

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

April 30, 2007

Art & Pam

Filed under: [Pamela Anderson](#) — alecsothblog @ 2:12 am

I'm struggling to digest all of the art I've seen in the last week, much less regurgitate it on the blog. Looking for help, I've turned to the guru of American abundance, Pamela Anderson:

"I don't really think about anything too much. I live in the present. I move on. I don't think about what happened yesterday. If I think too much, it kind of freaks me out." Pamela Anderson

It kind of freaks me out too. The gluttony started in the belly of the beast: Chelsea. There was a lot of caca on display, but the absolute worst was Sante D'Orazio at the [Stellan Holm Gallery](#). D'Orazio showed thirty-two pictures of a young Latina model scantily clad in a Catholic schoolgirl uniform. The project is called *Katlick School* (the model's name is Kat....get it). Does this all sound a little shallow. No way. Read what D'Orazio said about the project on Page 6 of the [New York Post](#):

The book is about a young girl going into her own womanhood and the outfit is only a symbol of purity which is transformed into a symbol of the bad girl. It's really all about symbolism and mythology. Every artist I've shown the book has been blown away.

(If you really want to be blown away, watch [this cartoon](#) about the project on Gawker)

This is D'Orazio's second show at Stellan Holm. The first was [nude pictures](#) of Pamela Anderson. In an interview on [pamelazone.com](#), Ms. Anderson described the show:

I like the experience of being in a shoot, and I'm a total exhibitionist, but I don't like to look at them. Sante sent me some on my computer, and I was kind of blown away. I can't imagine them blown up.

D'Orazio isn't the first to blow up pictures of Anderson for the galleries. Marilyn Minter currently has a photograph of Anderson in a group show at [Smith-Stewart](#). Here Anderson talks about working with Minter on her online diary:



3/23/2007
Dreams...

Happy spring! Lots of work coming up. Great show in development. Working with great artists. I'm so flattered to be working with Marilyn Minter these next few days. Very exciting. I love her work. These are my dreams.

Anderson should be flattered. Minter is a thousand times more interesting than D'Orazio. She's as interested in the freckles as the fantasy.

"I've always been interested in people with so-called flaws," Minter says in [this video](#) interview with CreativeTime.



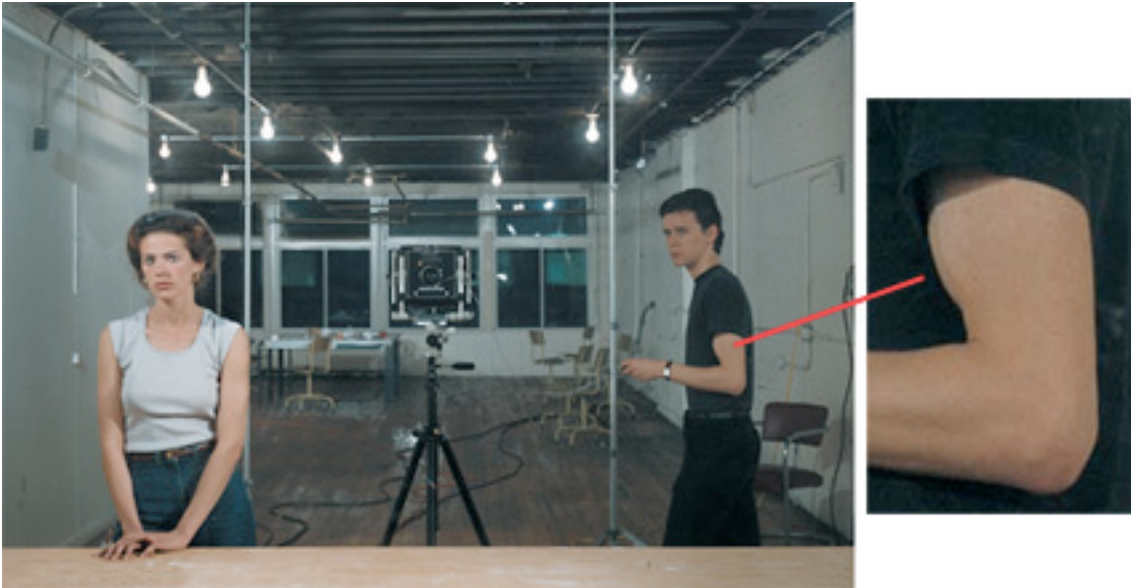
Unarmed (Pamela Anderson) by Marilyn Minter

After Chelsea I made a trip up to MOMA and saw the [Jeff Wall retrospective](#). It was the perfect antidote to D'Orazio. I've always liked the work of Wall, but I've been skeptical of the lightboxes. Seeing them isolated in a collection, they always struck me as trying too hard. But with the brilliant installation at MOMA, I was able to forget the apparatus and enter the pictures. I even liked the size.

"Size does matter. There's a lot of ways to make people feel good, but personally I think it does enhance things." Pamela Anderson

In 1991, Vince Aletti wrote [an excellent article](#) on big photographs. "For too many photographers bigger is not better," he said, "a weak image doesn't suddenly look important when it's blown up to the size of a store window." Wall's images aren't weak, but they sometimes feign weakness. The size of the prints seems essential to understanding this dynamic.

I've probably seen Wall's *'Picture for Women'* reproduced a thousand times. But until seeing the 5×7 foot image at MOMA, I never really felt the presence of Wall's bicep while he clicked the shutter. This detail seems essential:



After admiring Wall's muscles, I visited the [Taryn Simon show](#) at the Whitney museum. I'd recently acquired Simon's book, *'An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar.'* The book is so good that it almost makes an exhibition unnecessary. But, like Wall, Simon leans toward the conceptually chilly. So her surprisingly sensual prints can be a relief. I was especially touched by the details in her print of Kenny the retarded Tiger:



White Tiger (Kenny) Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge Eureka Springs, AR. by Taryn Simon

I left New York surprising optimistic about photography. Wall and Simon had my head in the conceptual clouds. But I was quickly brought back down to earth after visiting [Art Chicago](#). As usual, the toxic mix of money and decontextualized art was nearly devastating. For the record, I think these fairs have a lot of good work and I'm grateful for the business that gets done. I'm just not sure it is healthy for artists to spend much time watching this business get done.

"I'm not an actress. I don't think I am an actress. I think I've created a brand and a business." Pamela Anderson.

It is easy to become cynical. After too much time at the fair, you begin wondering if the successful artists are the ones who've devoted themselves to branding and business. So thank God for [Chicagraphy](#). On Saturday night I attended the opening of [an excellent exhibition](#) curated by Brian Ulrich and Jon Gitelson. The organic mix of good art and MGD (in cans, of course) helped erase my art fair cynicism.

"I found I could be happy and throw up at the same time." Pamela Anderson

25 Comments

1. I completely agree about artists and art fairs. The limited exposure I've to those in London has left me thinking about seeking a gentler occupation like stock-broking or corporate law.

I'm glad you found some nuggets amongst the caca. And Pamela always adds to The Gaiety Of The Nation.

Comment by [guybatey](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [3:07 am](#)

2. Wow wow wee waa, you are real man! High Five!

Comment by [Borat](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [3:31 am](#)

3. Dear Alec, I have been reading your blog for a long time and I really appreciate it. I also get the same feeling at art fairs. After 1 or 2 hours of seeing so many works on the walls you start to get tired and distracted. It is then that you start noticing all the business frenzy and commercial side of it, with gallerists trying to spot the people that might become potential buyers (usually wearing nice suits) and artists just trying to much. I know selling is an important part of a artist's life, after all we all have bills to pay and a living to make, but sometimes I feel that this need of selling and constant attention from the media and curators, makes some good artists loose touch with their art.

I am glad to see that you still have both feet on the ground.

Comment by [carlos lobo](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [4:06 am](#)

4. Great post. Thanks, Alec (and Pam).

Comment by [Christian](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [8:09 am](#)

5. Appreciate your post and viewpoints about artist branding, art commodification and fair frenzy. But, I see nothing wrong with an artist trying to make a decent living from sales of his/her art to further a full-time working artist career. Art is business, unless you are dealing with public art, education and therapy and even those arenas have underlying business practices. So to procure the businss, you have to employ business tactics which do include marketing, sales and branding. The more money in art, the more art fairs to get more exposure for artists, and more artists can afford supplies, rent and daily expenses. Like it or not, marketing yourself is essential to make a living. And I can assure you that people like Brian Ulrich employ guerilla marketing tactics to brand his copa art movement in Chicago. Whether is overt or subtle, it really does not matter. To be in business, you have to play the game.

Comment by [tamara](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [8:33 am](#)

6. That D'Orazio stuff is too funny
thanks for the post
Can't there be love for us unwashed masses though?

Comment by [Dan](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [8:40 am](#)

7. sadly you missed the best show in town – Tod Papageorge 'Passing Through Eden' at Pace McGill. wonderful work, and not shown for 25 years.
get the book for a great afterword too – he really is one of the few bright sensitive minds in contemporary photography.

Taryn Simon is somewhat a triumph of production over imagery. i.e. the locations and organization involve in finding/ getting/ accessing there, is more interesting than the pictures. she knows how to get a good team around here and gather support. not quite there yet, but certainly someone to watch.

Jeff Wall – his best works are homages to Winogrand/ Street Photography. ('mimic', the exploding milk image, the people crossing the bridge with cases) and the small studio still lifes. Not that 99% of the art world has a clue who Winogrand is. the rest are mostly laborious photo-illustration. sorry, 'near documentary'.

Comment by peter yardley — April 30, 2007 @ [9:30 am](#)

8. Man, I love Wall's photo illustration work. To me that is the last stop in the progression of photography as 'fine art'

Comment by [Dan](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [12:51 pm](#)

9. Wow. This has to be the BEST blog post I've ever read. They keep getting better and better, Alec. Keep up the fantastic work! (both photographically and bloggically speaking...)

Comment by Beth Wilson — April 30, 2007 @ [1:47 pm](#)

10. That was a real good post. You're back on your A-game lately Alec.

Comment by Sam Logan — April 30, 2007 @ [2:57 pm](#)

11. *Anderson should be flattered. Minter is a thousand times more interesting than D'Orazio. She's as interested in the freckles as the fantasy.*

I can't tell for sure whether that's a compliment or damning with faint praise.

Comment by [Jen Bekman](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [4:27 pm](#)

12. Good post. Pamela? I thought that was Cameron Diaz. Wait pan a bit or a lot lower. I like the Wall Photos but the light boxes are over powering.

Comment by [mark](#) — April 30, 2007 @ [5:49 pm](#)

13. Kenny the Tiger is.

Comment by J Ake — April 30, 2007 @ [11:31 pm](#)

14. Seriously amazing post Alec. Your writing on photography blows me away. It makes sense you are easily one of the most important contemporary photographers out there right now.

Comment by Ben — April 30, 2007 @ [11:37 pm](#)

15. i really liked the taryn simon show as well, but jeff wall felt kind of flat to me. i'll admit that i entered with skepticism, and while it was exciting to see so much of his work together, i still didn't feel like it transcended my expectations.

Comment by [carey](#) — May 1, 2007 @ [7:53 am](#)

16. I am pondering about the word "caca". Didn't find it in the dictionary. Does it mean: redundant noise? I also was thinking about the word:cacophony. But first of all it reminded me of a hungarian childhood word: kaka is the childs word for shit.

Comment by Zoltán Jókay — May 1, 2007 @ [8:16 am](#)

17. This year art chicago had a thing called the artist project where unrepresented artist could get a booth for the duration of the show, it was near the bridge art fair. Yes there was some serious art

sales menship going on, but I can tell you as someone who sat in a booth for four days, I did a lot more meeting than selling. I came out out tired but feeling great, like many unconnected artist I have a box full of rejection letters and to actually get some face time with some gallery types was great, also to meet the general art public and have them like what I was doing felt good too, I'd do it again in a second. Art is not as different from any other biz as we'd like to think, most of us don't get that and wallow in obscurity, some people see how to work the system and do quite well, this weekend I got a little insight on how the other half lives and it's pretty nice.

Comment by [doug mcgoldrick](#) — May 1, 2007 @ [10:08 pm](#)

18. I didn't even notice how long the post was until I looked back at it.

Comment by [Nate Twedten](#) — May 1, 2007 @ [10:25 pm](#)

19. Many wallow in fame,
Many revel in obscurity.

Comment by [Ignatius J. Reilly](#) — May 2, 2007 @ [8:14 am](#)

20. Hi Alec,
Your comment about D'orazio brings home an important point: no matter how hard one tries to intellectualize or self mythologize, at the end of the day the work speaks for itself. Shallow is as shallow does.

Comment by [Song Chong](#) — May 2, 2007 @ [9:36 am](#)

21. Alec,

Since I got an **A** on your *Spectrum 2.0* assignment, I think the least you can do is do a nice job with [this one](#).

P.S. Pam says you should.

Comment by [Shane Lavalette](#) — May 2, 2007 @ [3:42 pm](#)

22. [...] alec soth - blog photographica, miscellanea, etcetera < Art & Pam [...]

Pingback by [alec soth - blog » Blog Archive » Art & Borat](#) — May 2, 2007 @ [5:51 pm](#)

23. Is the Minter stuff more interesting? I dont know...that seems like such a cliché art opinion to take. 'We artists hate pin-ups, we seek the truth...' I dunno. My gut instinct as a young male is I like trashy pictures of attractive women, but that kind of feeling is just about the surface of the photos. I cant say that I'm particularly particularly interested in Pam Anderson that much at all...even more so pictures of her not dolled up. I think art needs more gut-feelings. I can say proudly that all the intellectual stuff since duchamp makes my head spin.

Comment by [Dan](#) — May 3, 2007 @ [8:36 am](#)

24. That Sante D'Orazio was so terrible. My teacher said "I hate this. It makes it hard to teach when you know your students are coming to chelsea and then seeing shows like this."

Comment by [Ben Hider](#) — May 9, 2007 @ [7:19 pm](#)

25. But surely you can't be serious about calling Jeff Wall's work conceptual even the most broadest sense. I'd take Prince over Wall any day because Prince, at least, is honest about being a prankster/con-man.

Wall falls into line with the Crewdson / Gursky line of photography. Scale at the expense of meaning, and zero content...

Comment by Nonce — May 16, 2007 @ [7:24 pm](#)