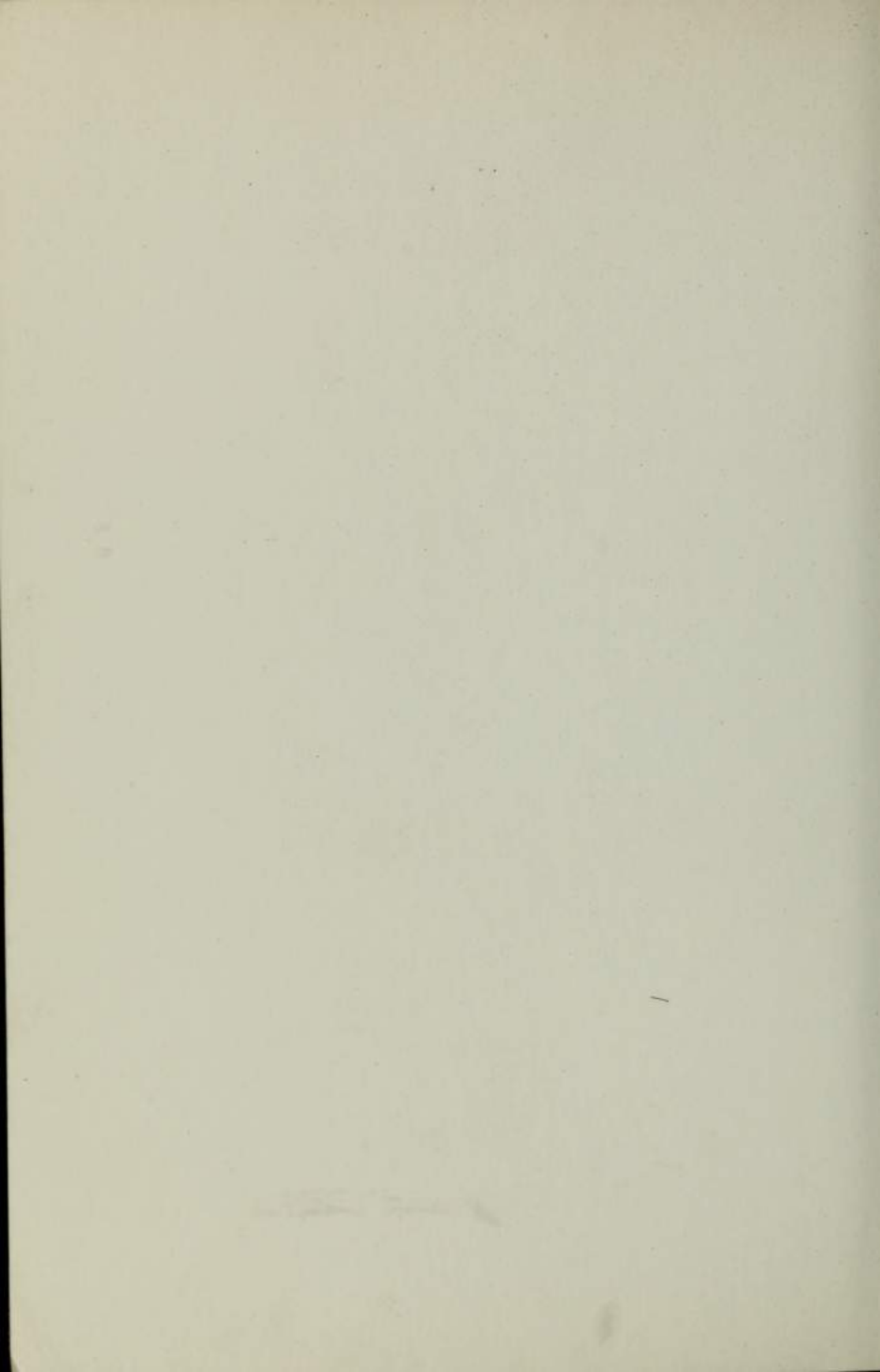


Duane Michals



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DUANE MICHALS

Duane Michals

Introduction by Renaud Camus



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THE SHADOW OF A DOUBLE

for William
A large mirror, so at first
it seemed to me in my confusion,
now stood where none had been
perceptible before
Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson"

Duane Michals was born on February 18, 1932, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. His parents were of Czech origin, like those of another Pennsylvanian, Andy Warhol. Early on in their respective careers, Michals would photograph Warhol, producing a singularly striking portrait.

Wishing to Americanize the original family name Mihal, his parents had it changed to Michals. Mrs Michals was employed in the home of a wealthy couple who had a son named Duane. She must have liked the name very much, or perhaps she was particularly fond of the little boy, for she decided to name her own son Duane as well. As a boy, Duane Michals was understandably intrigued by the boy whose name he shared; however, the two would never be given an opportunity to meet. Though probably highly regarded by his namesake, the "original Duane" – as a recent biography, not without a certain stinging cruelty, called him – committed suicide during his sophomore year of college.

The whole issue of the name Duane, and all it suggests of frustration, doubts regarding identity, a virtual rivalry for his mother's love, unsatisfied curiosity, the ambiguity surrounding the death of someone who was more himself than he was – and more legitimately so – may not entirely explain but may well symbolize the majority of the basic themes and recurrent aspects found throughout Michals' work, his life, and especially in his comments. There are his obsession with duality (*René Magritte*, 1965), and the usual accoutrements of mirrors and subtle reflections (*Bill Brandt*, 1974; *François Truffaut*, 1981); his double career as an artistic and a commercial photographer; time divided between doing the

work necessary to provide for material comforts and that done for personal pleasure, or between the city and the country; a taste for such binary opposites as spirit and matter, appearance and reality, youth and old age, the artist and the model, or life and death; things split in two (*Now Becoming Then*, 1973); twins (*Homage to Cavafy*, 1978); veiled threats of obliteration (*Joseph Cornell*, 1972); hidden faces (*Andy Warhol*, 1958); emptiness (the series on deserted places, 1964-66); superimposed images; disappearances; transparent presences; ghostly silhouettes; double exposures; and the omnipresence of death.

"How can I be dead? the spirit asks himself, standing in front of a mirror in *The Journey of the Spirit after Death*. Michals speaks repeatedly of "dissatisfaction" when explaining his decisions to combine photography with activities or other artistic expressions which had, until then, seemed to be as distinctly different as possible. These innovations are landmark dates in his evolution as an artist. In 1966 he associated photography with narration, thus creating his famous sequences and ensuring his reputation as a photographer. In 1974 he added written narratives; this new form became as typically his as the earlier sequences. Then, in 1979, he incorporated photography's most renowned rival, painting, in his work. He did this by painting directly on his own prints or on classics by photographers such as Cartier-Bresson, Kertész or Ansel Adams. In the latter instance, he never hesitated to add his own signature above that of the other. One may interpret this gesture as a sign of his persistent interrogation and anxiety with regard to identity. Further confirmation of this is found in his own statements concerning the handwritten captions on his own photographs: "No one can reproduce my handwriting, but someone else can always make a new print." Writing about Michals, Michel Foucault quotes him on the same point: "Seeing words on a page pleases me. It is like a trail I've left behind me, uncertain, strange markings, a proof that I've been there." "Proof", of course, has two meanings, referring both to a photographic proof or to something that establishes truth. Among the most moving examples of Michals' work is a 1974 photograph with text, significantly entitled "This Photograph Is My Proof." Yet, in a text without photographs, handwritten as always on photographic paper, he

said, "It is a melancholy truth that I... can only fail. I am a reflection photographing other reflections within a reflection."

Consider the 1974 photograph entitled "Self-portrait with My Guardian Angel." The right side of Michal's face is cast in shadow while, on the left side, the profile of his "guardian angel," who resembles him in many ways, seems to be overexposed. The accompanying text speaks of the angel, Pete, who we're told died in 1931, just before Duane's birth. It contains a suggestion of frustration and the splitting in two of the double himself: "... He never became what he could have been." The name *Duane* has a definite affinity to duality. Likewise, the family names *Mihal* and *Michals*, for which many different, often very vague, interpretations have been expounded, are inevitably traced to Michael the Archangel. Many years ago, Michals created for himself an imaginary double, Stefan Mihal, who is the opposite of everything he is, the person he never became.

Michals was brought up in the Catholic religion. Among the possible origins for the sequences that are so intimately associated with his image as an artist, he readily cites the different Stations of the Cross and the order in which they hung along the walls of the family's home. The philosophic and metaphysical aspects which preoccupy him and which he emphasizes when speaking of his art are discreetly tinged with a more or less repressed religiosity. This same element is clearly manifested in his choice of words, in his titles, e.g. soul, heaven, paradise, spirit, Prodigal Son, Jesus Christ, grievous fault.

In the sequence *The Fallen Angel*, another angel – not the same one as before – immediately loses his wings for having tasted of the flesh. Michals believed he had found in Constantine Cavafy's work the literary counterpart to his own photographic work. But sexuality and, in this case, homosexuality are far more serene and more triumphantly assumed, albeit nostalgically, as concerns Cavafy than they are for Michals. Any guilt in this regard remains completely exterior to Cavafy; the memory of his youthful ardors gives wings to the poet in his old age.

One of the specific traits of the intellectual premises in Michals' work is an obstinate mistrust – basically very Chris-

tian, in fact – of appearances, coupled with a rather naive faith in the superior reality that these appearances hide. As he has said: "It is important not to worry about appearances but about what people are. What they represent in one's life is the meaningful thing, not what they resemble today or yesterday." Note the exquisite ambiguity produced by placing the verb *represent* in a position of near equivalence with the preceding verb *to be*.

In an extremely well-known sequence, *Paradise Regained*, a young couple in an apartment see themselves progressively being stripped, or freed, of their cultural environment, beginning with their clothes. Furniture, knick-knacks, art reproductions – all disappear one by one to be replaced by a growing profusion of greenery. But the primitive Garden of Eden thus reconstituted and, no doubt, supposedly natural, is represented by the most cultural of all these objects, green plants. In the last picture, the clock on the mantel can still be glimpsed among the leaves. This particular paradise has not been freed of time, nor, therefore, from History.

Another of the most frequently reproduced and commented upon of Duane Michals' works, and one of those which most arouse differing emotional responses in the mind of the viewer, is "A Letter from My Father." A complex composition in all respects, the photograph itself was taken in 1960, whereas the written commentary surrounding it was not added until 1975. In the text, the narrator uses the first person in speaking of his father. Presumably, therefore, especially as the text is handwritten, the narrator and the author are one and the same. Hence the observer identifies the narrator with the young man whose stubbornly set profile is seen on the right of the photograph confronting the face of the father, who is seen full front. Although the father is indeed Duane Michals' father, the young man is not the photographer, but his brother, a psychiatrist.

Photography is, of course, the art of duplication *par excellence*. However, the function of duplicating reality does not satisfy Duane Michals, who insists that the important thing is not the appearance of things, but rather their philosophic nature. But what if their philosophic nature were their appearance? Neither the artist nor the thinker in Michals can completely escape this terrible suspicion.

Michals' work is almost as autobiographical as that of Lartigue, for example. However, it differs radically in that Michals does not surprise the moment, he creates it. Unlike Lartigue, who, in his youth, would station himself at a bend in the paths of the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, patiently waiting to capture the apparition of elegant ladies in their best finery, Michals is never on the lookout to catch a body in motion. He provokes movement in order to put it on film so as to produce a movement in the soul. To do this, he uses models, whether professionals or not, complex technical processes, and intelligent staging. He occupies a place of honor in the ranks of those photographers, less numerous than at the turn of the century, who are dedicated to what A.D. Coleman called "the directorial mode." It may be said that, with him, one is as far away as possible from reporting, that "universal reporting" for which he professes a total poetic disdain.

A certain little boy wearing a cap, standing in a public square in Leningrad, seems to offer the viewer something *déjà vu*, in the tradition of Cartier-Bresson, if you will. The great square behind him, however, glistening with rain after a storm, is nothing but reflections, throwing back images of the few passersby, the street lamp, a small van; it is an inverted response, trembling, precarious, threatened. One is tempted to see in the photograph, in those shadowy silhouettes, a more specific presage of the art to come of the *real* Michals. But there is no real Michals. He is always elsewhere, beyond the mirrors, critical reductions and closed genres. He has been carried away by new inspiration from any image of himself that would freeze him in clichés. A 1973 self-portrait is entitled "I Am Another." Let us end here, with the little boy among those reflections, and with those first scenes and characters photographed in Russia in 1958, which, to Michals' surprise, opened up and revealed to him his true vocation. One who believes in signs, and the signs made among signs, will delight in a small detail. These photographs were taken by a young traveler with someone else's camera, an Argus, which, before leaving New York, he had, just in case, *borrowed*.

Renaud Camus

Chance Meeting



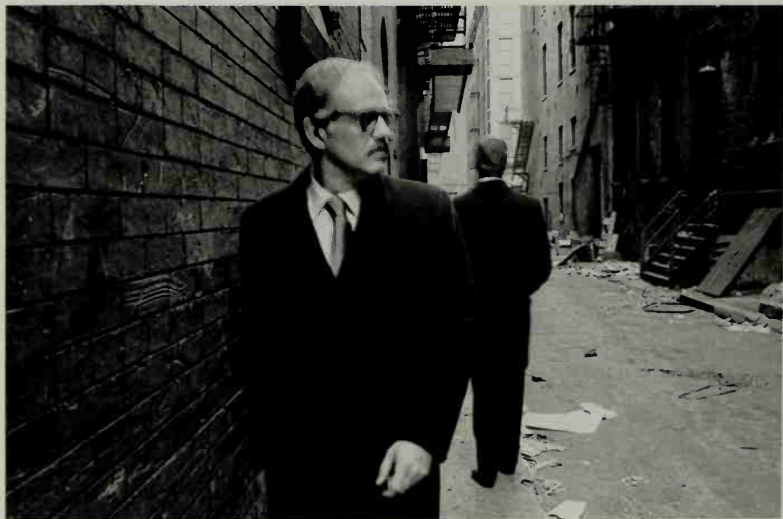
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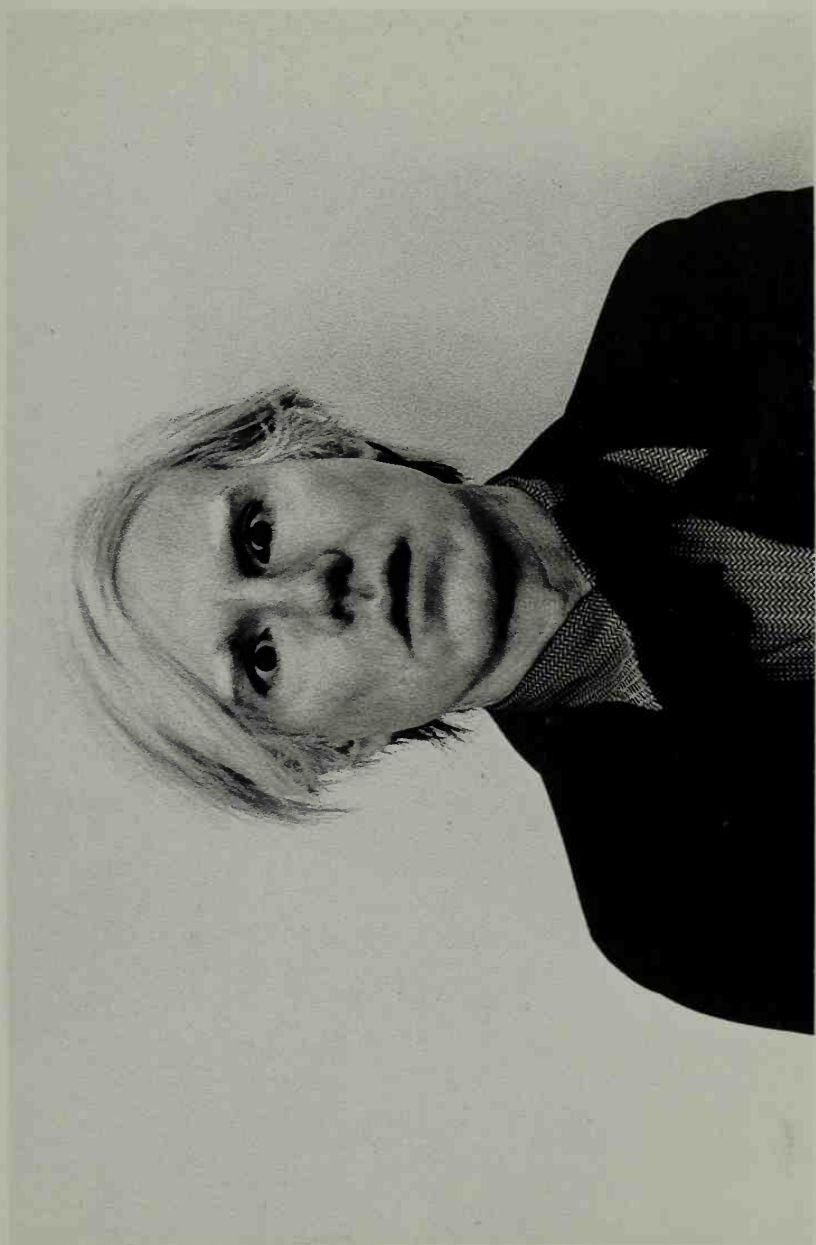


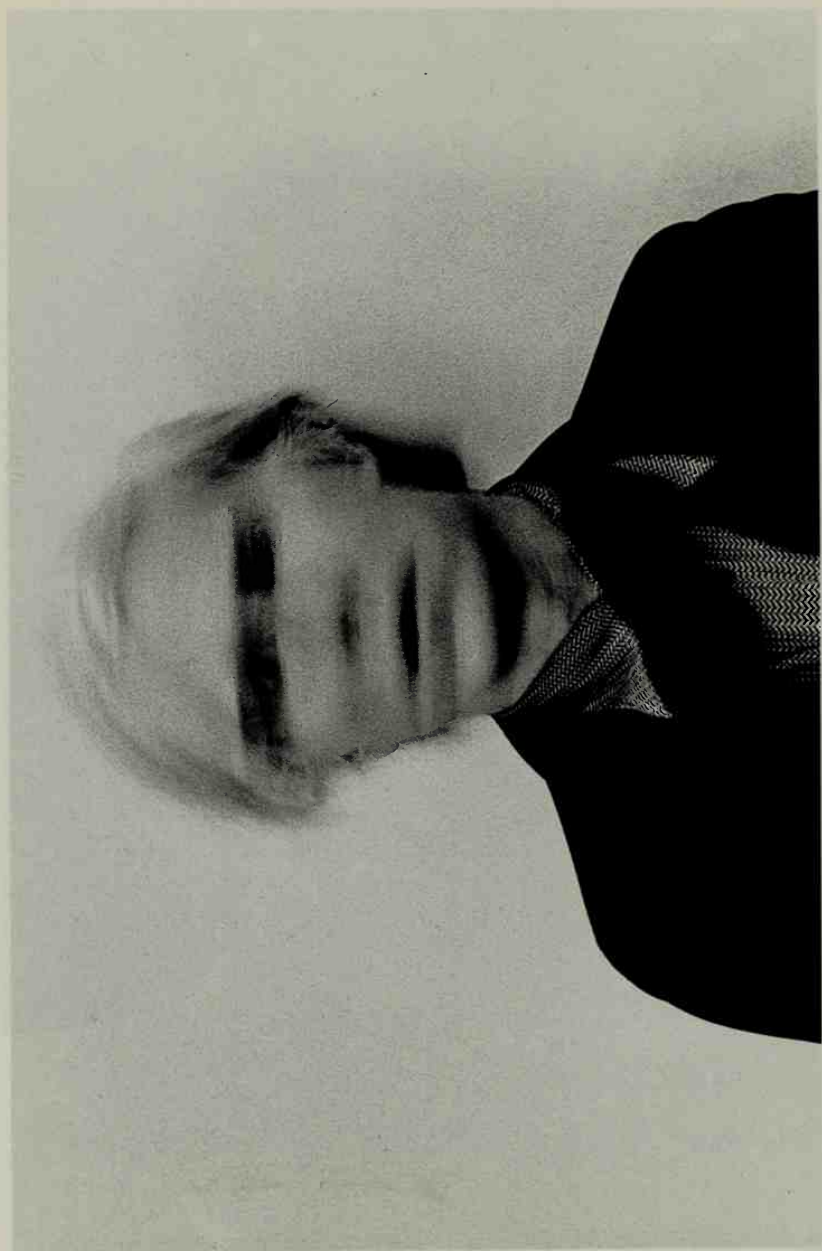
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6.

Andy Warhol, 1958







The Human Condition



1.



2.



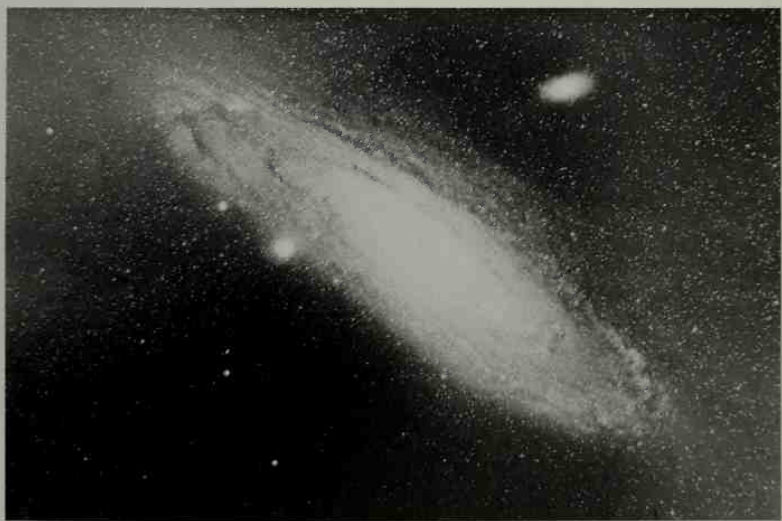
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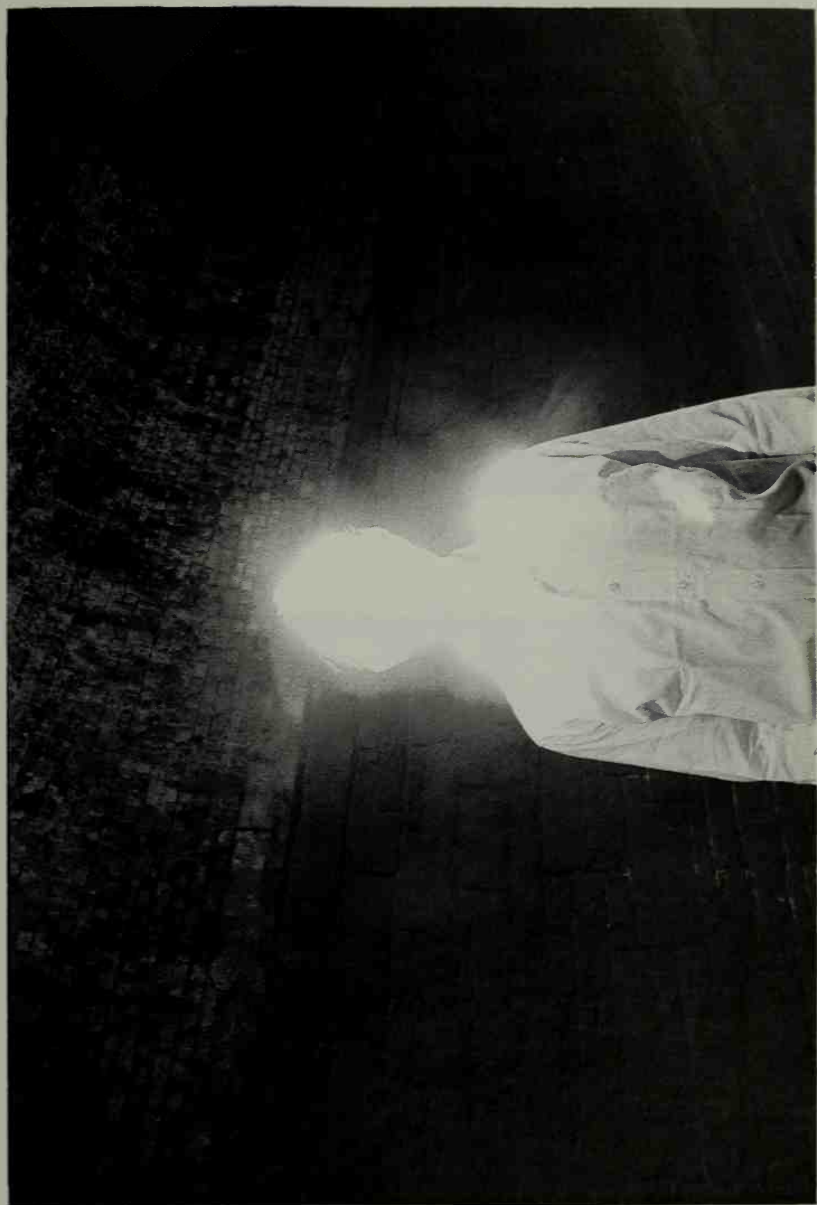


5.



6.





The voyage of the spirit
after death



1.



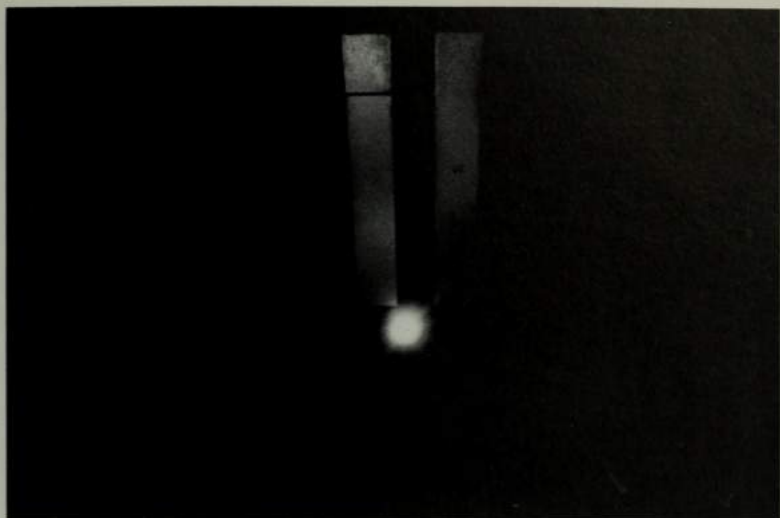
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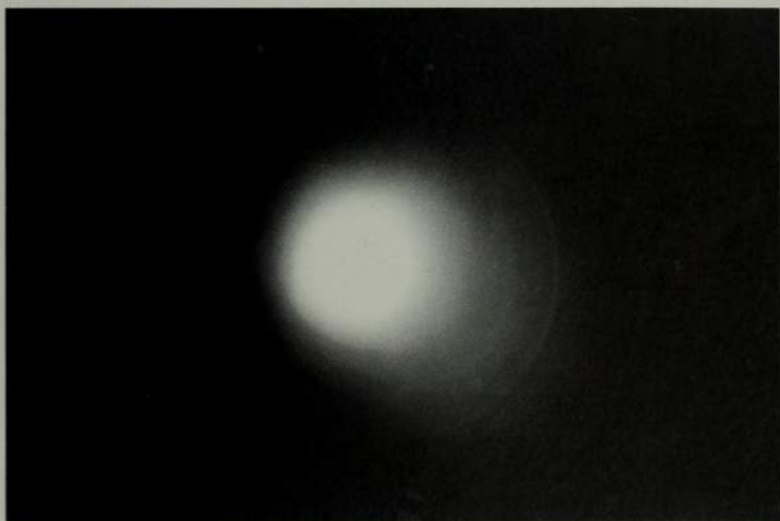
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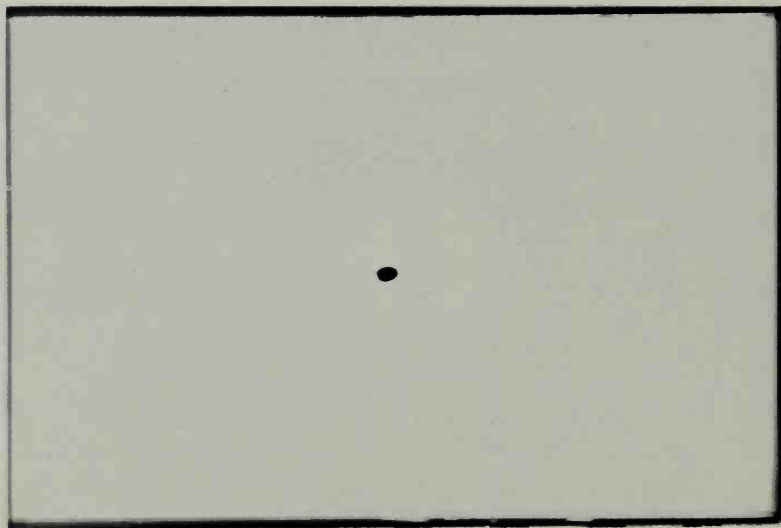
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6.



7.



8.

The great white light



9.



10.

"How can I be dead?"



11.

The wandering



12.

The spirit visits those he loves



^{13.}
He visits his possessions.



^{14.}
The apparitions: Adam and Eve



15.

The apparitions: His friends



16

"Please let me return to my past life."



^{17.}
The spirit in ignorance



^{18.}



19.

The teacher



20.

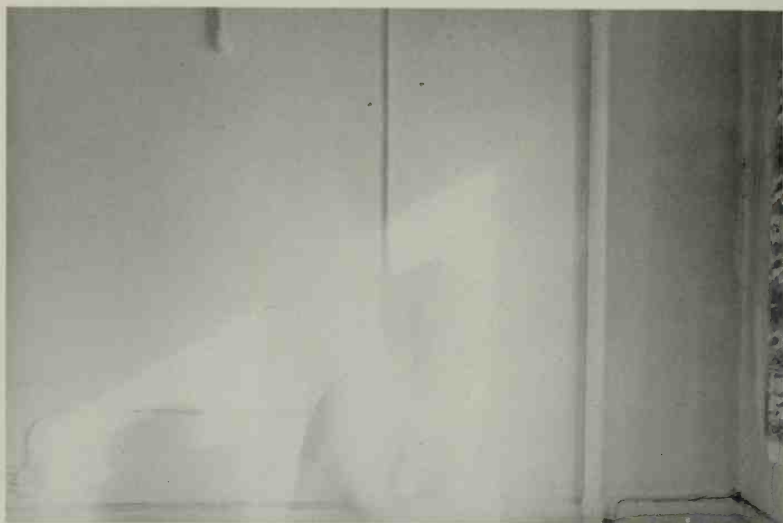
"I am."



21.



22.



23.



24.

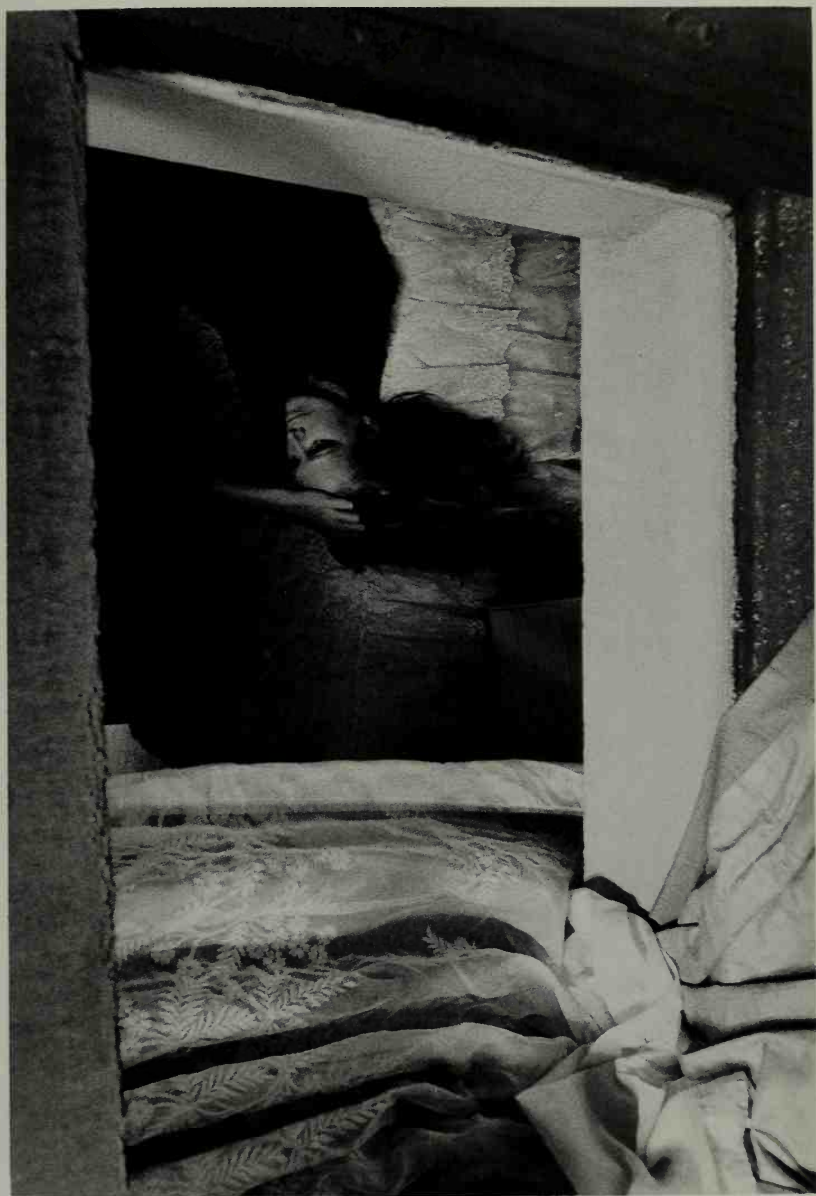


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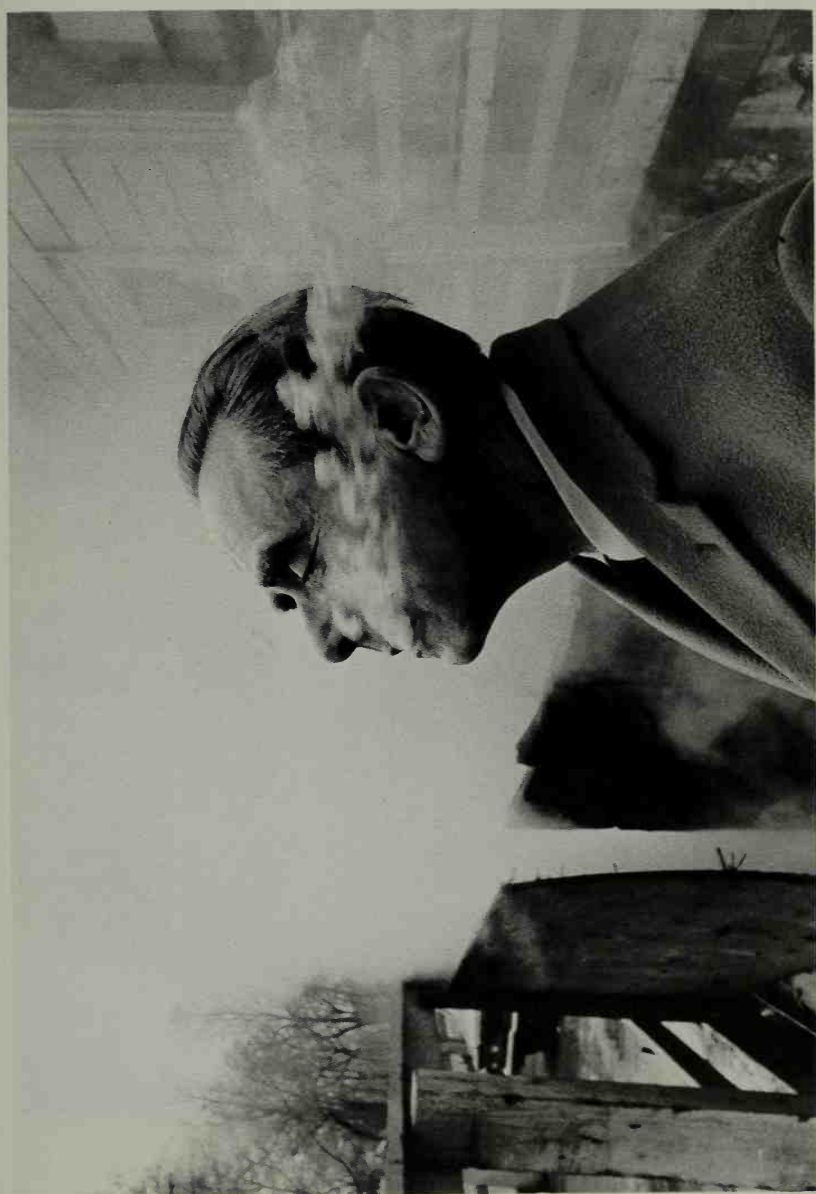
Joseph Cornell. 1972.



Hildegarde Knef. 1973.



Henri-Georges Clouzot.



The woman is hurt
by a letter



1.



2.



3.



4.

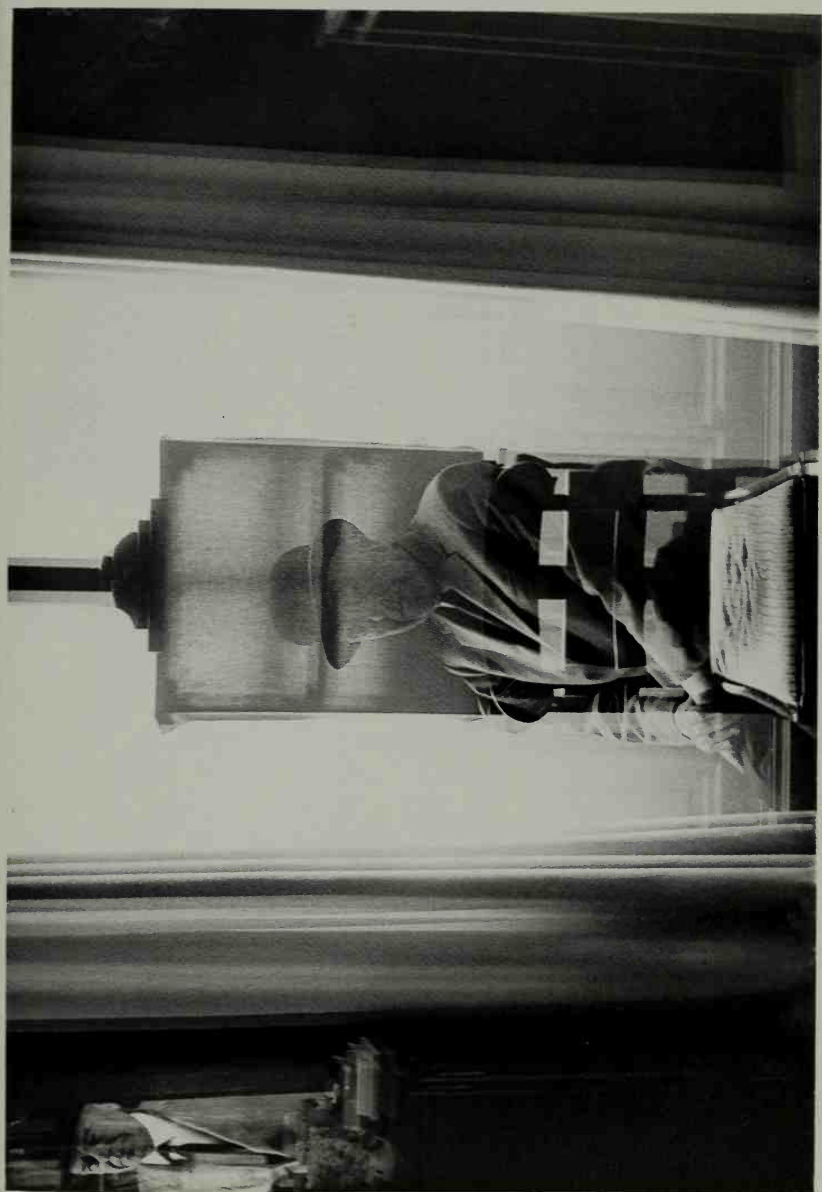


5.



6.

René Magritte. 1965.



Paradise regained



1.



2.



3.



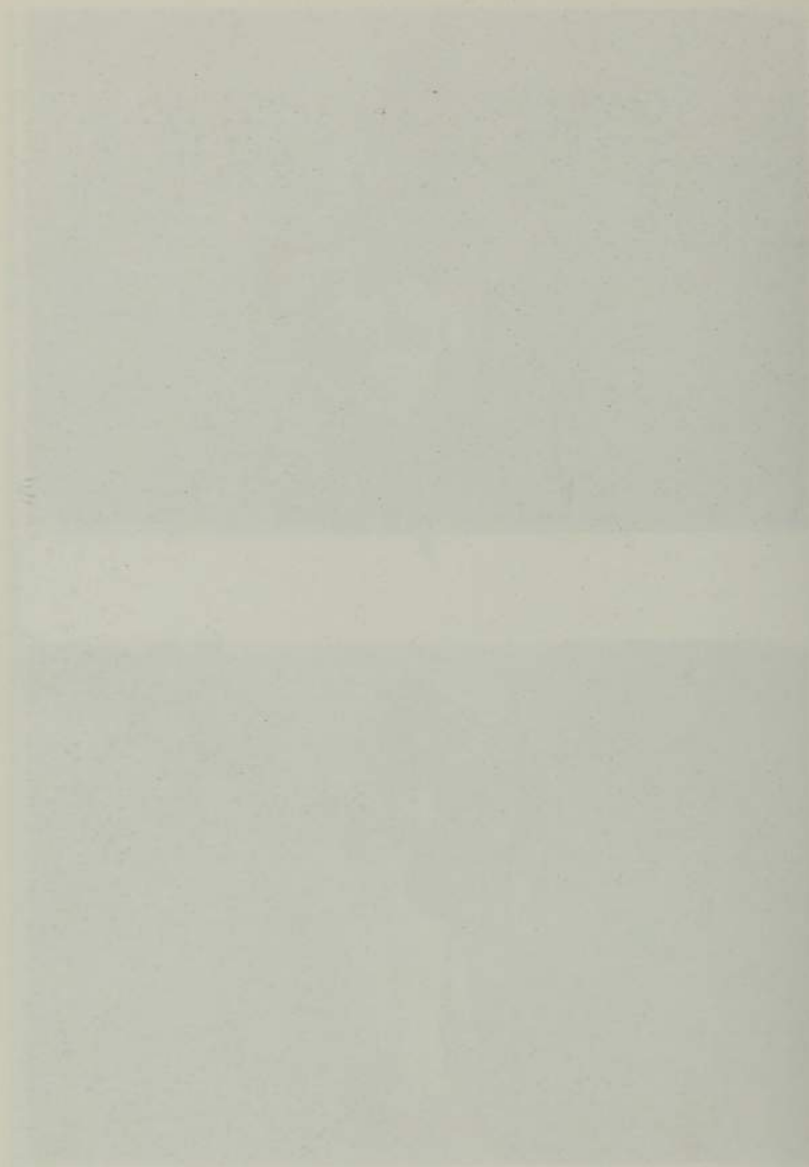
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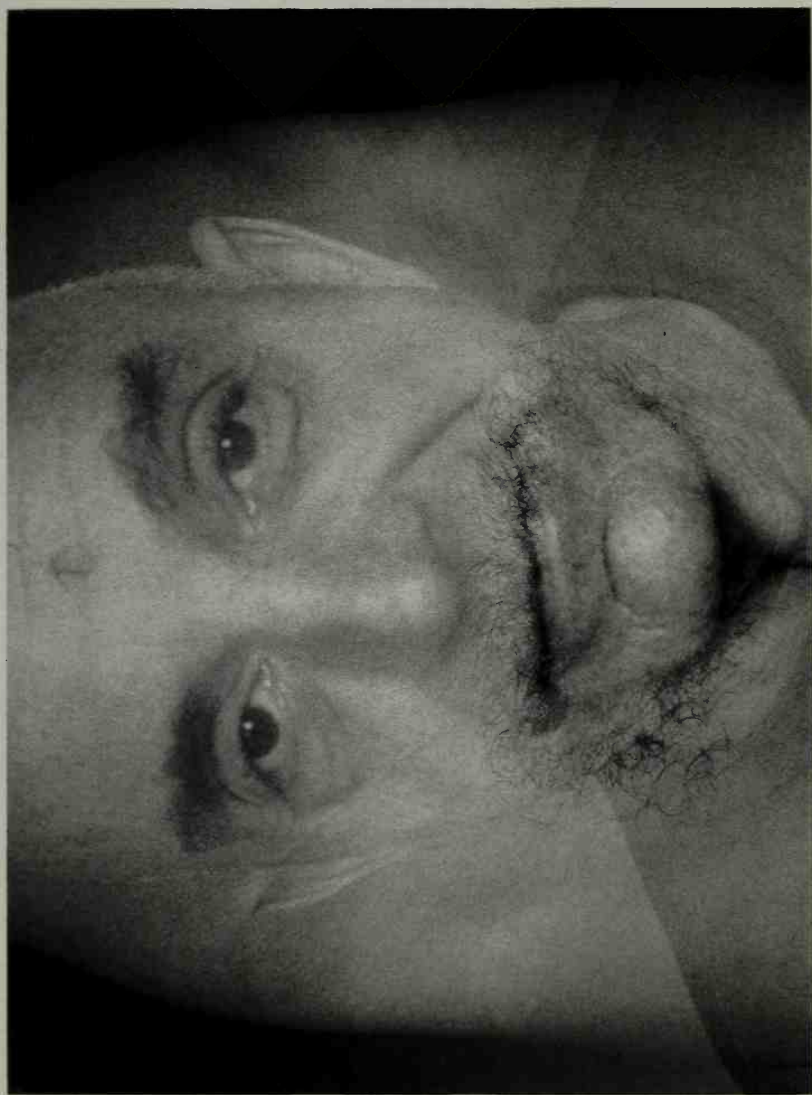
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6.



Myself with Feminine Beard. 1983.

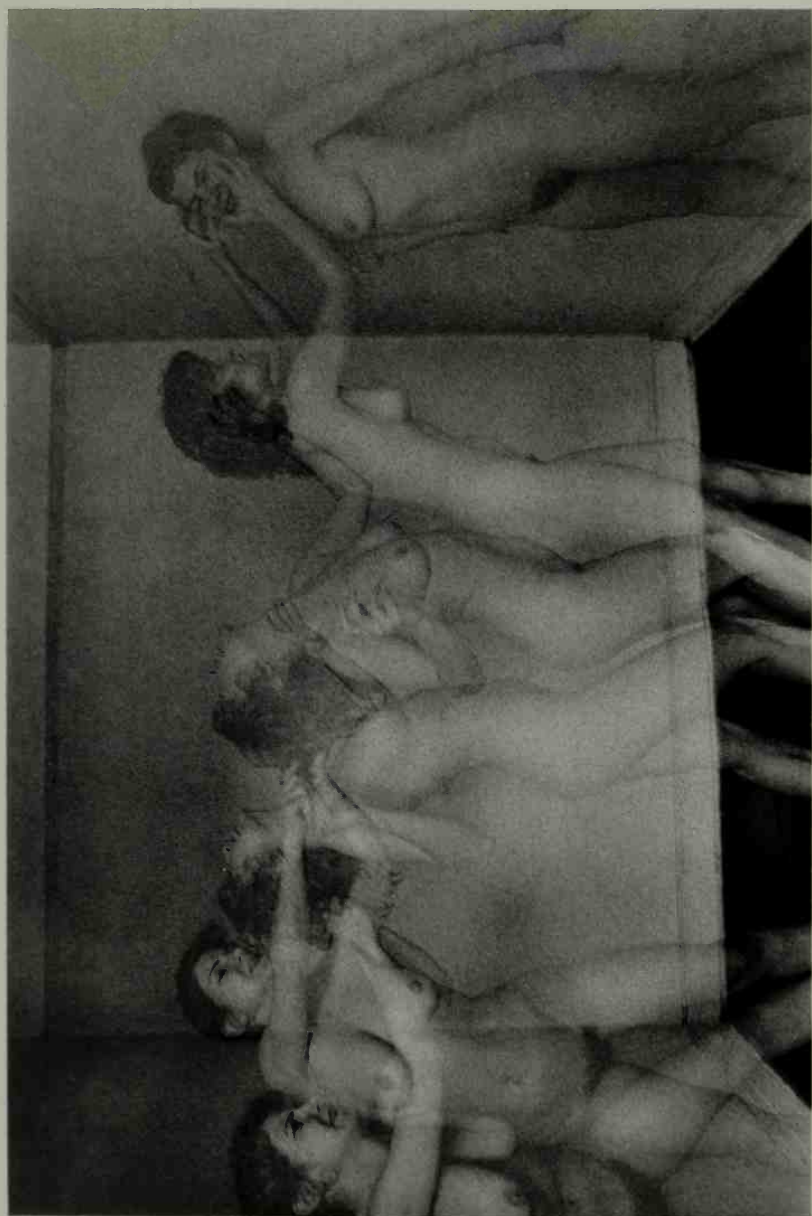




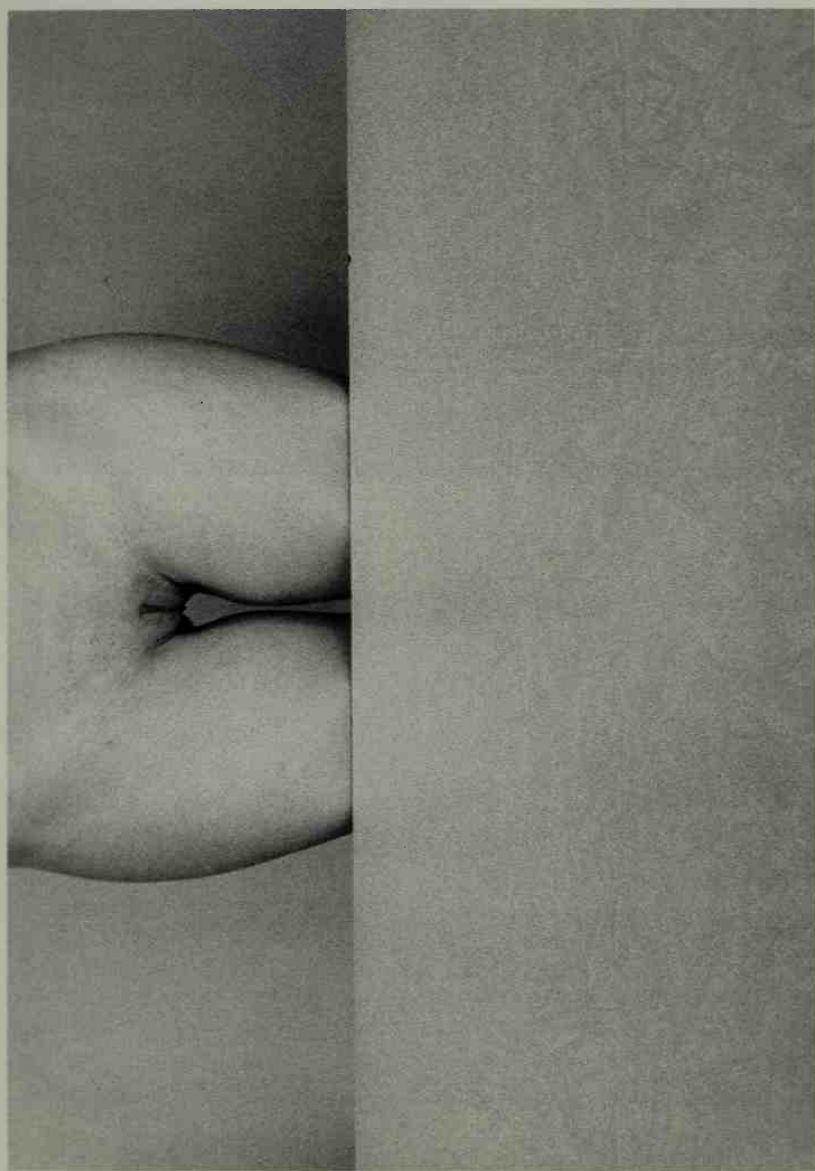
Men Fighting. 1983.



Women Fighting. 1983.



Nude Denuded. 1983.



The Fallen Angel



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



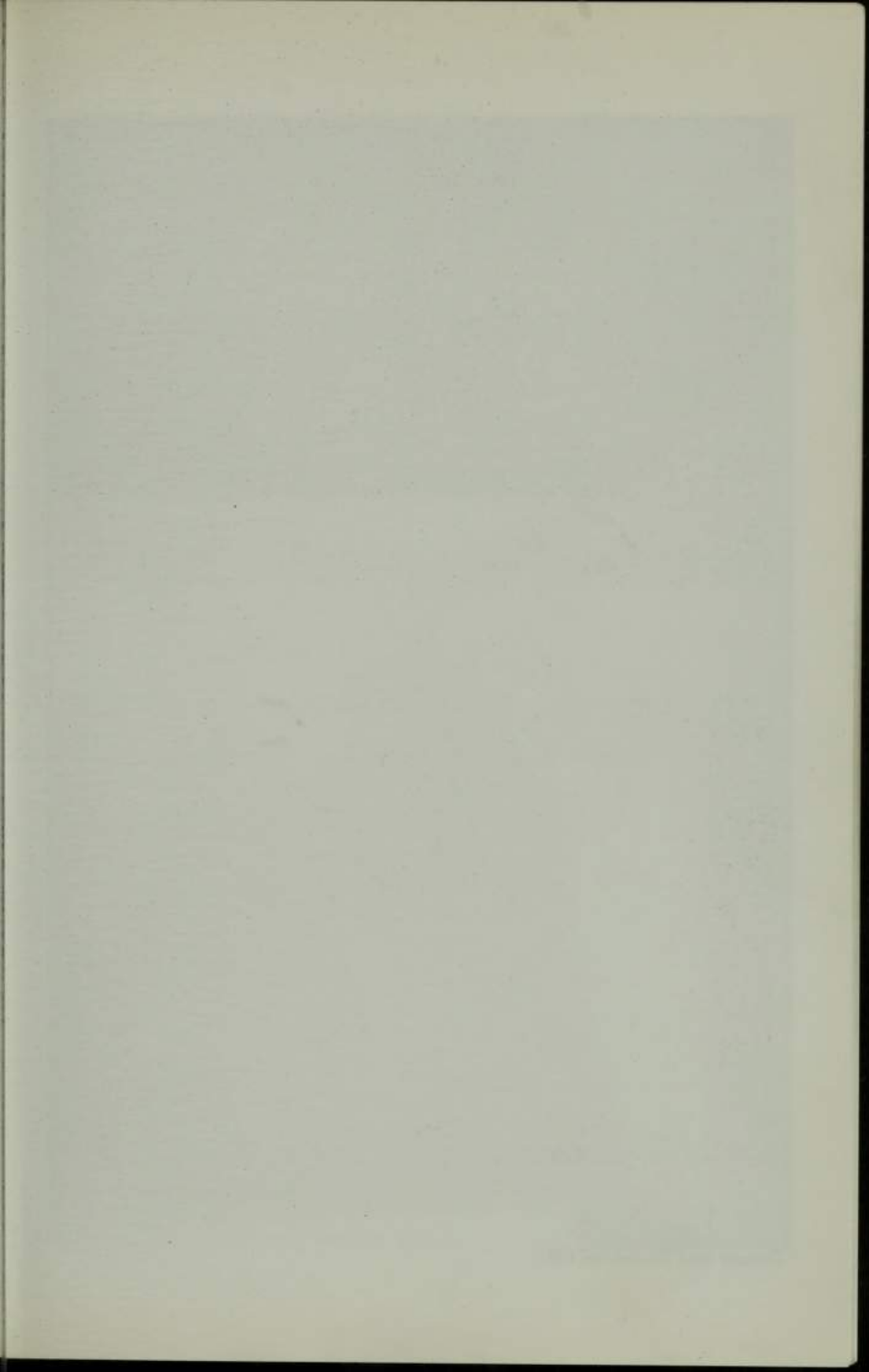
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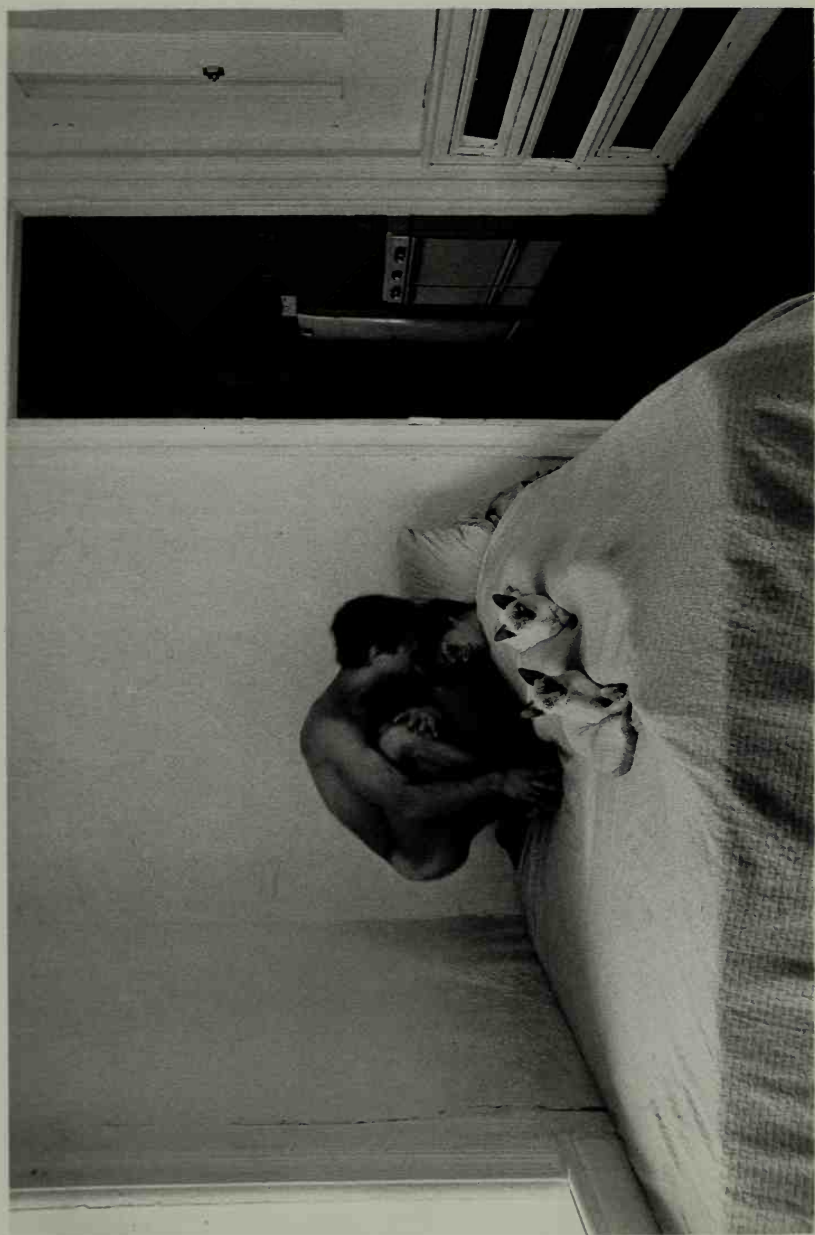


7.



8.





The bogeyman



1.



2.



3.



4.



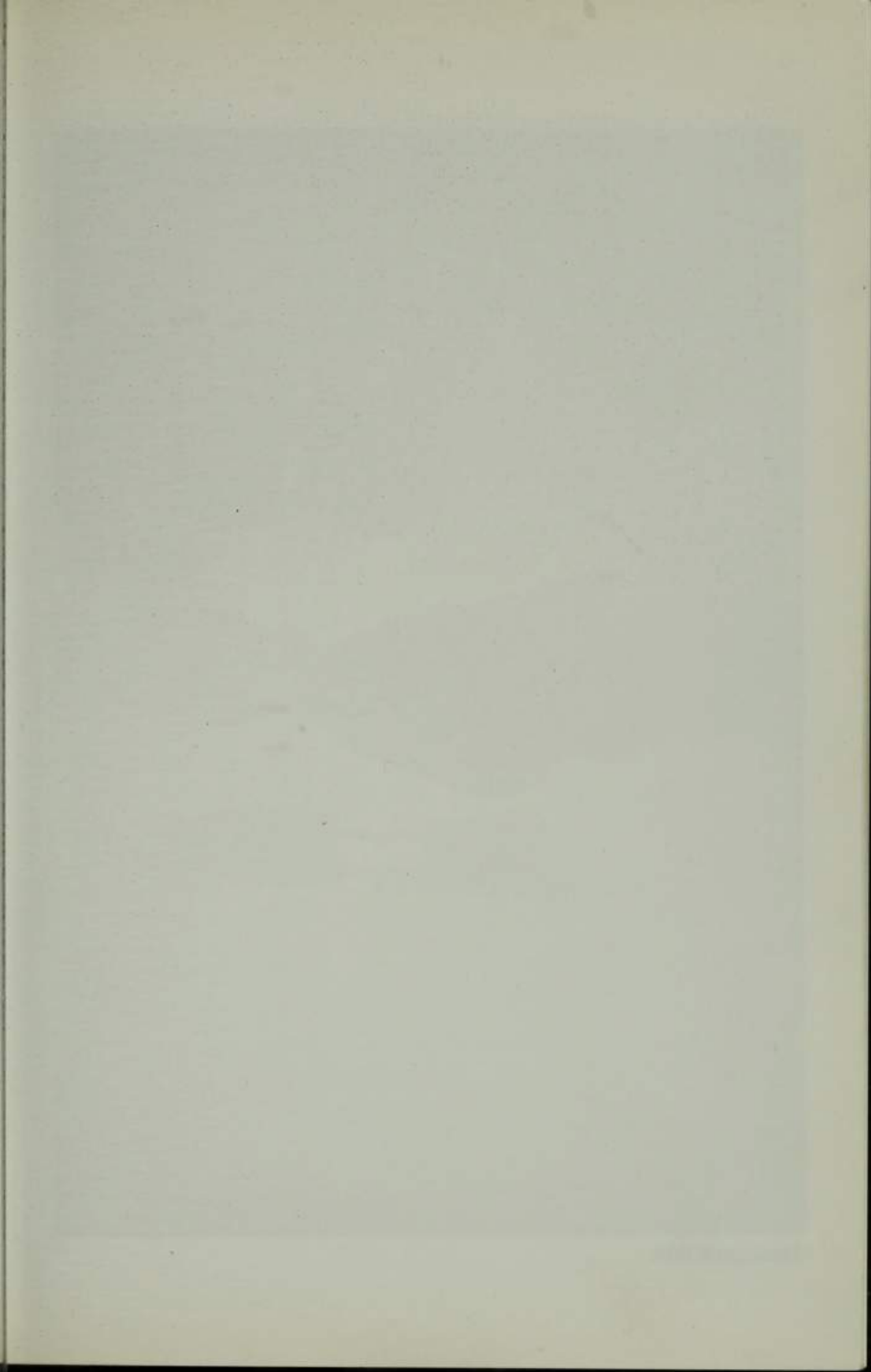
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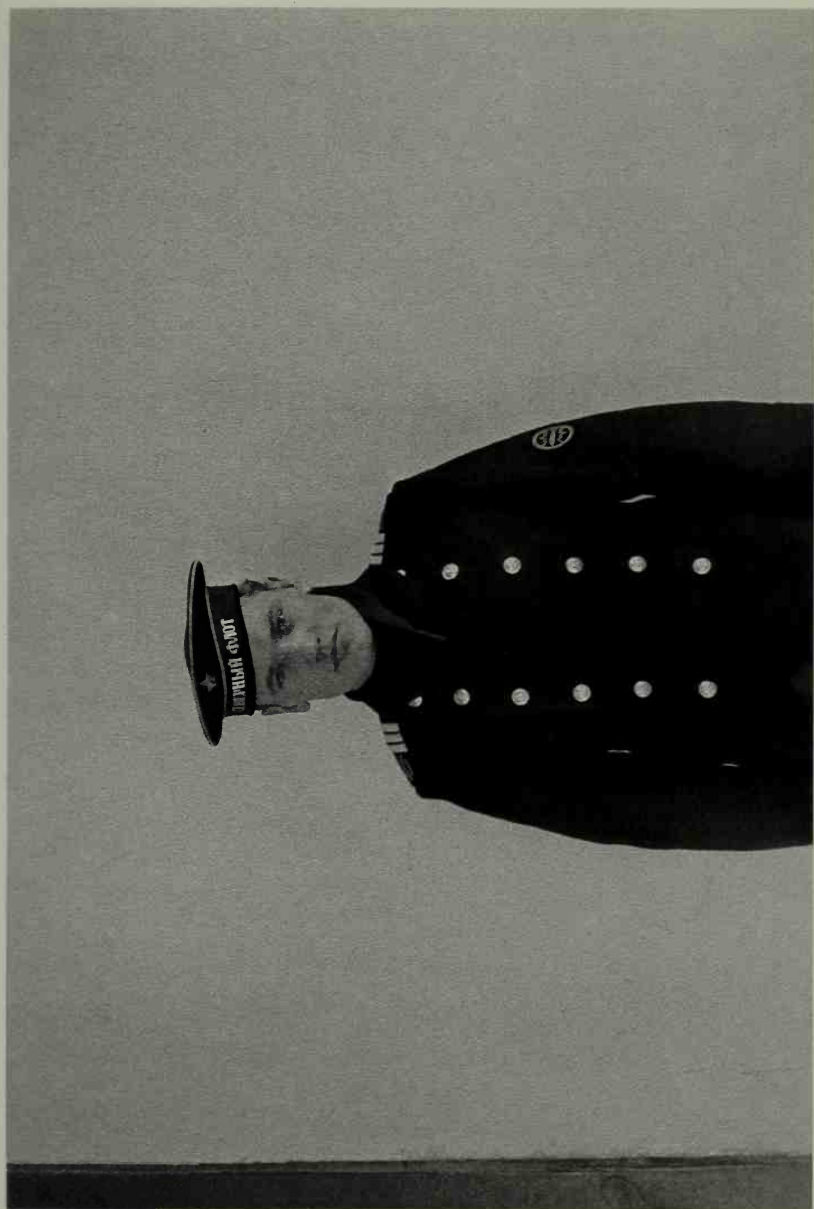


7.





Minsk. 1958.

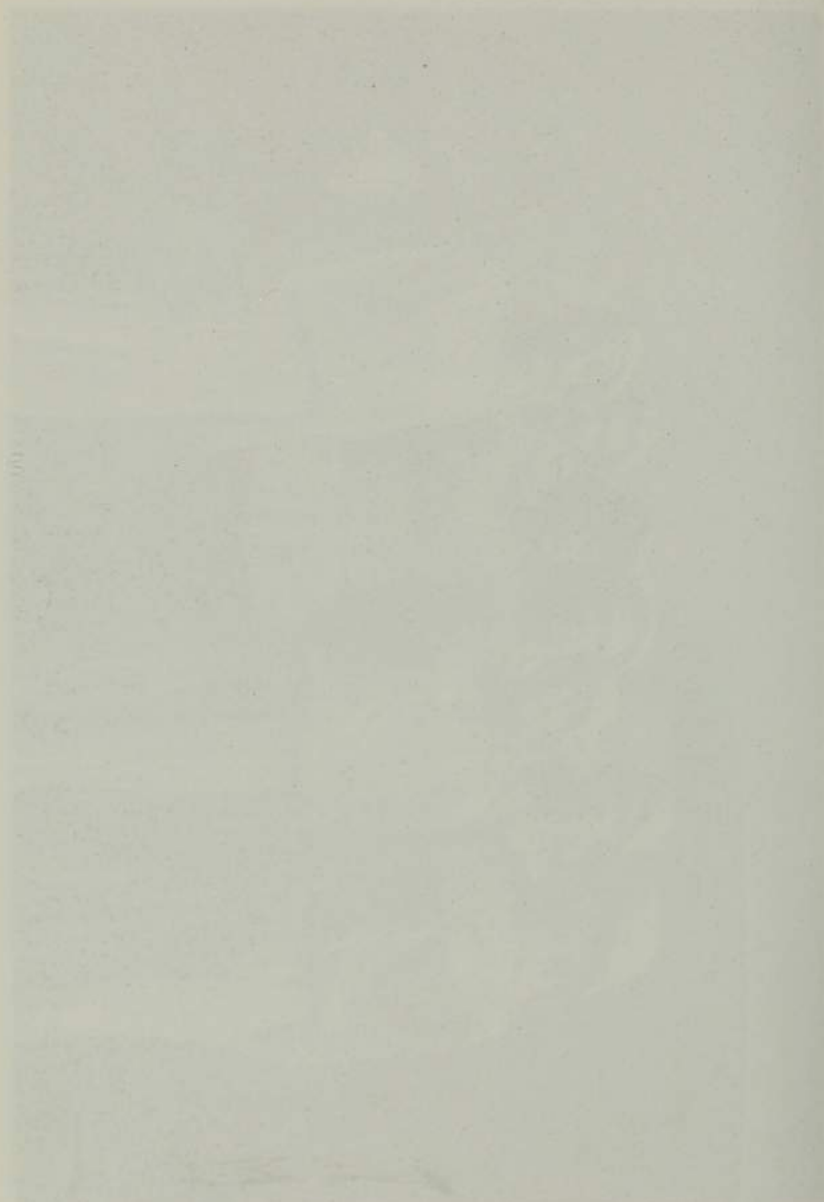


Flower peddler. Kiev. 1958.



Group of acrobats. 1960.





Acrobats at the Cirque d'Hiver. 1960.



The young girl's,
dream



1.



2.



3.

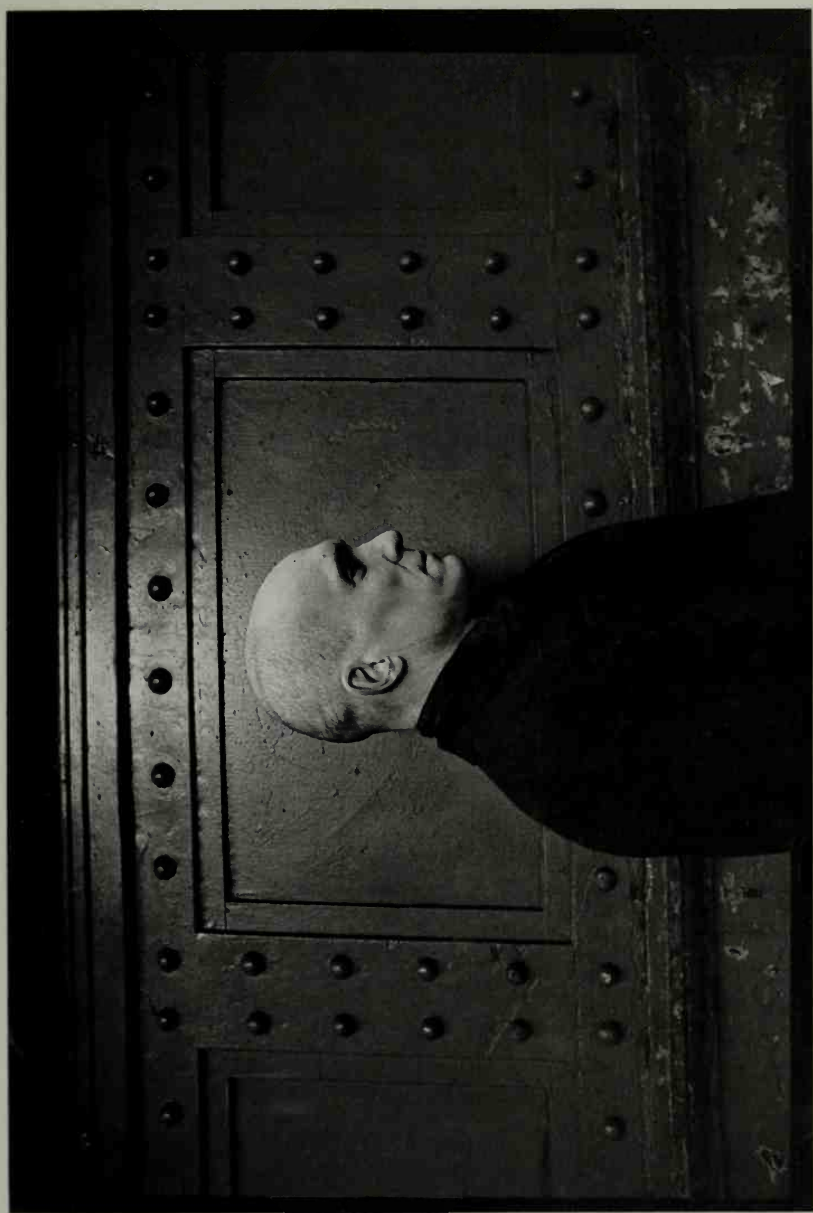


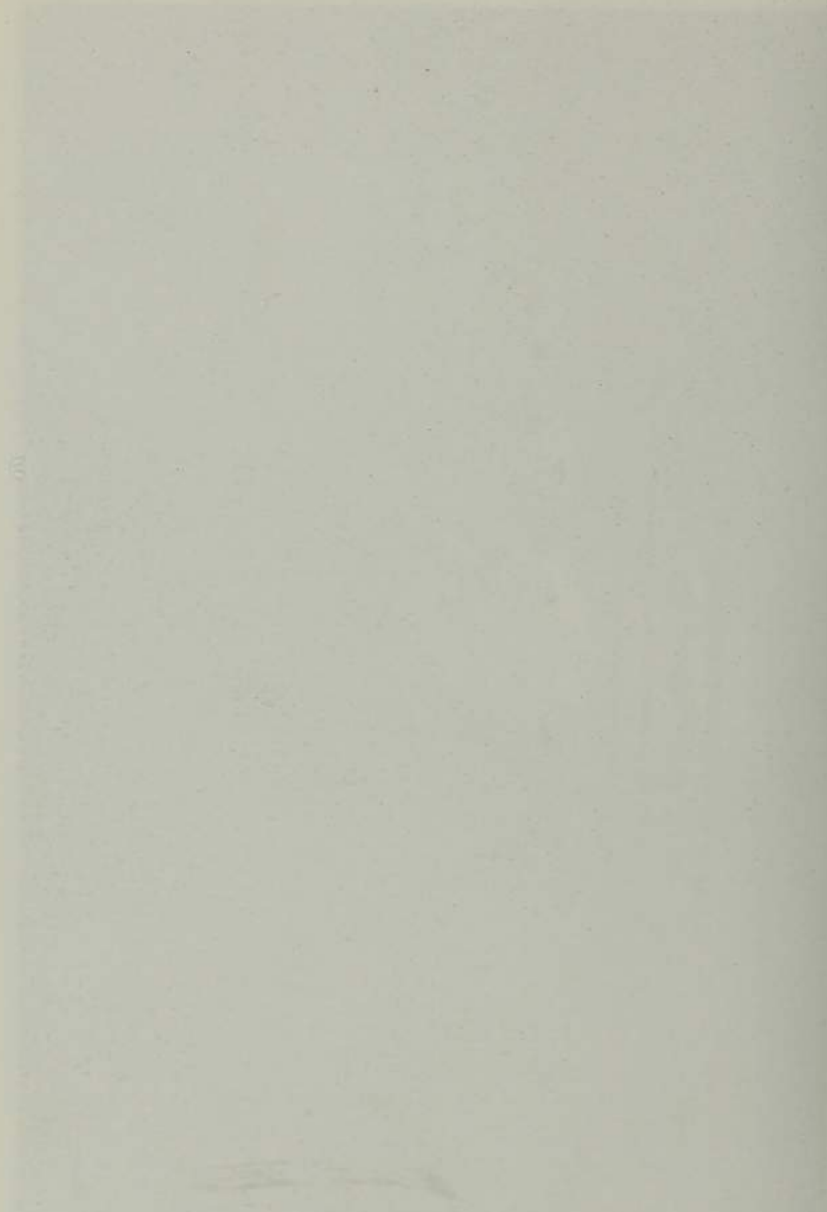
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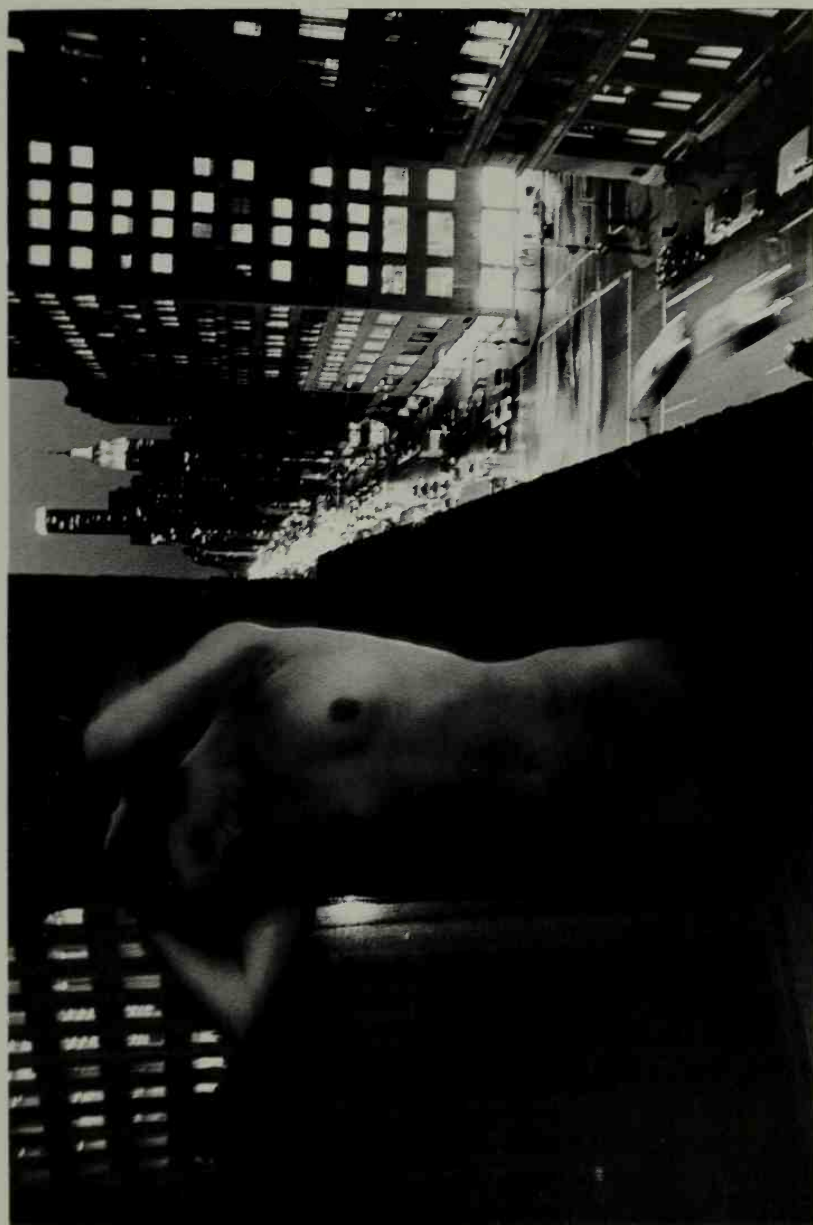
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Robert Duvall. 1964.

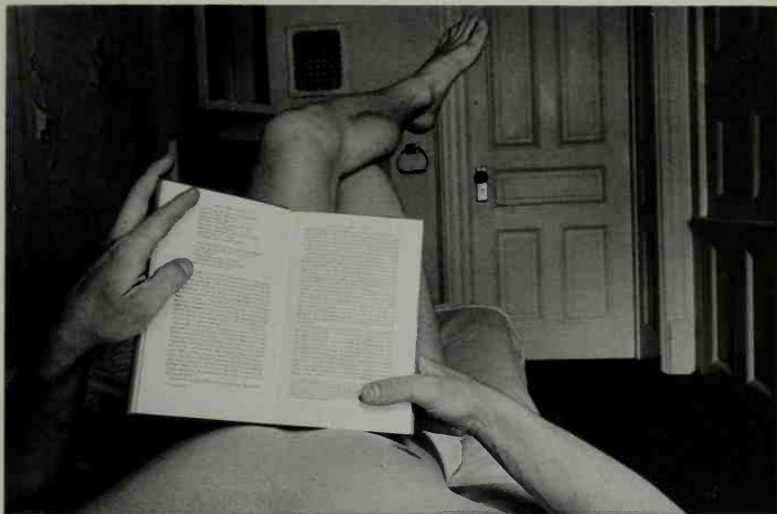




Nude in City Setting. 1969.



Take one and see
Mt. Fujiyama



It was a hot day.¹ The book was dull.
He was bored.



Someone slipped an envelope²
under the door.



^{3.}
There was something peculiar
written on it.



^{4.}
Inside were some pills. Without any
hesitation he gulped down a pill.



He felt like a balloon⁵ with its air being
let out. Instantly he became six inches tall.



⁶
The door squeaked behind him as an
enormous nude woman entered the room.



7.
she grew larger as she approached his chair.



8.
She did not see him. He was excited by her size



9.
His excitement turned to terror, when he realized that she was going to sit on his chair, and on him.



10.
As her colossal ass descended upon him, he tried to run but was paralyzed. His tiny legs refused to move.



11.

*He stood frozen with excitement, as her big
belongings settled down, closer and closer.*



12.

She sat on him!



13-

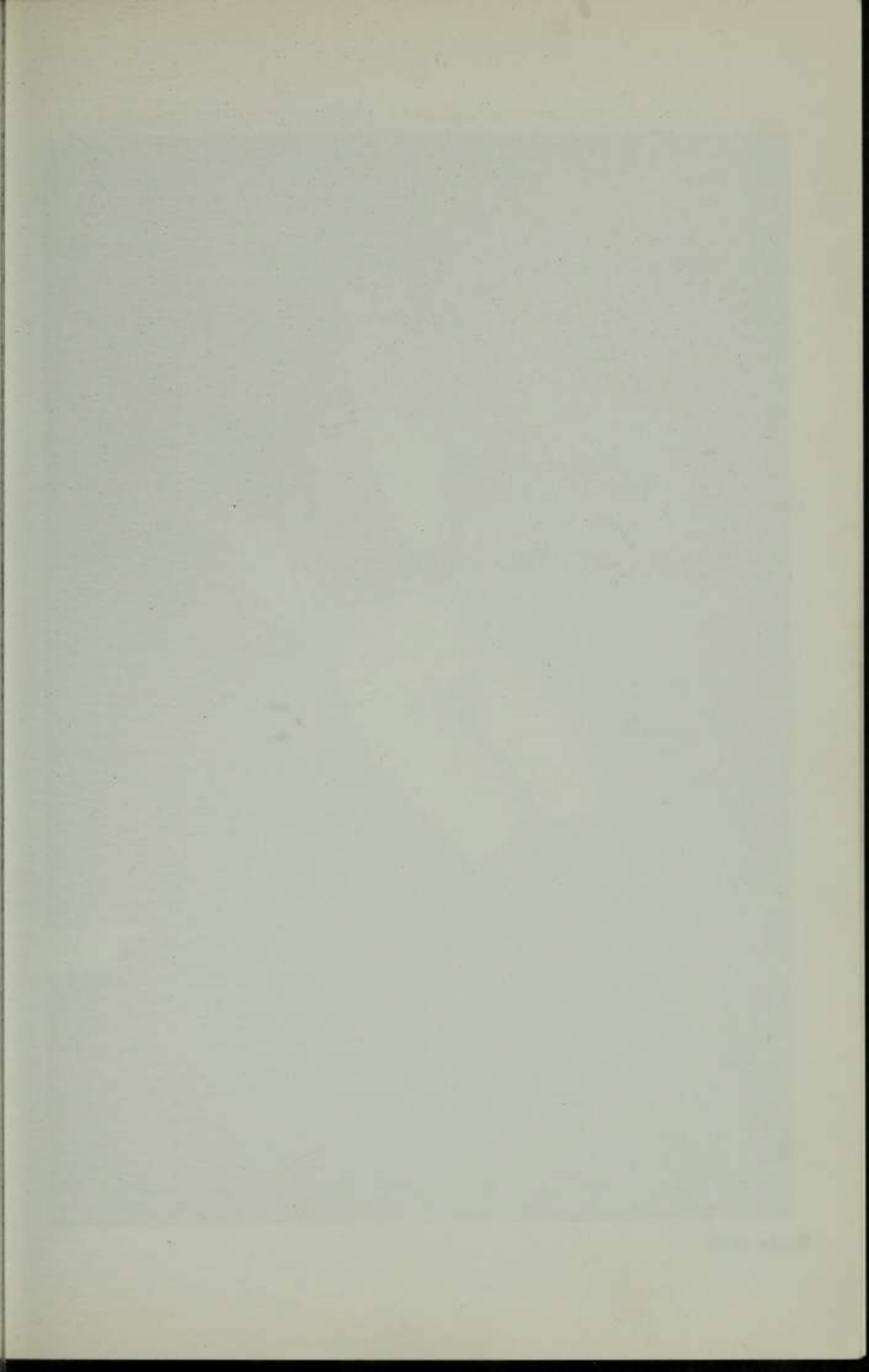
Miraculously, in the darkness, he began to see the snow covered peak of Mt. Fuji yama.



14.



15.



Nude. 1970.



Things are queer



1.



2.



3.



where the giant unlocked a cellar door and showed him gold: 'One is for the poor, the second for the King, a yours.' Just then the clock struck twelve and the giant vanished the boy in total darkness. Next morning the King came and had happened. 'My dead cousin came to see me and a fellow showed me three treasure chests in the cellar; but me to shudder.' The King was overjoyed: 'You have said he tried, how you may marry my daughter.'

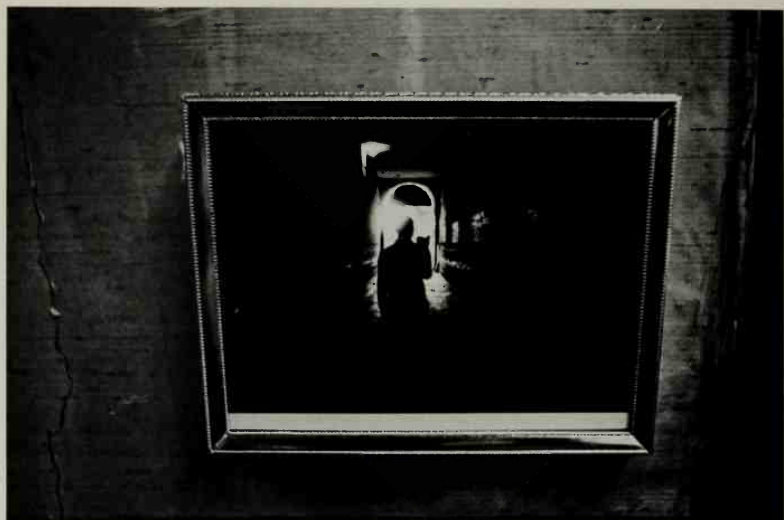
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5.



6.



7.



8.



From the sequence "For Balthus," 1969.



The pleasures of the glove



^{1.}
Although he had to walk blocks out of his way, it had become a daily ritual with him to look in the shop window. He was strangely pleased to see them there.



^{2.}
Of course it had occurred to him to buy the gloves. To own them would have ruined it. It would not be the same.



He sat there much too long ^{3.} staring at his gloves.



His eyes kept returning ^{4.} to the curious shape his gloves had taken. One had become a queer funny tunnel. He wondered where it might lead.



^{5.}
*"How marvelous to let his hand enter the tunnel
and see where it would take him," he thought.*





7.
The glove ate his hand.



8.
She sat there reading the paper, wearing one glove



9.

She brought her hand to her hair.



10.

He could almost touch the glove.



11.

The hand in her glove became his hand.



12.

*He could not control his hand.
The gloves will become his will.*



13.

The glove made his hand follow the contours of her face and down her body.



14.

The glove did what it wanted to do.



15.

He rose abruptly leaving a glove.



16.



17.



Christ in New York



1.
Christ is sold on television by a
religious hypocrite.



2.
Christ cries when he sees a young
woman die of an illegal abortion.



3.

Christ is beaten defending a homosexual.



4.

Christ eats dog food with an old Ukrainian lady in Brooklyn.



5.

Christ sees a woman being attacked.

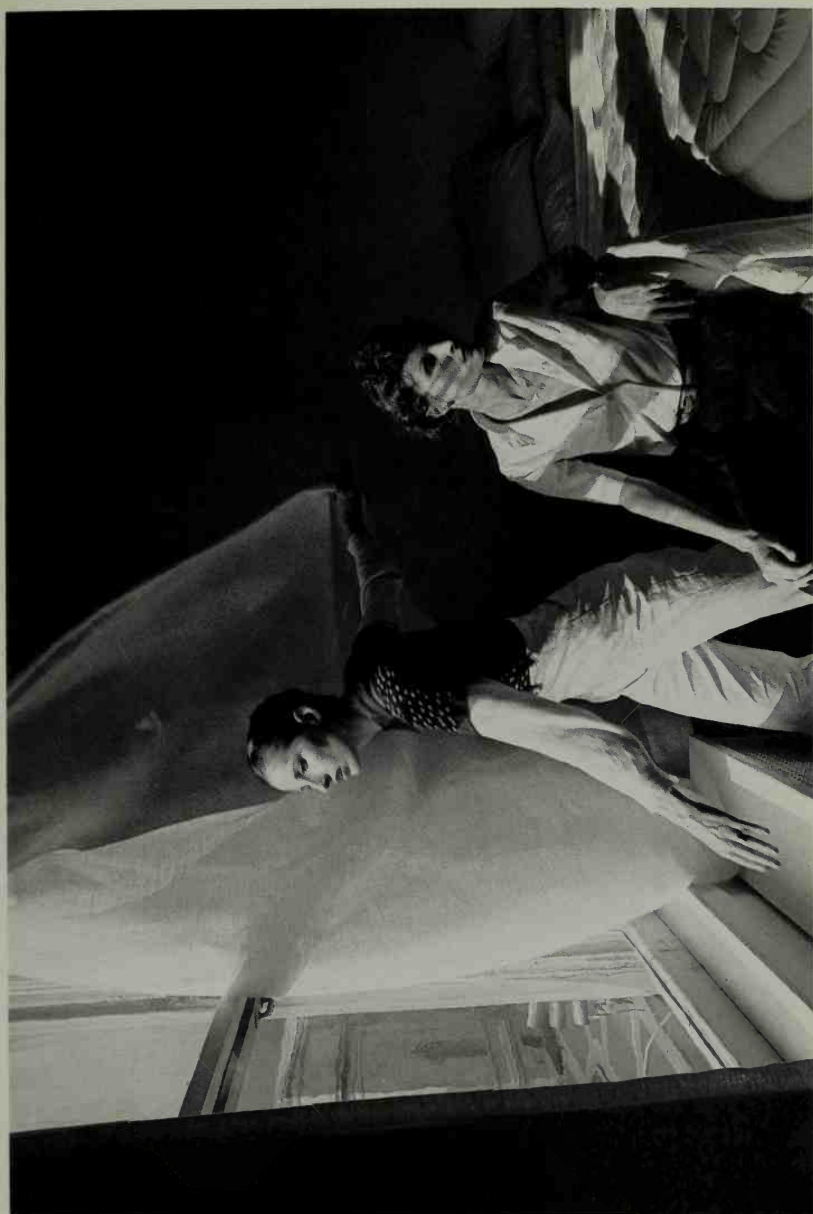


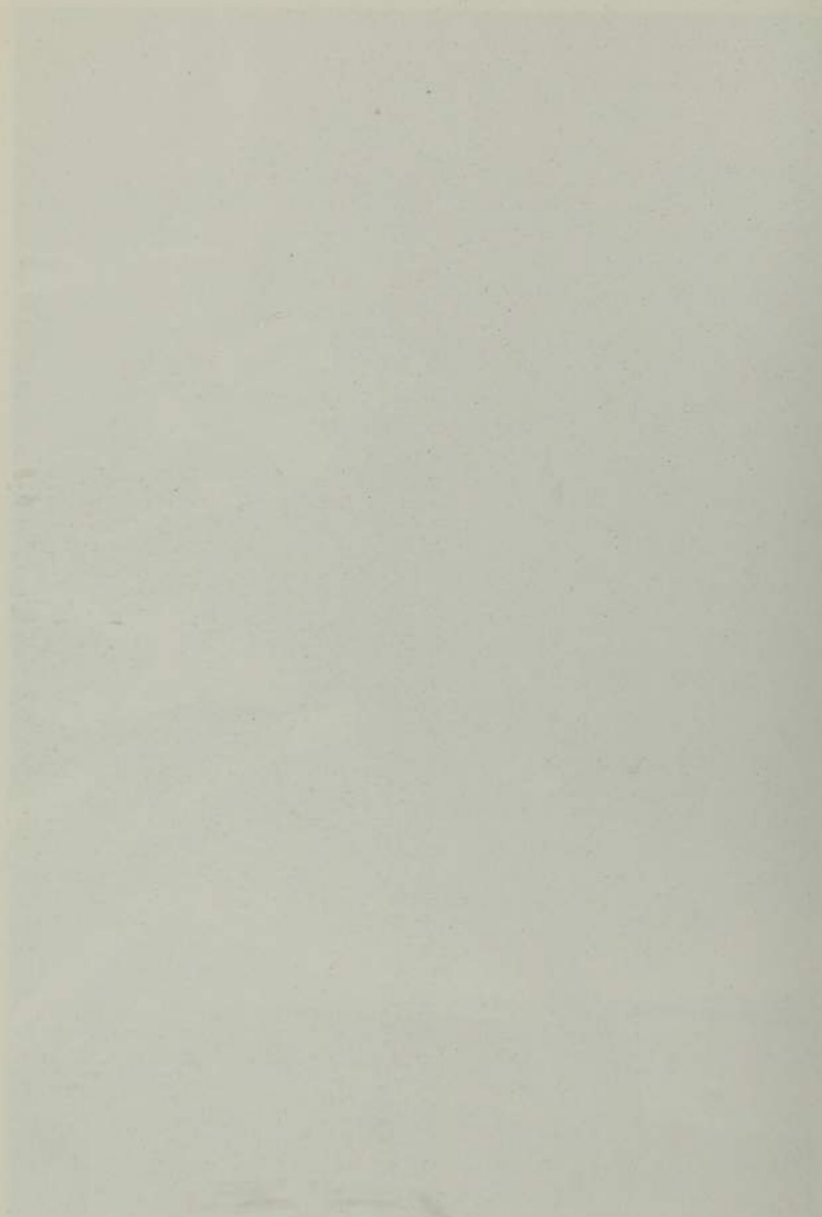
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Christ is shot by a mugger with a hand gun and dies. The second coming had occurred, and no one noticed.

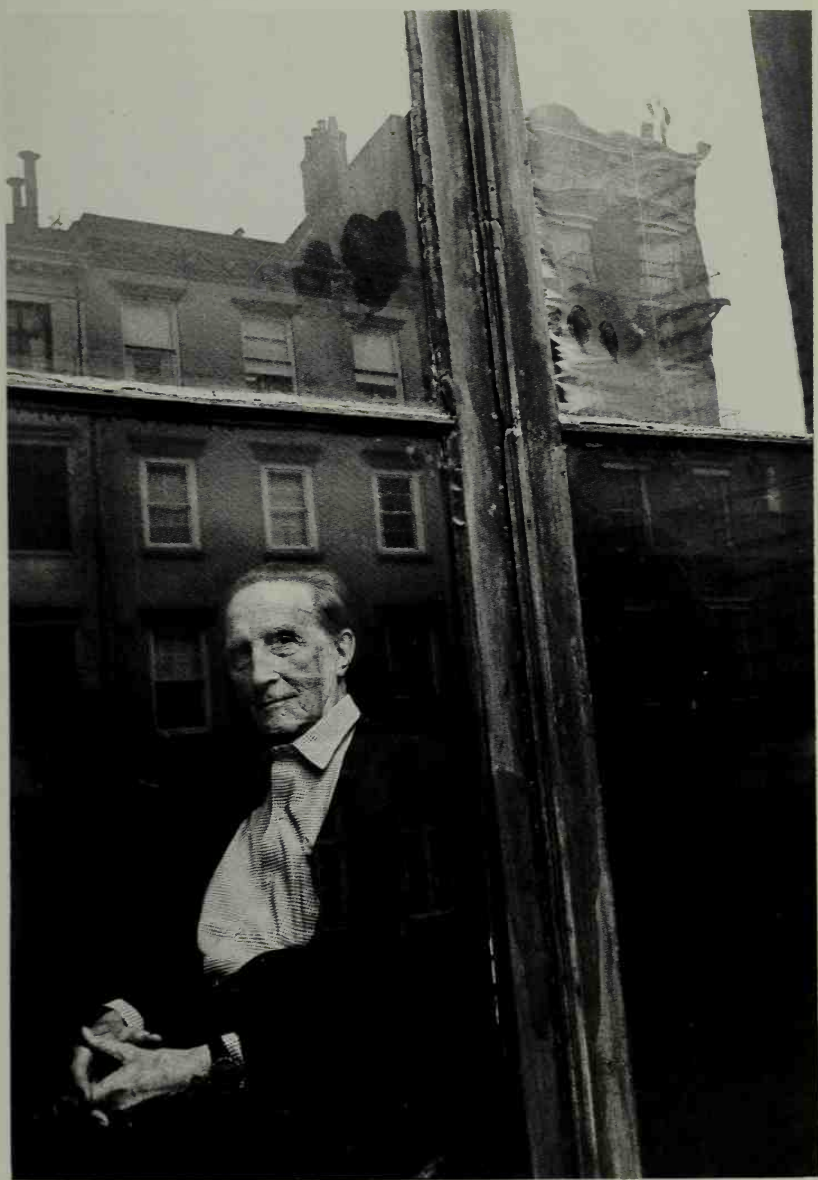
CERTAIN WORDS MUST BE SAID

Things had become impossible between them and nothing could be salvaged. Certain words must be said. And although each one had said those words a hundred times to herself, they had never had the courage to say them out loud to one another. So they began to hope someone else would say the words for them. Perhaps a letter might arrive, or a telegram delivered that would say what they could not. Now they spent their days waiting. What else could they do?





Marcel Duchamp. 1962.



Death comes
to the old lady



1.



2.



3.



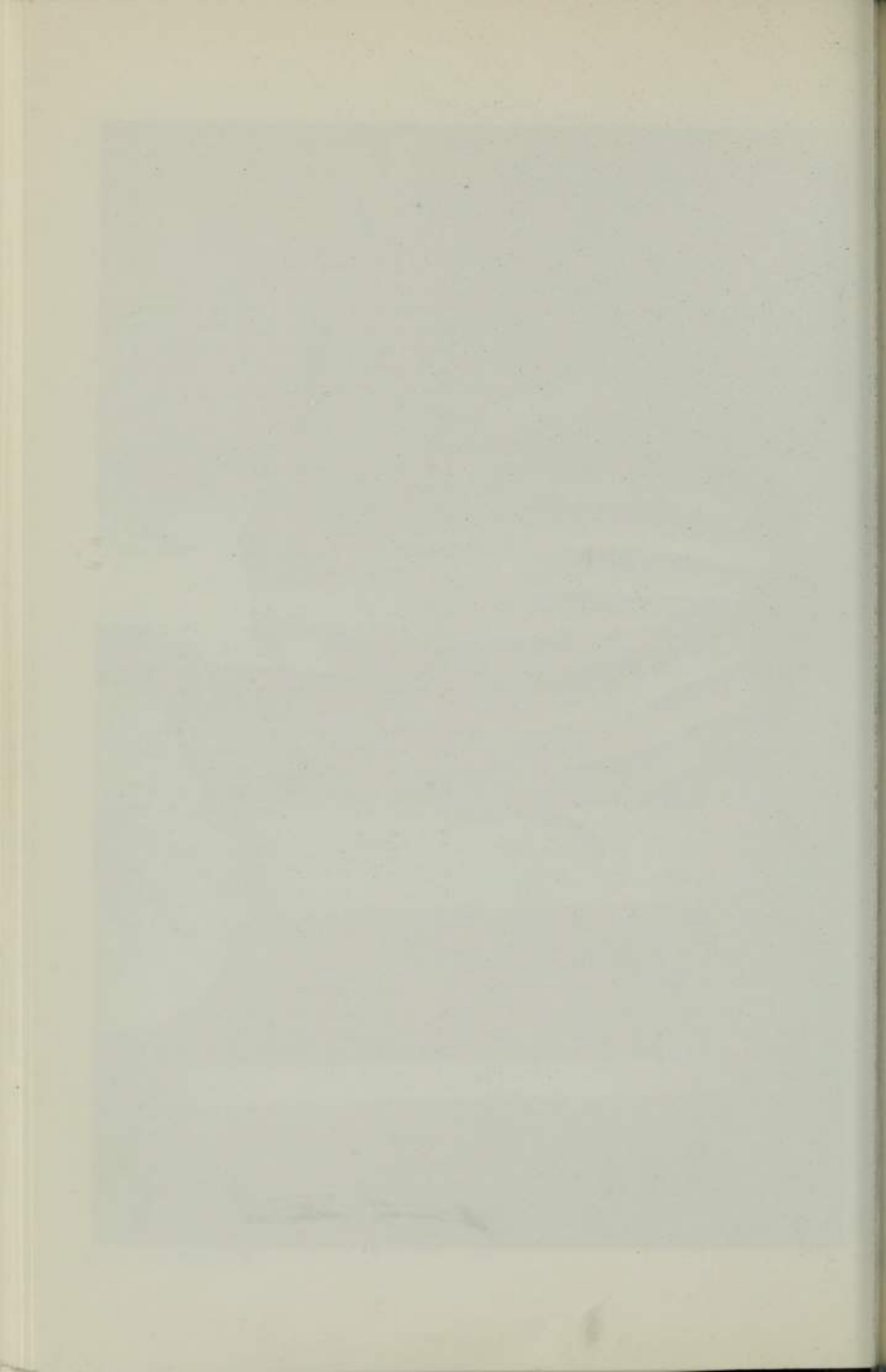
4.



5.

Andy Warhol. 1958.





BIOGRAPHY

1932. Duane Steven Michals is born on February 18, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. His father, John Ambrose Michals, is a metal worker; his mother, Margaret Cecilia Matik, a cleaning woman. He spends his first five years with his grandparents because his mother resides with her employers.

1946. Michals is awarded a scholarship enabling him to register for the Saturday watercolor classes held at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh.

1951. Thanks to another scholarship and earnings from spare jobs, he enrolls at the University of Denver.

1953. Michals receives his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Denver. Although he was not an art major, he was very interested in Magritte, Balthus and De Chirico. He enlists in the Army and is stationed in Germany.

1956. Having finished his military duties, he settles in New York and registers at the Parsons School of Design.

1957. He obtains his first professional job, assistant art director for *Dance* magazine.

1958. Michals is hired by Time Inc., to do graphics for the advertising department. Just before leaving for a three-week trip to the USSR, he borrows an Argus C3 camera. During his travels in Russia, he seems to discover his true vocation, taking numerous pictures of children, sailors and workers. Home again, he takes a job in a graphic arts agency, which closes down six months later. He then decides to make a career out of his newfound interest in photography. With the help of the commercial

photographer Daniel Entin, he begins a fruitful career in this field. His first professional jobs are a series of publicity photographs for the musical *The Fantasticks*. He receives regular assignments from such publications as *Show, Mademoiselle, Esquire*, and later from *Vogue, The New York Times, Horizon*, and *Scientific American*, as well as commissions from Revlon and Elizabeth Arden.

1963. First exhibition, the Underground Gallery, New York.

1964-66. Michals photographs the deserted interiors of urban sites that are usually bustling with people and activity – laundromats, beauty parlors, subway stations, cafeterias and theaters.

1966. He decides to people his sites with persons he uses as actors. Places and persons both participate in his stories and narratives, which represent dreams or parables and which unfold in sequences. At first, each sequence comprises six photographs; later he sometimes uses nine photographs *Burlesque, 1979*, fifteen *Take One and See Mt Fujiyama, 1975*, or even twenty-six *The Journey of the Spirit after Death, 1970*.

1974. He introduces photographs accompanied by texts handwritten in the margins. These may be single photographs or several arranged in a sequence.

1979. He produces his first works combining photography and painting.

1980. At the beginning of a new decade, Michals seems to display, among other things, a new interest in politics and a marked concern for the "intolerance of the moral majority."

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1968. The Underground Gallery,
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1971. The George Eastman House,
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San Francisco.

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Light Gallery, New York.

1975. Light Gallery, New York.
The Broxton Gallery, Los Angeles.

1976. Jacques Bosser, Paris.
Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
Galerie Die Brücke, Vienna.
The Texas Center for Photographic
Studies, Dallas.
Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati.
Ohio State University, Columbus.
Felix Handschin Galerie, Basel.
Douglas Drake Gallery, Kansas City.

1977. Galerie Breiting, Berlin.
Paul Maenz, Cologne. G. Ray Hawkins
Gallery, Los Angeles.
Philadelphia College of Art.

Focus Gallery, San Francisco.

1978. Douglas Drake Gallery,
Kansas City.
The Collection at 24, Miami.
Camera Obscura, Stockholm.
Galerie Fiolet, Amsterdam.
Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
Galerie Wilde, Cologne.
Akron Art Institute, Akron.

1979. La Remise du Parc, Paris.
Canon Photo Gallery, Geneva.
Douglas Drake Gallery, Kansas City.
The Collection at 24, Miami.
Art Gallery, The University of Denver.
Galerie Wilde, Cologne.
Nouvelles Images, La Haye.
Nova Gallery, Vancouver.

1980. Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati.
Nouvelles Images, La Haye.
Susan Spiritus Gallery,
Newport Beach.
Museum of Modern Art, Bogotá.
Silver Image Gallery, Seattle.
Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
The Art Gallery, University of Pittsburgh.

1981. Galerie Fiolet, Amsterdam.
Gemeentemuseum, Apeldoorn.
Halstead Gallery, Birmingham.
Swarthmore College, Swarthmore.
The Atlanta Gallery of Photography,
Atlanta.
The Huntsville Museum of Art,
Huntsville.
Work Galerie, Zurich.
Colorado Photo Arts Center, Denver.
Philadelphia College of Art,
Philadelphia.
"Fotografia vs. Realidad," Musée de
Monterrey, Mexico.
The Photographer's Gallery,
South Tarr, Australia.

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American Photographers of the Depression

Eugene Aget

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Bruce Davidson

Early Color Photography

Robert Frank

Andre Kertesz

Jacques-Henri Lartigue

Duane Michals

Helmut Newton

The Nude

Alexander Rodchenko

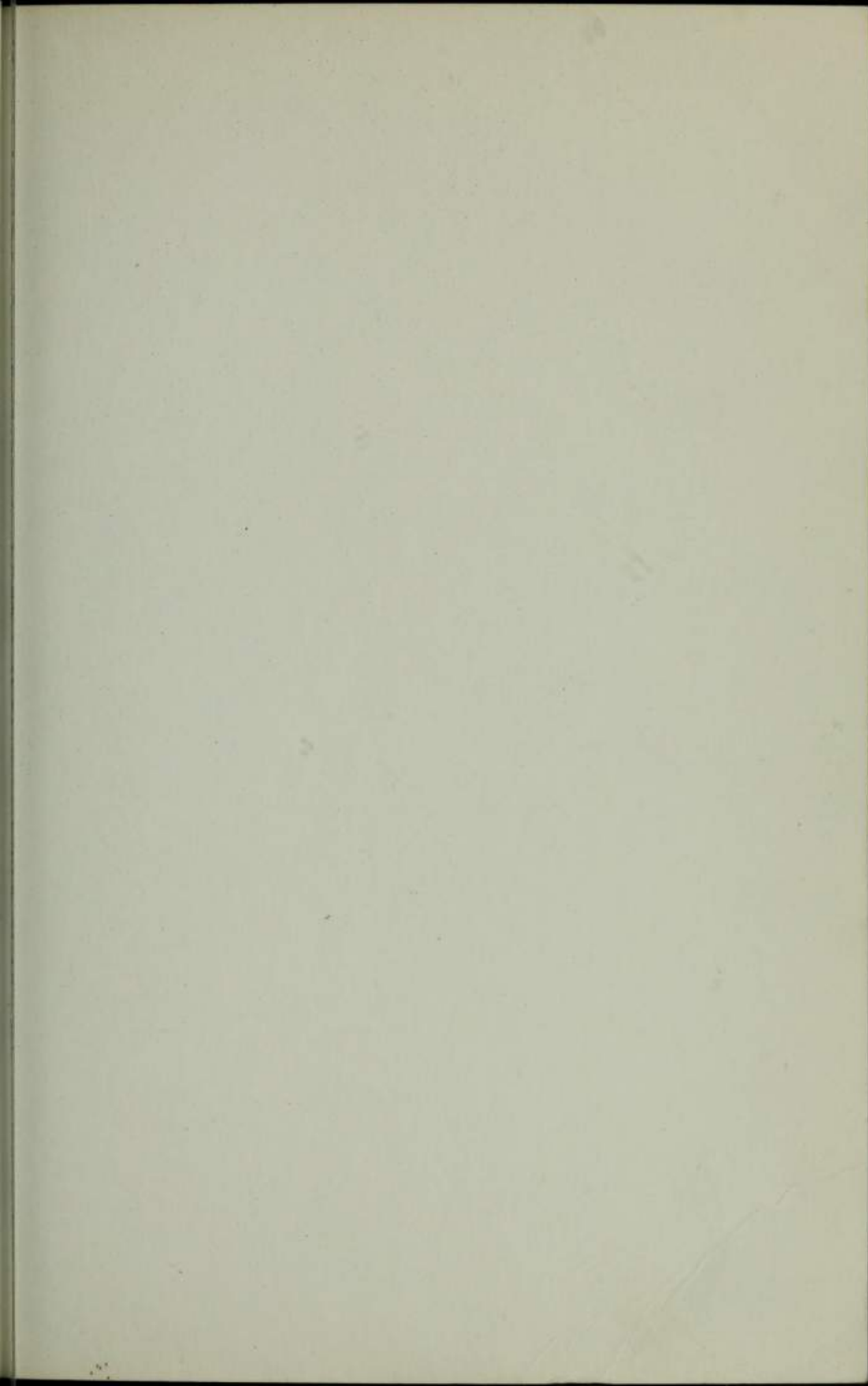
W. Eugene Smith

Weegee

Brassai

Lee Friedlander

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under the direction of Robert Delpire.



Duane Michals

Born in 1932 in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, Duane Michals discovered his vocation in 1958 when he borrowed a camera for a three-week trip to Russia. Since that time he has become famous for such haunting narrative sequences as "The Journey of the Spirit After Death," "Paradise Regained," and "The Fallen Angels," among others. Relying on props, double exposures, reflections, and texts written on the margins of the images, Michals occupies a singular place in the long line of photographers who create the events they capture on film.

The Pantheon Photo Library, conceived and printed by the National Center of Photography in Paris, brings together the best work of classic and contemporary photographers in affordable guides produced to the highest standards. The series was the recipient of the International Center of Photography's first annual publication award for distinguished books on photography.



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