes.

Everything is going; yes, even you must go. Right now you are going. Right now!

I find myself talking to photographs. I see a photograph of a woman and I ask, Is that all you're going to tell me?" I can see the long hair and costume. Is she a witch, a mother, kind, consuming? Does she believe anything? I want more.

As I write this, at this moment, thousands of people are dying, thousands are being born, the earth is totally alive with Spring lust, stars are exploding - my God!

It is the great unknowing that we all live in, that we call life, that I find overwhelming. And I think that I will never know, never.

I am the limits of my work. You are the limits of yours. This is a journey. We do not live here. When I say "I," I mean We.

As soon as I say "now," it becomes "then."

It is very easy for photographers to fake. Just go out and photograph twenty Pizza Huts.

That's all there is, change.

Some influences open doors and liberate, other influences close doors and suffocate. Photography, particularly, is suffocating.

I believe in the imagination. What I cannot see is infinitely more important than

what I can see.

Photographers tell me what I already know. The recognition of the beautiful, bizarre, or boring (the three photographic B's) is not the problem. You would have to be a refrigerator not to be moved by the beauty of Yosemite. The problem is to deal with one's total experience, emotionally as well as visually. Photographers should tell me what I don't know.

I find the limitations of still photography enormous. One must redefine photography, as it is necessary to redefine one's life in terms of one's own needs. Each generation should redefine the language and all its experiences in terms of itself.

The key word is expression – not photography, not painting, not writing. You are the event, not your parents, friends, gurus. Only you can teach yourself.

Everything we experience is in our mind. It is all mind. What you are reading now, hearing now, feeling now...

We're all afraid of dying. We've already died. Look at your high school graduation picture, she's dead! Just now, you died.

It is essential for me to be silly. If one is serious, one must also be foolish, to survive.

Trying to communicate one true feeling on my own terms is a constant problem.

I am compulsive in my preoccupation with death. In some way I am preparing myself for my own death. Yet if someone would put a gun to my stomach, I would pee my pants. All my metaphysical speculations would get wet.

When you look at my photographs, you are looking at my thoughts.

I am very attracted to the person of Stefan Mihal. He is the man I never became. We are complete opposites, although we were born at the same moment. If we should meet, we would explode. We are like matter and anti-matter. He is my shadow. I saved myself from him.

I only photograph what I know about, my life, I do not presume to know who blacks are or what they feel or bored suburban families or transvestites. And I never believe photographs of them staring into a camera.

I take nothing for granted. I can count on nothing. I am not sure where I once was certain. I don't know what will be left by the time I'm fifty. That's ok.

The sight of these words on a page pleases me. It's like some sort of trail I've left behind, clues, strange marks made, that prove I was once here.

When I was about 9 (the year my brother Tim was born), I would sit on the edge of my bed and be very still, long after the family had gone to sleep. I would try to find the "I" of "me." I thought that if I would be very quiet, I might find that place inside that was "I." I am still looking.

We are all a mental construction. Change our chemistry, our point of reference and reality changes.

I am a professional photographer and a spiritual dilettante: I would prefer to be a professional mystic and a dilettante photographer.

I remember the first time I sensed being lonely. I was about five at the time, living with my grandmother, and my best friend Art went away with his family. The afternoon loomed long and empty. I missed someone, I was empty. There was a lacking.

Only I am my enemy. My fear can stop me.

Never try to be an artist. Just do your work and if the work is true, it will become art.

"We must pay attention so as not to be deceived by the familiar."

Things are what we will them to become.

It is important to stay vulnerable. To permit pain, to make mistakes, not to be intimidated by touching. Mistakes are very important, if we're alert.

None of my photographs would have existed without my inventing them. These are not accidental encounters, witnessed on the street. I am responsible whether (Henri Cartier-) Bresson was there or not, those people would have had their picnic along the Seine. They were historical events.

There is not one photography. There is no photography. The only value judgment is the work itself. Does it move, touch, fill me?

Any one who defines photography frightens me. They are photo-fascists, the limiters. They know! We must struggle to free ourselves constantly, not only from ourselves but especially from those who know.

It seems I am waiting for something to happen: and when it does, it will be difficult for me to imagine that I had ever been the person who is writing this. I will be someone else.

I am not interested in the perfect print. I am interested in a perfect idea. Perfect ideas survive bad prints and cheap reproductions. They can change our lives.

(If Duane wants to take pictures, he should do a study of laborers and farm workers and unwed mothers and make some social changes. Do something else – something noble. That's what I'd do.– Stefan Mihal)

We have a way of making the most extraordinary experiences ordinary. We actually work at destroying miracles.

The best artists give themselves in their work. (Rene) Magritte was a gift, (Eugene) Atget, (Thomas) Eakins, (Odilon) Redon, (Bill) Brandt, (August) Sander(s), Balthus, (Giorgio) De Chirico, (Walt) Whitman, Cavafy. That's all that there is to give. I am my gift to you, and you are your gift to me.

Most photographers photograph other people's lives, seldom their own.

We must free ourselves to become what we are.

Photography describes to well.

Our parents protect us from death. But when they die, there is no one to stand between us and death.

I once thought that time was horizontal, and if I looked straight ahead, I could see next Thursday. Now I think it is vertical and diagonal and perpendicular. It's all very confusing.

People believe in the reality of photographs, but not in the reality of paintings. That gives photographers an enormous advantage. Unfortunately, photographers also believe in the reality of photographs.

The most important sentences usually contain two words: I want, I love, I'm sorry, please forgive, please touch, I need, I care, thank you.

Everything is subject for photography, especially the difficult things of our lives: anxiety, childhood hurts, lust, nightmares. The things that cannot be seen are the most significant. They cannot be photographed, only suggested.

I would like to talk to William Blake and Thomas Eakins.

Duane Michals

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