

The New York Times

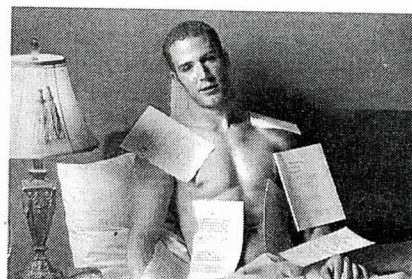
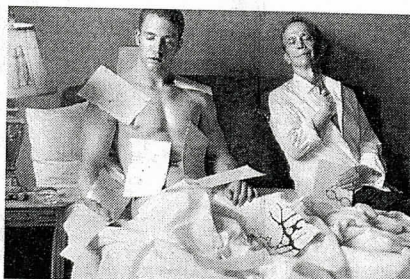
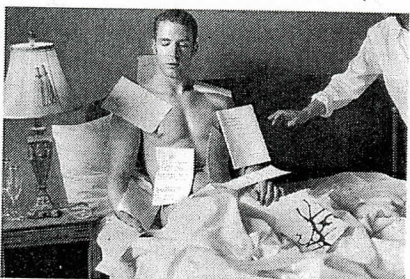
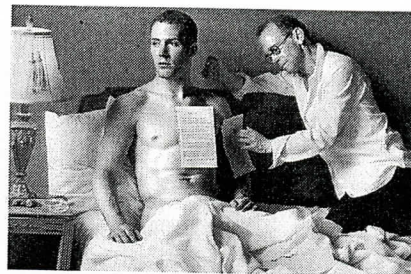
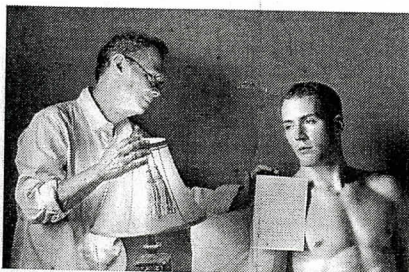
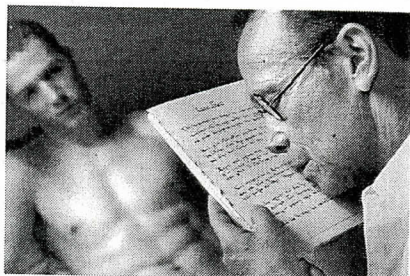
# Arts & LEISURE

| DIRECTIONS |

## How to Act Like a Poet in Black and White

Duane Michals and Joel Grey honor Cavafy, with stickies and bare-chested model.

*The poet decorates his muse with verse*



Pace/MacGill Gallery

Duane Michals's photographic sequences, often as poignant as they are witty, have been likened to visual poems. Constantin Cavafy's poems were of the more traditional variety — words strung together on a page. But in Mr. Michals's new series, "The Adventures of Constantin Cavafy" (on exhibit at Pace MacGill Gallery in New York), the two come together in imagined scenes from the poet's life that reflect themes in his poetry. Cavafy was unable to participate, having died in 1933, so he is played by the actor Joel Grey.

In "Homage to Cavafy," an earlier volume of his photographs published in 1978, Mr. Michals described the gay, Greek poet as a man of great feeling and even greater courage. "He lived then, as we still do to-

day, among those brute people who would literally destroy him both physically and spiritually for the unforgivable sin of loving the wrong person."

Mr. Grey was asked by phone how he prepared for the role of Cavafy. "I didn't," he said. "I had a suit and a pair of glasses of the sort that Cavafy wore." On the spur of the moment, he'd get a call from Mr. Michals, who would say: "I have an idea. Are you around? Can we do it today?"

Acting in still photographs turned out to be a different proposition than in the theater, Mr. Grey said. "Onstage the actor is more autonomous. Onstage, the actor has the last word." But when acting for a camera, "you have to trust the photographer," he said. "It's a leap of faith." In fact, Mr.

Grey added, he felt more like Mr. Michals's assistant than his muse.

The fact that, as Mr. Michals noted, the actor has a similar bearing to the poet was a help. But how far does bearing go in a tableau like "The Poet Decorates His Muse With Verse," above, a parable about the value of poetry both to define the object of desire and satisfy the longing for it?

For the photographer, however, the series doesn't require a Ph.D. in literature to understand. "All these stories are couched in being an older man myself," Mr. Michals said from his weekend home in upstate New York. "When you're young, you're all future and no past. Time gives you perspective on your youth."

PHILIP GEFTER