





**JOHN SHEA AND ANEMONES**



# *PHARTOGRAPHY*

## **WHY NOT PAINT ON A PHOTOGRAPH?**

**I AM A PRETEND PAINTER WITHOUT PRETENSIONS TO GAGOSIAN HAUTE KUNST.**

**LAST YEAR I FOUND AN OLD HOLLYWOOD GLAMOUR PHOTOGRAPH OF JOAN CRAWFORD AND PAINTED A LARGE LOBSTER ON HER HEAD. IT WAS TITLED JOAN CRAWFISH. LOOK AT MY LOBSTER! HOW GREAT IS THAT! SO WHAT?**



DUANE MICHALIS



**PORTRAIT OF ARTHUR SANZARI AND SHOE**

**1980**

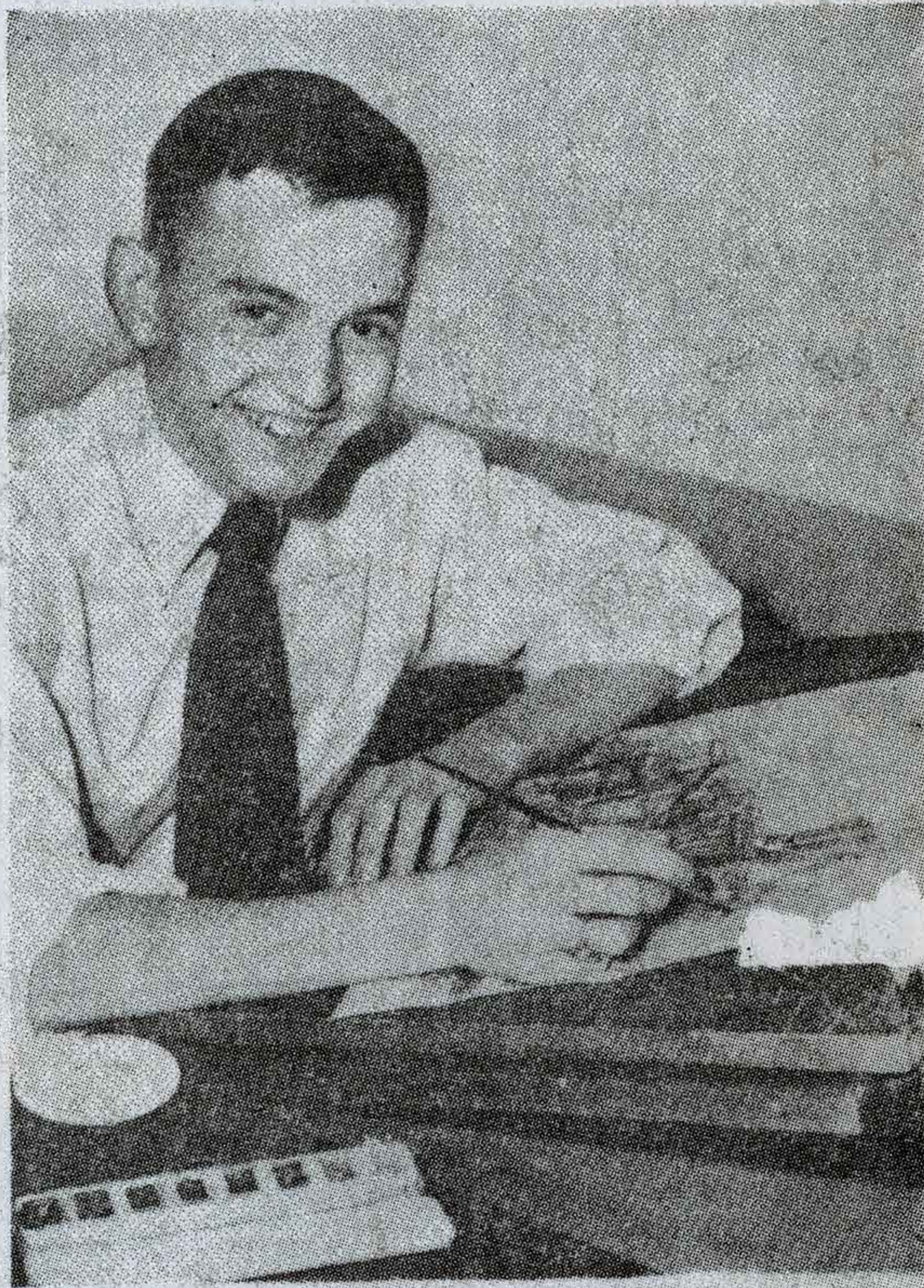
**AS A HIGH SCHOOL KID I ATTENDED SATURDAY CARNEGIE MUSEUM ART CLASSES. ONE WEEK OUR ASSIGNMENT WAS TO PAINT 'WAR". I PAINTED A GIANT EXPLOSION, WHICH WON ME FIRST PRIZE AT THE ANNUAL EXHIBIT. THIS ENTITLED ME TO ATTEND CARNEGIE MELLON'S WEEKEND CLASS FOR SMARTASS KID PAINTERS.**

**A BIG DEAL.**

**THIS WEEK, SEVENTY FIVE YEARS LATER, I ILLUSTRATED SOMETHING I HAD WRITTEN ABOUT MY ARMY DAYS WITH A PAINTING OF A GIANT EXPLOSION.**



# Six Art Awards Won By High School Senior



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—A Daily News Photo  
Duane Michals, who received six first prize ratings in the Regional Art Exhibit of the National Scholastic Exhibit, is shown above as he works on another of his water colors.  
Students from all schools in Western Pennsylvania entered the exhibit in Pittsburgh. The young McKeesport artist received a gold key for his six top water colors.

*Prize Water Colors, Now on Display in Area Show, Later Will Be Entered in National*

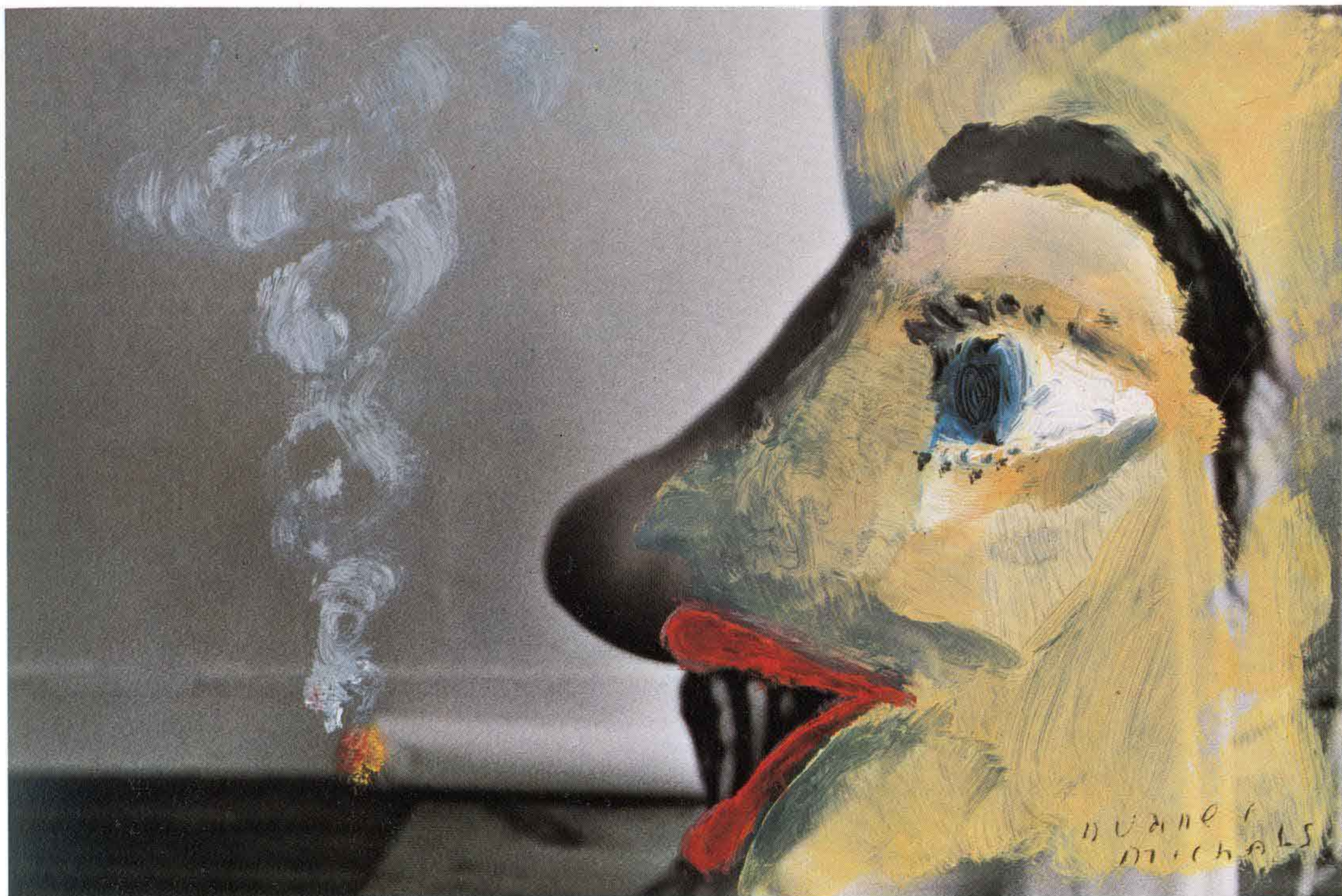


**IN DAYS OF YORE, I PHOTOGRAPHED MY GREAT MODEL  
ESTA, NUDE, UNDER AN UMBRELLA AND WITH A FEW  
PROPS. I POSED HER IN THE CHAIR BACKWARDS AND  
TRIED TO CREATE AN ILLUSION OF A FACE. HER  
DERRIERE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A NOSE AND THE  
UMBRELLA WAS THE HAIR.**

**IT DIDN'T WORK, SO WHAT?**



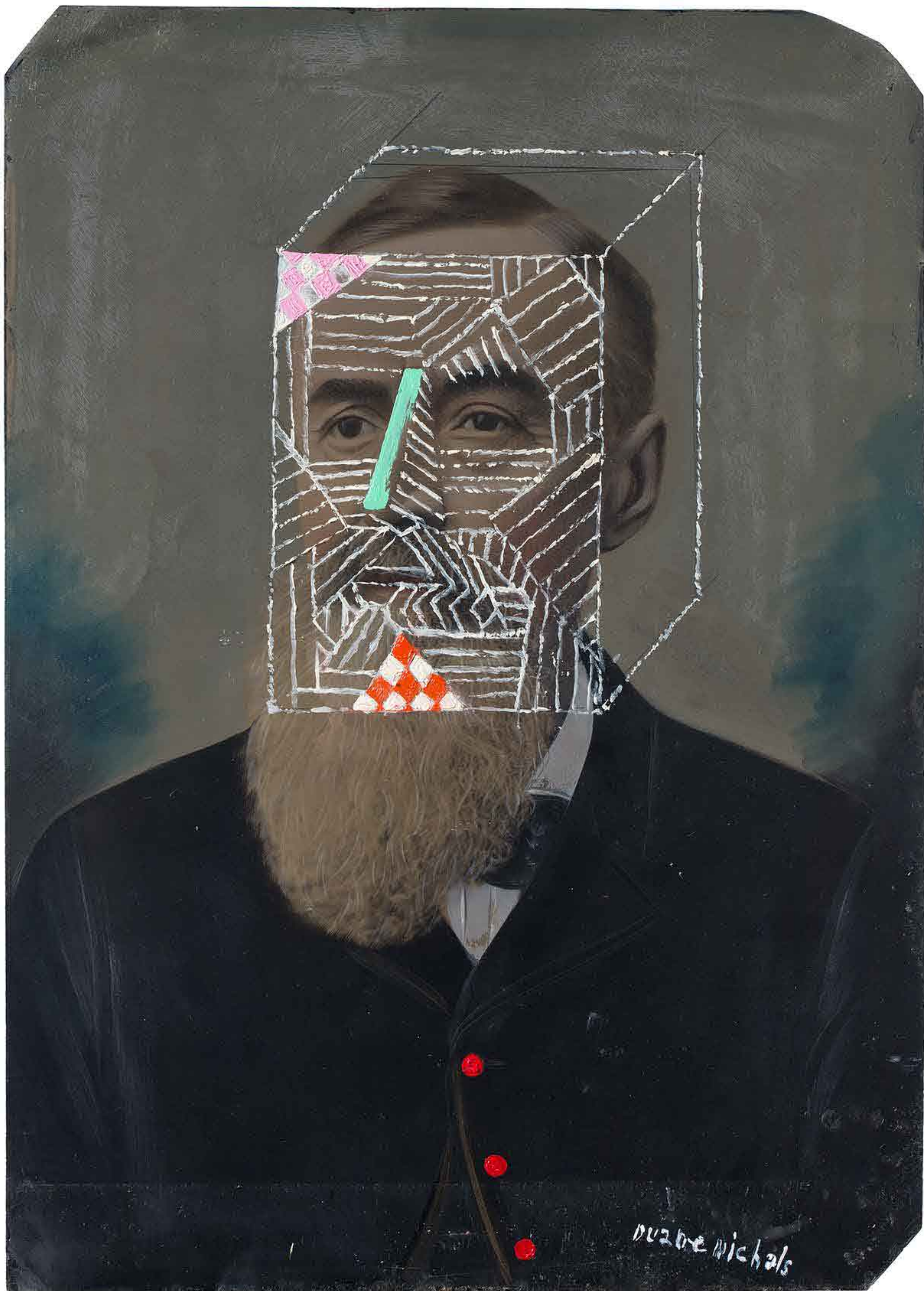
Portrait of Esta  
Smoking a cigarette

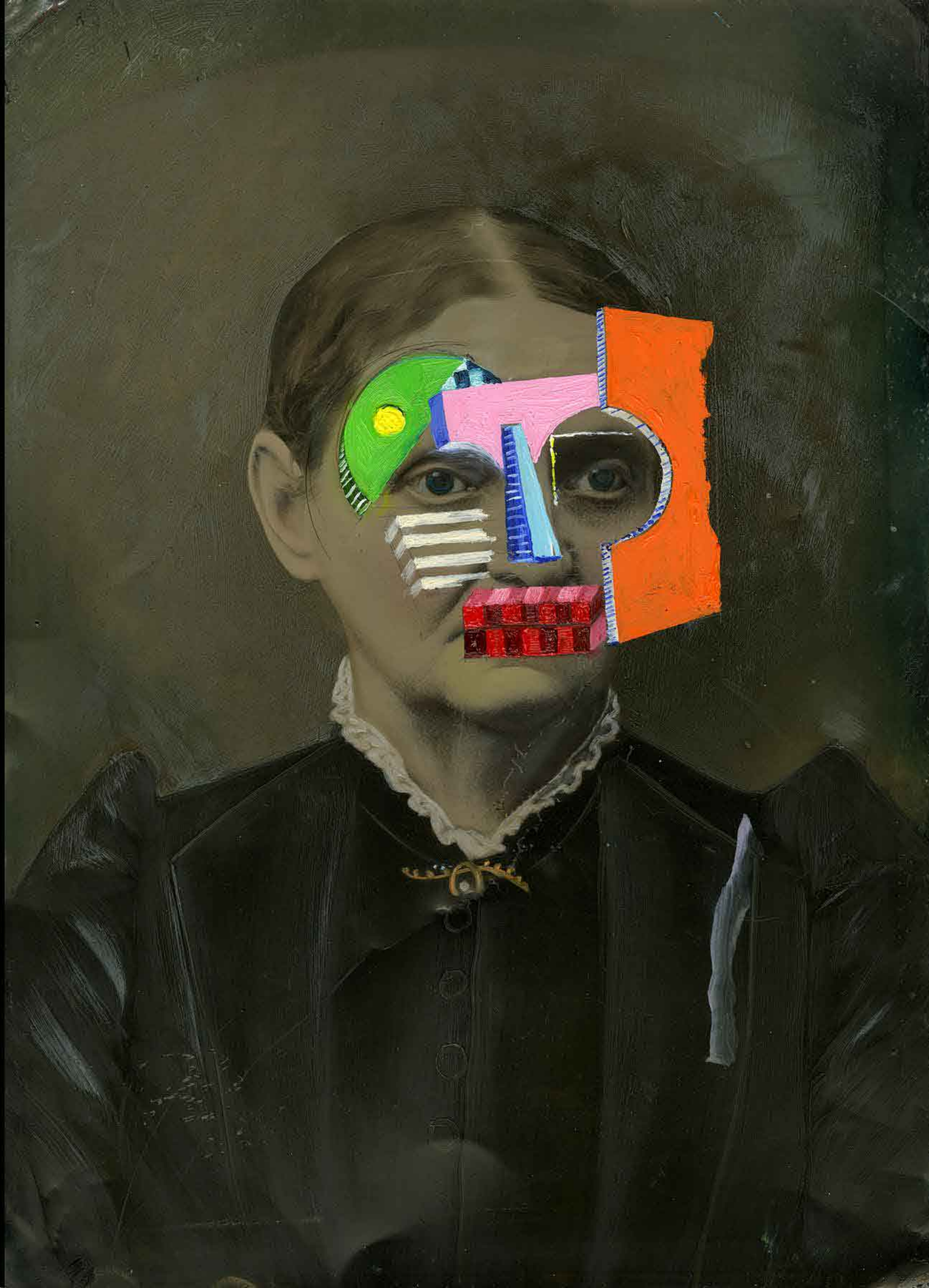


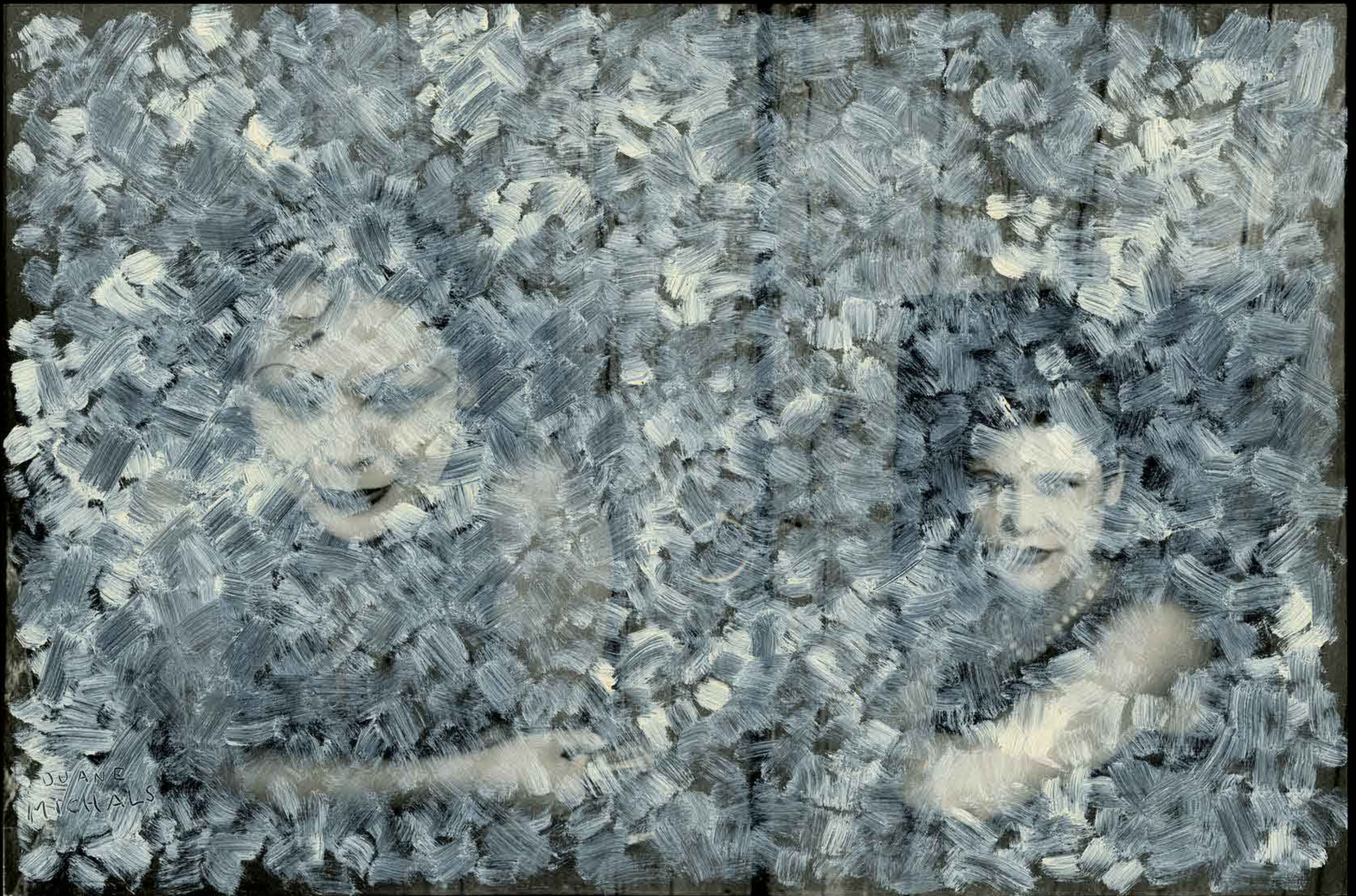
**MY FAVORITE WRITER IS JAMES JOYCE.**

**SEVEN YEARS AGO, I PAINTED TWO ABSTRACT  
PORTRAITS, ONE OF HIM AND ONE OF HIS WIFE  
NORA BARNACLE, ON TURN OF THE CENTURY  
TINTYPES.**

**IT WOKE UP FINNEGAN'S WAKE!**







**ONCE I BOUGHT A HENRI CARTIER BRESSON PHOTOGRAPH  
AND PAINTED IT WHITE. WOW!**

**SO WHAT?**



*White photograph*

**OIL ON MY PHOTOGRAPH *BOY IN LENINGRAD***





**I PAINTED A FAUX SIGNATURE OF ATGET ON AN ORIGINAL ATGET PRINT.**

**DRAWING IS THE OVERTURE TO THE OPERA  
OF PAINTING.**

**WHEN YOU PHOTOGRAPH IT IS THE ENTIRE  
GESTALT MOMENT. WHEN YOU DRAW YOU  
PAY INTIMATE ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS.**

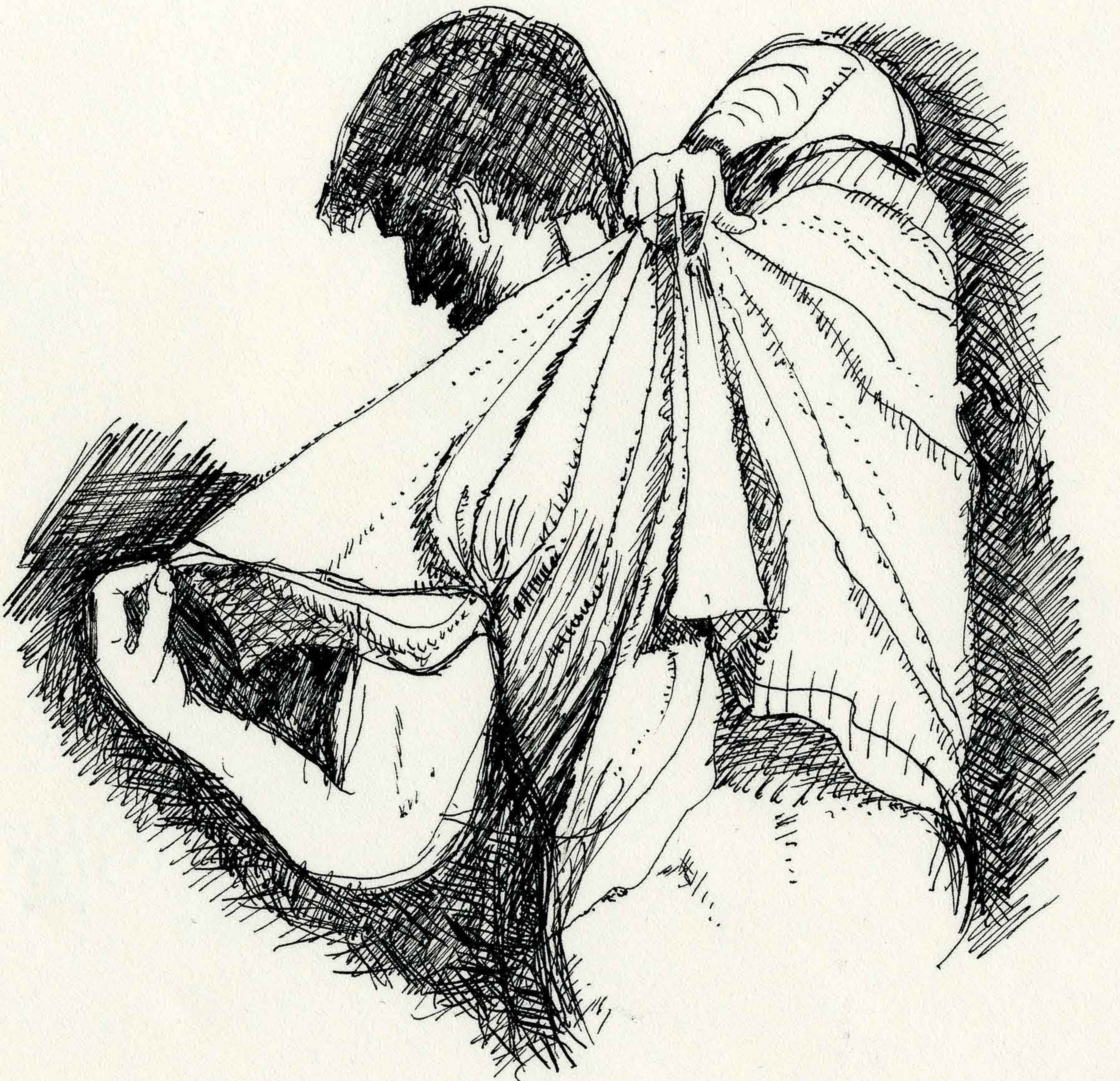
**I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AESTHETICALLY INCLINED,  
NOT ATHLETICALLY INCLINED. I AM TOTALLY FREE  
TO INDULGE THE WHIMS OF MY IMAGINATION.**

**LIGHT AS A CLOUD, FLOATING LIKE A FEATHER.**

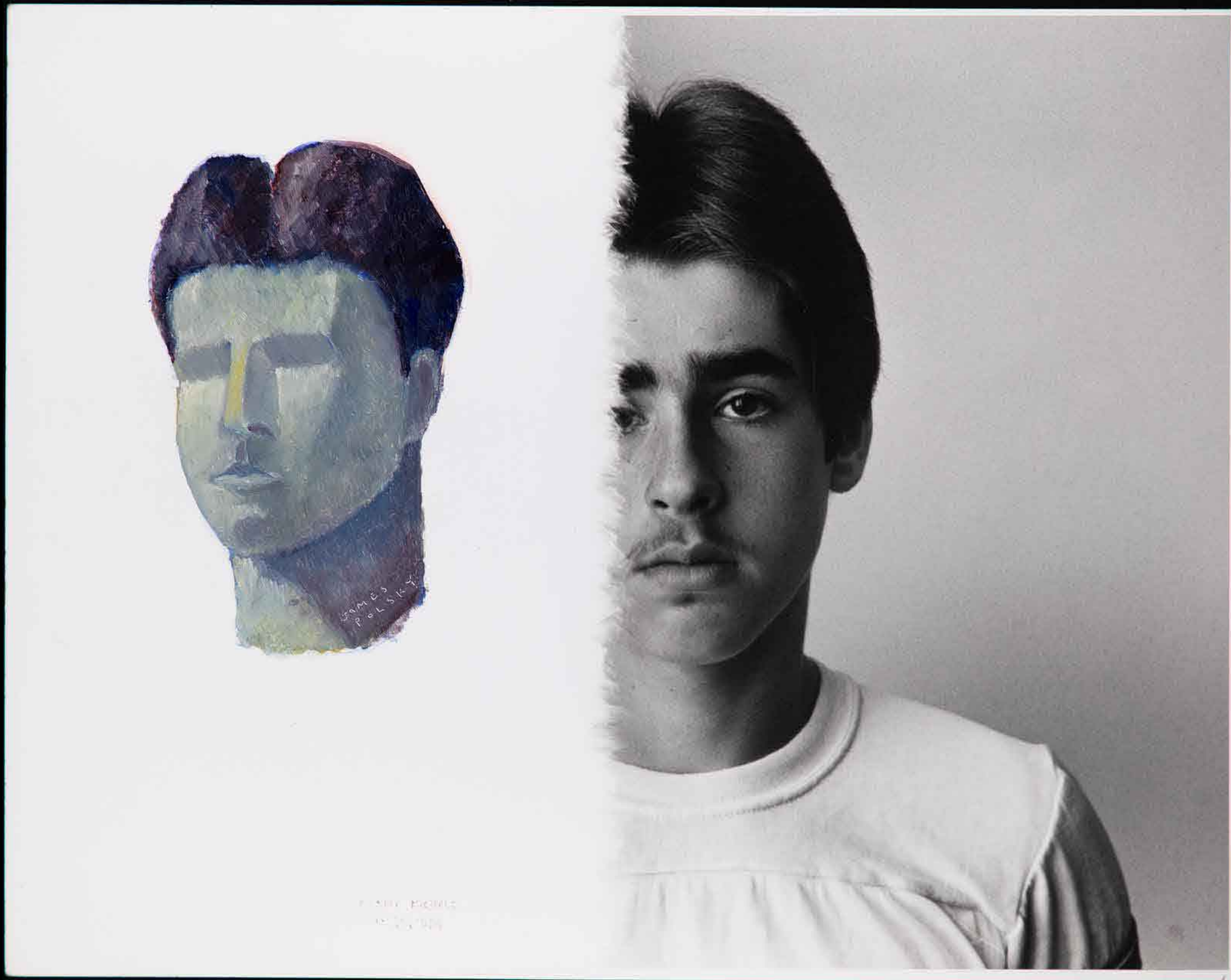
**SO WHAT?**









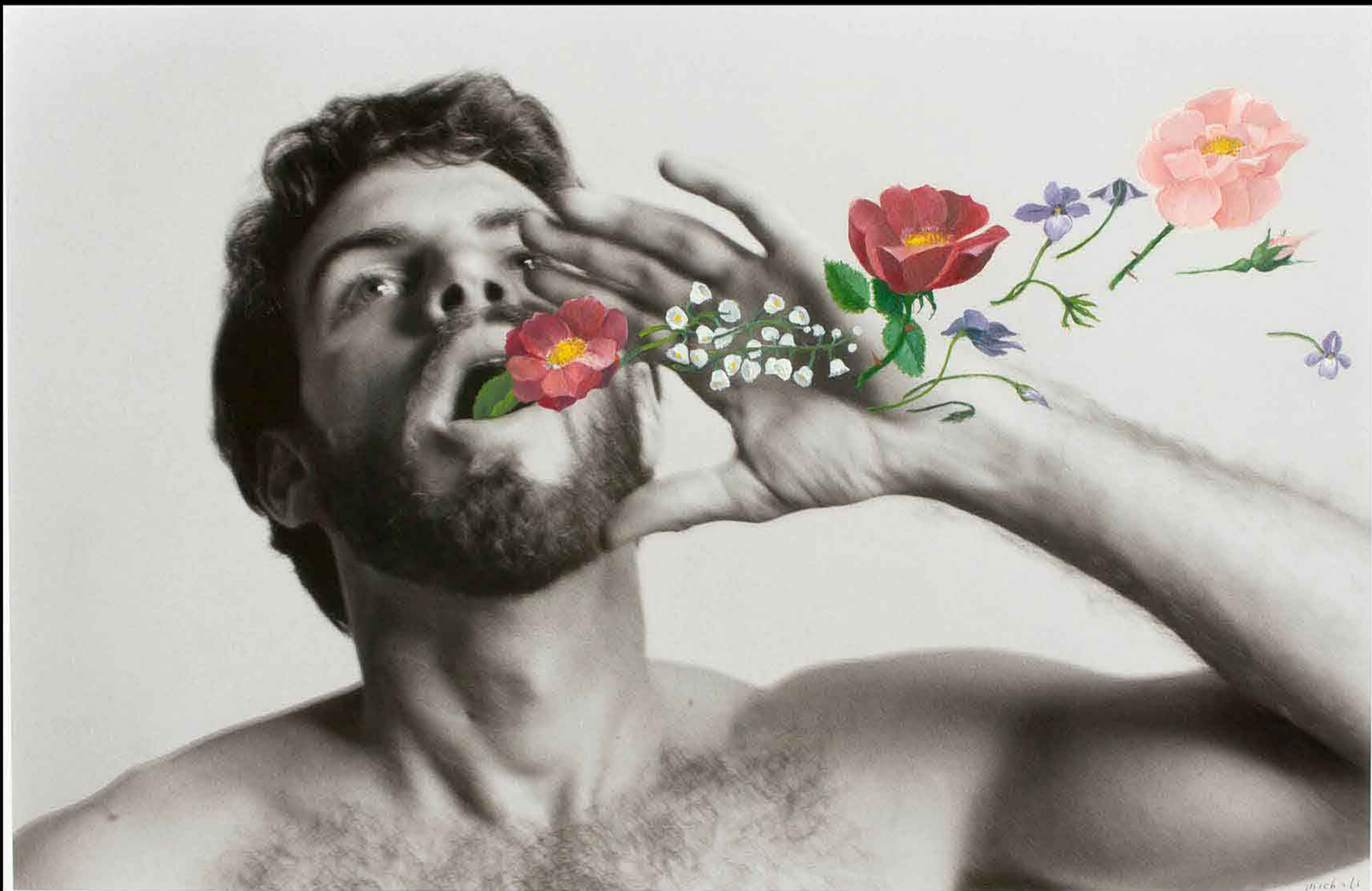


**POLSKY**

**I DID A PHOTO-PAINTING ONLY OF THREE SEASONS BECAUSE I COULD NOT THINK OF HOW TO RENDER WINTER.**

**BUT I WILL. SNOWFLAKES?**





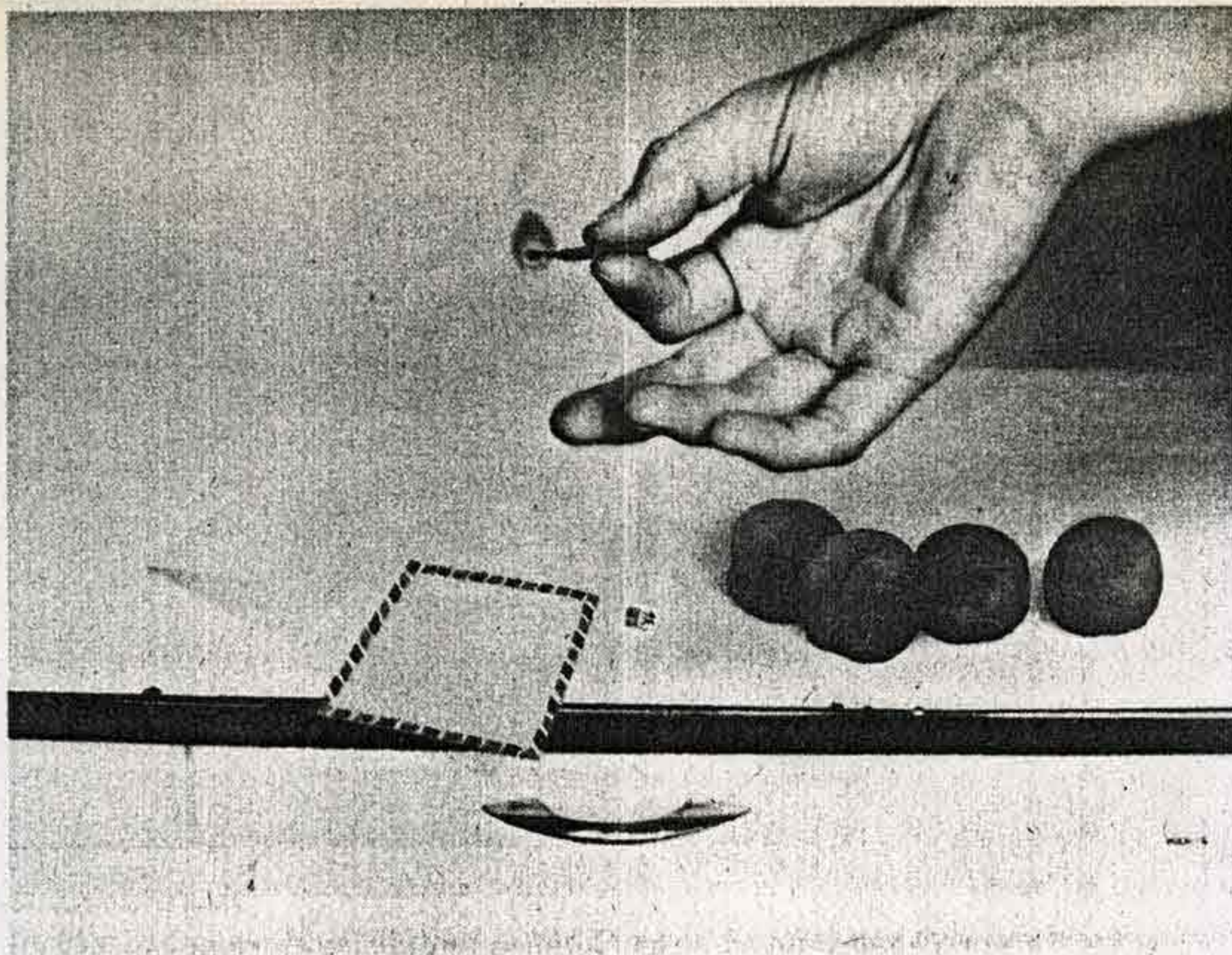
**PRIMAVERA  
(SPRING)**



**SUMMER**



**AUTUMN**



Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery

*'The Letter': Violating the purity of two mediums with a trompe l'oeil fantasy*

## The Camera and the Brush

In the venerable war between painting and photography, the intrepid Duane Michals has lately raced into the thick of the battle, inviting fire from both sides. He is currently displaying, at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, his own "painterly" photographs, in which black and white images are enlivened by daubs and slashes of oil paint. Even more shocking, he has "decorated" works by legendary masters. The Paris show includes "White Bresson," a 1934 portrait of two Mexican prostitutes by Henri Cartier-Bresson that Michals has covered with layers of rich white paint. In New York, at the Sidney Janis Gallery, Michals has taken one of the most famous photographs ever made—Ansel Adams's classic "Moon and Half-Dome, Yosemite National Park"—tilted it on its side and daubed it with three irreverently luscious pears, each one swimming in a gooey paste of bright-blue pigment. For photographic purists, this is rank heresy.

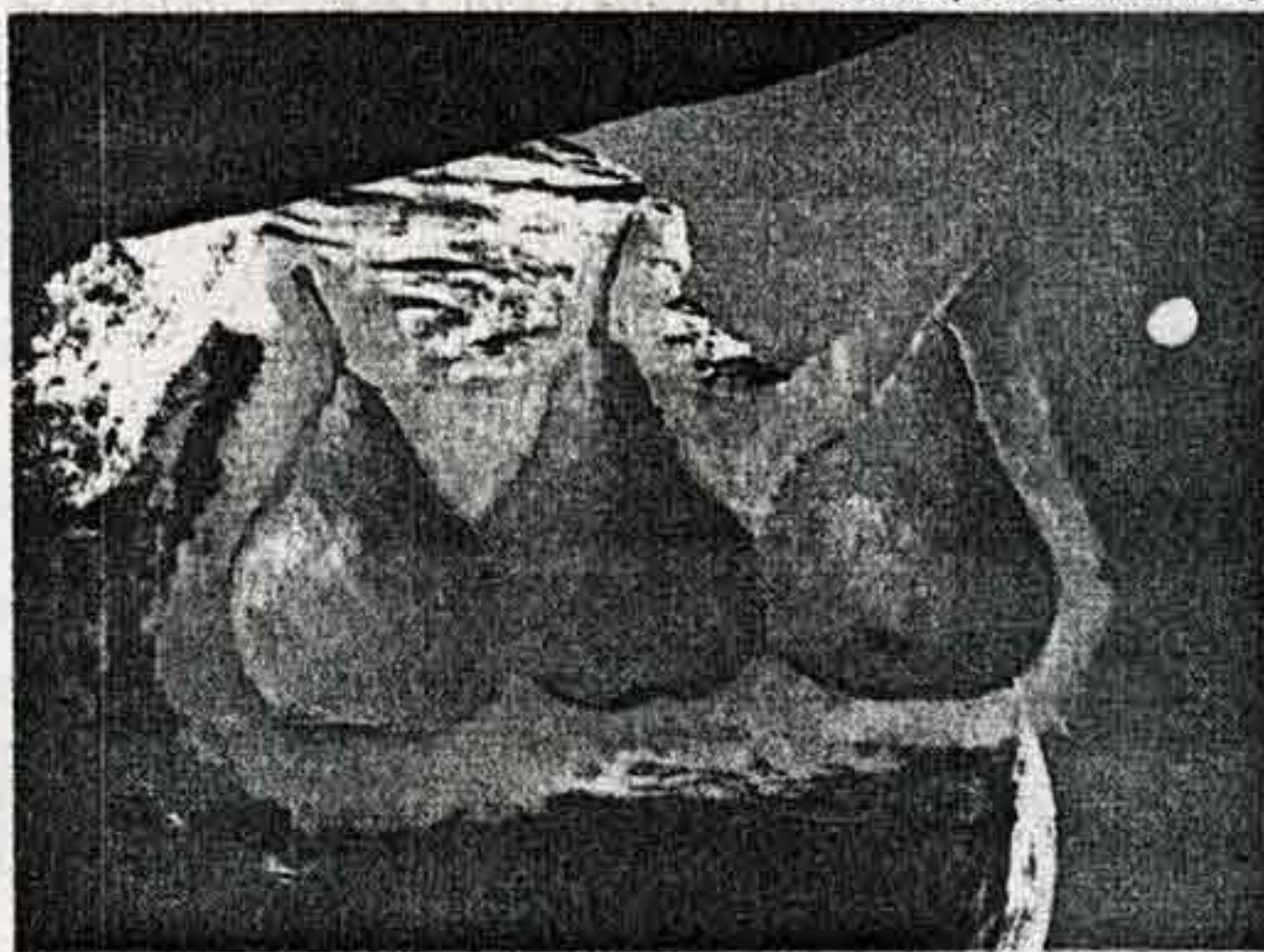
What's going on here? Is Michals attempting to trade on the glossy reputation of other photographers? Hardly. At 50, Michals himself possesses a reputation as glossy as anyone's. He's the acknowledged father of more fashionable trends in contemporary "art" photography than either Cartier-Bresson or Adams—as well as a successful commercial photographer in New York. In the '60s and '70s he pioneered the now

thriving genres known as "sequential" and "directorial" photography; he assembled casts of characters, photographed them in step-by-step incidents and later wrote narrative captions by hand on the print. The biting, often touching humor of these fables has won Michals a worldwide following that includes such distinguished intellectuals as the French social philosopher Michel Foucault, author of the ecstatic essay in the Paris Museum of Modern Art's catalog.

Now come these strange works suspended between two mediums. Take, for example, "The Letter," also displayed at Sidney Janis, in which Michals the director has combined with Michals the painter to pro-

*'Blue Ansel Adams': 'Decorating' a classic*

Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery

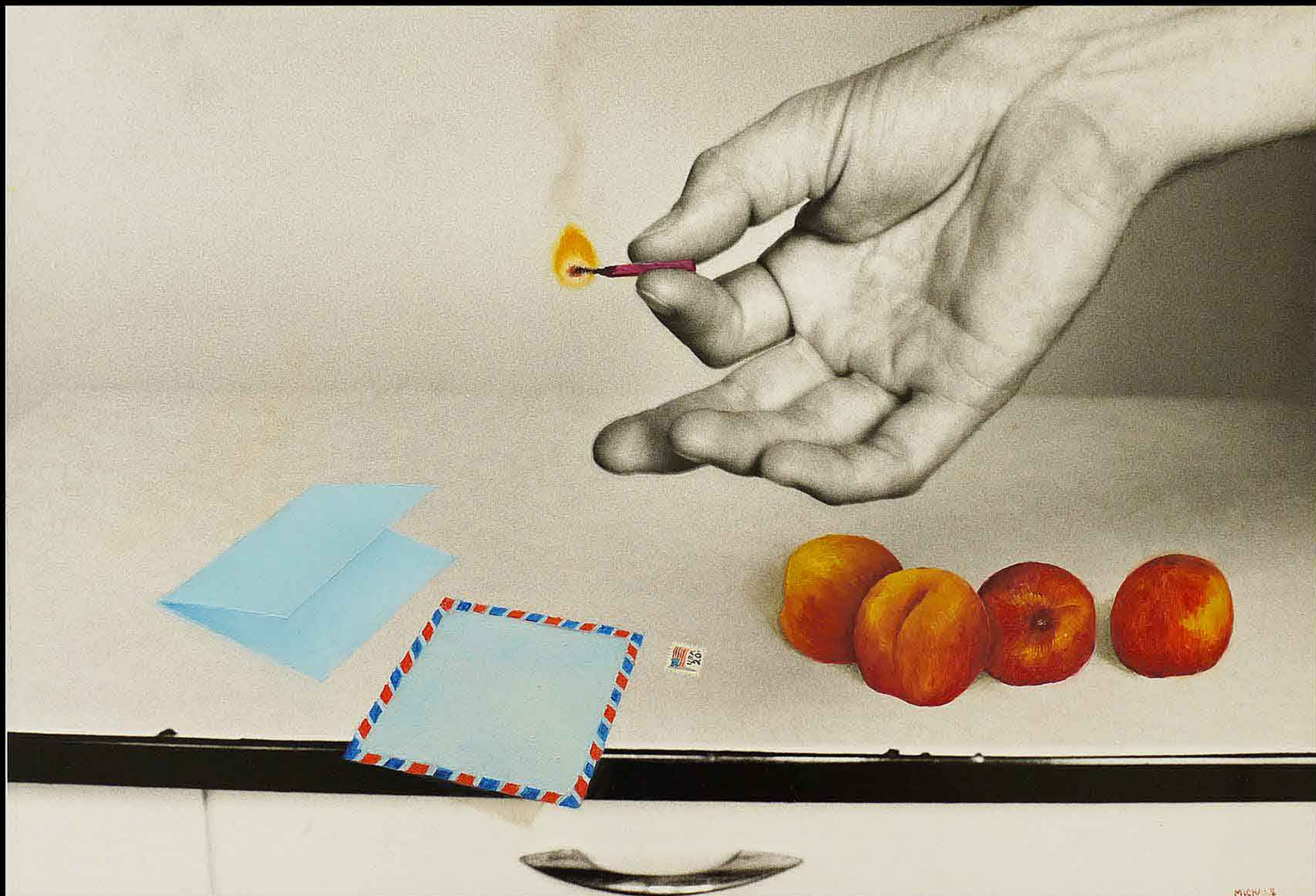


duce a thoroughly original trompe l'oeil fantasy. We see a gray-toned photographic hand reaching rather threateningly toward a blue airmail letter. The finger and thumb hold a vivid red match bursting into a menacing flame. The picture plays games with the spectator on several levels. Is the match painted or photographed? Since we know that photographs copy the real world and paintings invent it, is this another way of asking what is real and what is fiction? Above all, why is the letter about to be torched? Behind all of these questions the artist seems to be enjoying his own game of hide-and-seek—and hoping to provoke the viewer into providing his own answers. As Michals once said, "I'm really interested in the mind rather than in looking. I do not walk the streets with my camera looking for life. To me the most important thing is to question."

**Entrenched Foe:** Since 1980 Michals has broadened his questioning to include the highest levels of art. He was already an entrenched foe of "pure" modernist photographers, who insist that neither the negative nor the uncaptioned print be touched. His sequences and handwritten captions assailed that ground long ago. Now he is violating the purity of two mediums at once, returning to the once despised 19th-century tradition of enhancing portraits and landscapes with the brush. In an era when photo-realist painters have tried unsuccessfully to copy the unblinking veracity of the camera, he is reversing the process. Starting with the camera, he is raising his images to a new and richer level, between the real and the surreal.

Michals is not yet the master of his own protean invention. Some of his outraged critics have correctly pointed out that his hand as a painter is hardly as sure as his photographer's eye. Yet he has once again embarked on a provocative line of investigation, and others are already following him: younger artists have begun to exhibit marked, tinted and painted photographs in Europe and the United States. What's more, Michals has clearly touched a post-modern nerve in the appropriation and reinterpretation of iconic images like Adams's "Moon and Half-Dome." His most ambitious foray into the new territory comes near the end of the New York show. It is a photograph of the same square in Paris that the artist Balthus painted 30 years ago. To the image he has added—with his brush—figures similar to those found in Balthus's famous painting "Passage du Commerce-St.-André," a casual assortment of strolling men, women, children. One of the men, seated on the ground near the side of the square, looks suspiciously like Duane Michals himself. Whether intentional or not, this figure suggests a sort of truce between the two mediums. Here the photographer has painted himself into a corner in his own photograph.

DOUGLAS DAVIS



MICHAEL

# THE LETTER



**PORTRAIT OF RICHARD WHELAN AND A WHITE CUP  
1980**



**RICHARD GERE ASLEEP**  
**1979**



**RED RED RED**  
**1984**



**THESE EARLY PAINTINGS WERE DRESS REHEARSALS FOR A SHOW THAT NEVER OPENED ON BROADWAY.**

**I FIRST CAME TO NEW YORK WITHOUT AN ART AGENDA, TOO SENSIBLE TO CONSIDER PAINTING A PLAYER IN THE THEATER OF MY LIFE.**

**STILL I REMAINED A CLOSETED ART ADDICT AND NOW I AM A JUNKIE.**

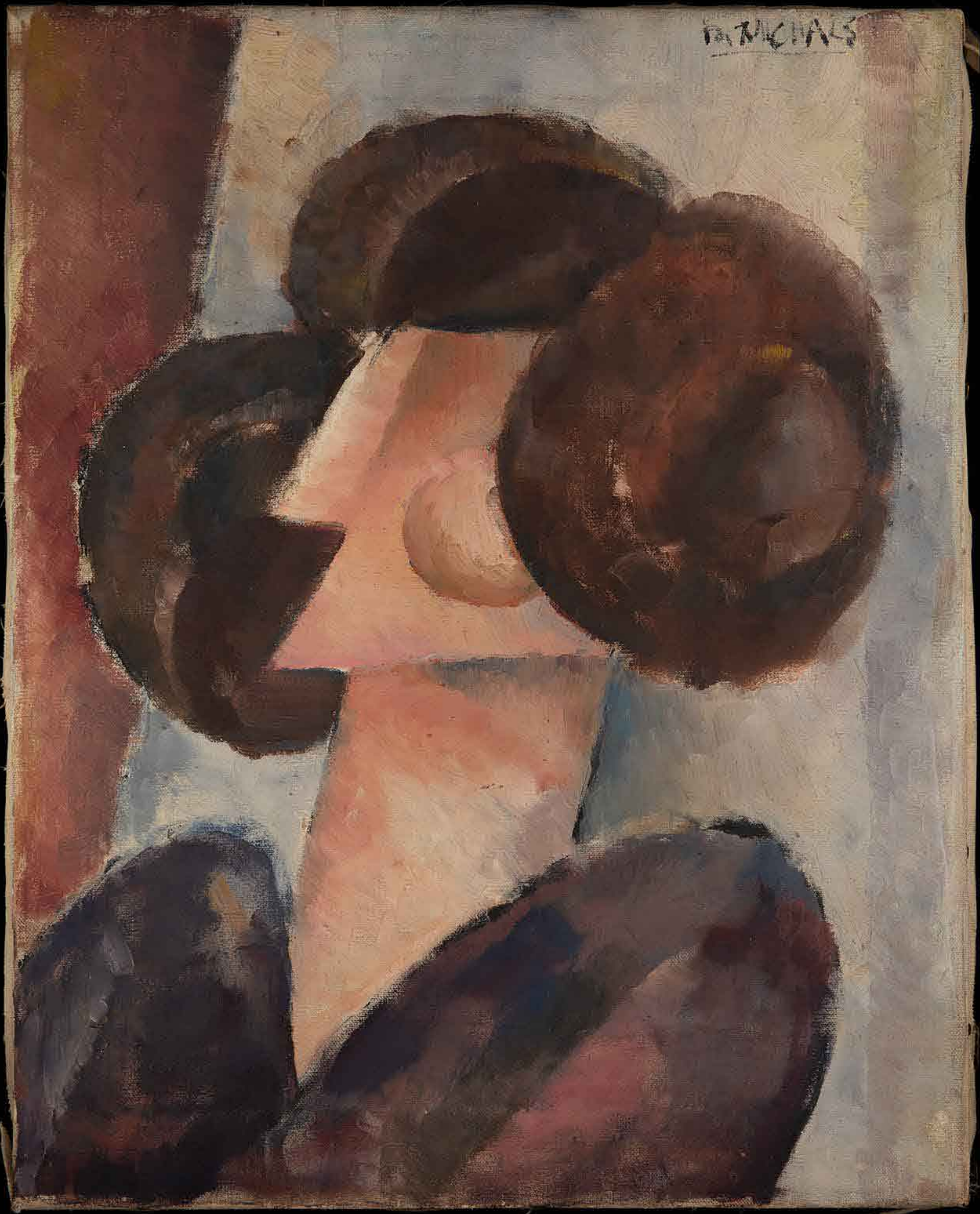




MICHAELS



FAMICIAS



**ON SEPTEMBER 9TH, 2020 I PAINTED A  
PORTRAIT OF MY FRIEND ROBESPIERRE. I  
WORKED FROM THIS DRAWING.**



**HIS HAIR MADE ME SEA SICK.**





MORRESPIERRE