

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

November 15, 2006

9 reasons I have a crush on Alex Majoli

Filed under: [artists](#), [Magnum](#) — alecsothblog @ 1:53 am

Last week my friend Wendy and I were on our way to Brooklyn to have dinner at Alex Majoli's apartment when she asked, "Why do you have such a crush on him?" (Wendy had never met Alex – after dinner she understood). Here are my reasons:

1) In 2004 I applied to Magnum. The night before the members voted on my application I attended a Magnum party in New York. The room was packed with great photographers from around the world. I was intimidated. One photographer approached me and said, "I just want to tell you that I don't like your pictures and I'm not voting for you." Scrambling for the door, I was stopped by Alex Majoli. Majoli is tall (I'm guessing 6'5"), Italian, and looks the way a photographer should look. I prepared myself for another lashing. Instead, he grabbed my face in his enormous hand and said "Good pictures, good pictures."

2) Majoli is a laid-back overachiever. When he was 15, he joined the F45 Studio in Ravenna. When he was 18 he became a full-time photojournalist. Since then he's won all the prizes (Infinity Award, Magazine Photographer of the Year, etc). Despite this he comes across as casual and unhurried. Many overachievers are annoying. Majoli is just the opposite.

3) This is probably obvious, but Majoli is a bad-ass photographer. One example from Majoli's book [Leros](#):



A patient and a care worker lie in the sun. ©Alex Majoli

4) Majoli sings Samba. Listen [here](#).

5) Majoli makes amazing polenta

6) Over the last few decades professional photographers have become increasingly specialized. Majoli has resisted this trend. "I want to photograph everything," he said in an interview (watch it [here](#)). He's produced iconic war images, sensual fashion work and austere portraits. But I wouldn't limit Majoli as a generalist. More and more these diverse subjects are being woven into a remarkably unified vision.

7) As this vision becomes unified, many of the pictures are becoming simpler. Majoli has been stripping away content. The results are stunning. Here are a few examples:



Paris, the 18th District, 2000 ©Alex Majoli



Fashion week, New York, 2005 ©Alex Majoli



Murambi Genocide Memorial, Rwanda, 2006. ©Alex Majoli

8) "I don't need 20 million megapixels" Majoli isn't afraid of amateur cameras. Read an interview [here](#).

9) Majoli is friends with Cat Power:



Chan Marshall, Memphis, Tennessee. 2005. ©Alex Majoli

30 Comments

1. Excellent stuff. I look forward to "Soth – the CoolShot Years".

Comment by [guybatey](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [4:02 am](#)

2. intimidated? I'd be shaking like a freak if i was in your shoes!
Im shocked that a magnum photographer blasted your work out of the door without even giving an explanation, surely the whole point is about learning and growing?

Alex's work is beyond words sometimes, and from the sounds of it i think his personality plays a massive part in that work.

Your work is brilliant, but you know that and don't need a newbie telling you that we have a crush on you haha

moving on!!

Comment by [Daniel](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [7:27 am](#)

3. i would like to be friends with Cat Power.

Comment by [chad](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [8:16 am](#)

4. I have checked out your blog from time to time and you have amongst many other things incredible generosity towards other creative individuals. This is an inspiring quality. Your article on Alex Majoli substantiates this.
Best wishes

Comment by [Andrew](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [8:23 am](#)

5. It's entertaining to read from a pro PJ shooting with that small oly, while the average photo forum amateur is stuffed with five times as much megapixel cameras and a set of oversized 2.8 Canon / Nikon zooms for weekends in the park... Since that interview is from 2005 and he's mentioning a sort of

"digital Leica", I wonder if Majoli has an M8 on order already.

Comment by [B. S. Ilkac](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [8:38 am](#)

6. Loved that interview with Majoli! It made me feel very good about my humble equipment, particularly my Olympus OM2 and Olympus XA.

Thanks for introducing me to this fine photographer (I honestly don't keep up with the big names very well).

Comment by [Renee](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [9:03 am](#)

7. Nothing at all humble about an Olympus OM2 Renee – the wonderful Jane Bown of "The Observer" has made all her photographs with an Olympus OM1 and a 50mm f1.8 lens:

http://observer.guardian.co.uk/special_report/gallery1/0,6903,212487,00.html

http://observer.guardian.co.uk/special_report/gallery1/0,,212485,00.html

Comment by [guybatey](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [9:47 am](#)

8. i am a huge fan of your work and of alex majoli's but i would like to hear more about the female photogs on magnum who you admire!!

Comment by carolyn — November 15, 2006 @ [11:31 am](#)

9. the interview about his use of point-and-shoots is really intriguing. i'd be interested to know if he uses any special techniques in PS to achieve the look of his digital black-and-whites (beyond the boosting of the contrast that he mentions). the flatness of most digital b&w conversions has always been a turn-off for me.

Comment by j zorn — November 15, 2006 @ [12:33 pm](#)

10. Alec, have you seen Alex's show as part of the Off Broadway collective? I saw it in Milan and was quite perplexed, it seemed that he, Pellegrin, Dworzak and the others were pushing photojournalism to such an avantgarde level that it kind of flew past the whole journalistic discourse. I was really surprised by the lack of cut-lines which seemed to decontestualize all the photos.

I always imagined Alex to be a really laid back guy, I think that's part of the reason he's been able to conjugate so well personal vision and documentary photography. I can't think of another photographer except him and Pellegrin who has pushed black and white so far and in so many different directions in the last few years. Maybe Italian neorealism is making a definitive comeback, except Fellini already did neo-neorealism, maybe what Alex is doing is neo-neo-neorealism.

You're not the only one to have a crush, for us Italians Alex is an almost an institution.

Comment by [Lorenzo](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [2:03 pm](#)

11. Alex is such a brilliant photographer, but to be honest, it's reasons #5 & #9 that really turn me on!

Comment by [Will](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [5:13 pm](#)

12. Great anecdote.

It's always wonderful to see that a good shooter is a good person as well.

Comment by [Clint](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [5:23 pm](#)

13. [...] [...]

Pingback by [TrentHead.Com » Blog Archive » 9 reasons I have a crush on Alex Majoli](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [6:02 pm](#)

14. i'm interested in the polenta, as well. what was in it?

Comment by [aizan](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [9:31 pm](#)

15. Who was it who told you they weren't voting for you, bless 'em

Comment by [colin](#) — November 17, 2006 @ [8:46 am](#)

16. Alex Majoli's pictures are amazing and beautiful. That he uses a "point & shoot" camera is more of a reflection of the lack of a suitable light, quiet digital camera. The Leica M8 is almost too much of a status symbol- precious and expensive: a dentist's or lawyer's "objet d'art". I have a Canon 5D, and while it is a wonderful capable camera, I don't always want that bulk of electronics foisted on me everytime I take a picture. Why can't digital camera manufacturers make a manual focus rangefinder with fast compact prime lenses ?

Comment by [ford](#) — November 17, 2006 @ [12:46 pm](#)

17. [...] <http://alecsoth.com/blog/2006/11/15/9-reasons-i-have-a-crush-on-alex-majoli/> [...]

Pingback by [Ball-Saal Blog » Blog Archive » Interesting post at the alecsoth.com/blog](#) — November 18, 2006 @ [8:33 am](#)

18. Ah...thank you for those photos. I needed them tonight.

Comment by [Eric Hancock](#) — November 18, 2006 @ [10:07 pm](#)

19. that first photograprer was a total asshole. It is seriously impossible to hate your work. I am not much of a fan of photo j's so I probably wouldn't like his work. This comment shouldn't have had any effect on you because you are probably one of the best photographers working today. Hands down. Period.

Comment by [Bob](#) — November 19, 2006 @ [10:02 pm](#)

20. I don't like your pictures and books either but I like your writing and the way you are on. I stumbled to this site and felt that I must say great work you are doing.

Comment by [Ali Riza Kutlu](#) — November 21, 2006 @ [2:44 pm](#)

21. i'm glad you have a crush on alex majoli, congratulations, and his work is very good, but to say he's resisted the trend of specialization is ridiculous - his war pictures look like his fashion pictures which look like his portraits which look like everything he shoots. it's not that he isn't good, but it all looks like straight photojournalism to this observer. if he has a vision, it appears to be very similar to the vision of the traditional magnum photojournalist, and in many ways, interchangeable with theirs.

i wonder, if i showed you his pictures mixed with those of several other photographers like zizzola, uimonen, bendikson, and pretty much every member of VII.

what was special was the way he had kind words to an anxious applicant.

Comment by [john kerren](#) — November 23, 2006 @ [12:15 pm](#)

22. Kerren is right abt Majoli nice but standardized magnum pictures. With a few exceptions (Parr) all magnums shoot with the same cameras (leicas and now with eossss) which are kind of looking at a visual trade mark to look reliable for big clients almost all very conservative. Soth also come from an american and or german lineage back from the New Objectivity photographers. Anyway when I see a good photograph (the one that communicates with me) i don't even consider any aesthetics involved, or maybe much later on a second scanning. As my masters came from art and docs (Rodchenko and Winogrand) you know what kind of pictures I love. SNAPSHOTS !!!!

Comment by [andré bonito](#) — November 25, 2006 @ [10:27 am](#)

23. [...] "I want to photograph everything" says Magnum photographer Alex Majoli at the beginning of this interview. [Link via Alec Soth's blog] [...]

Pingback by [I want to photograph everything « what's good](#) — November 26, 2006 @ [9:56 pm](#)

24. John & Andre, I appreciate your comments. But to me it sounds a bit like people who say 'all rap sounds the same.' (Or bluegrass, opera, abstract painting, etc). The work sounds or looks the same to people who don't appreciate the genre. Majoli certainly comes out of the photojournalism tradition. And I have no problem with you disliking photojournalism (or rap, for that matter). But I disagree that they all look alike. Do they have similarities? Yes, of course. This is because they are working within a certain idiom. Andre's appreciation of the snapshot aesthetic is a perfect example. For many people unfamiliar with

street photography, Winogrand looks identical to Friedlander. Only people familiar with the work can distinguish and appreciate the differences.

Andre's other comment that most Magnum photographers use Leica's or EOS's 'to look reliable for big clients' is funny. Do you have the phone numbers for the 'big clients' that like this kind of work – I'll pass them along. Beyond being flawed, your reasoning is profoundly cynical. It is like saying that a bluegrass musician plays an old fiddle to cash in on the big bluegrass market. Have you considered that the musician/photographer chooses their instrument because (1) they like it and (2) it is appropriate for the music they play? If these photographers started using Holga's and Lensbabies would you think their work is suitably fresh n' edgy?

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) – November 26, 2006 @ [10:27 pm](#)

25. good points, and while i was being a bit of an agitator in my comments (no offense meant at all), i feel that i do know the intricacies of the genre fairly well. while Alex Majoli's subject matter may vary greatly, and it certainly does, you may be better served looking at the work of people like jim goldberg and mary ellen mark (just two names that i can think of off-hand) to see photojournalists who truly move through the genre in different ways.

Comment by [john kerren](#) – November 27, 2006 @ [8:50 am](#)

26. I read your comments and I want just to thanks for your honorable criticts and your compliments. I'll keep those as lessons and encouragment on keep going on with this job. and I'll prepare a receipts book soon... chers alex

Comment by [alex majoli](#) – December 18, 2006 @ [9:05 am](#)

27. i think the quality of alex's work speaks for its self. i attended a workshop in cadiz with alex and found him to be very generous and inspiring. the comments above about the magnum photographer and the use of leicas or eos's is rather unqualified, i know for fact that alex shot lots of his images on small olypmus digitals like the 5050 or 8080. i think some of the people listed above should really look at the magnum site and they will see that his photos are very different from 'the norm'.

Comment by [jason hobbs](#) – January 15, 2007 @ [6:59 am](#)

28. Re-reading this post several months later reminds me that I haven't seen any new work from Alex Majoli for a while. At one time there was new stuff put up very regularly on the Magnum site. Recently nothing. I wonder what he is up to?

Comment by [David Paul Carr](#) – May 13, 2007 @ [7:59 am](#)

29. Reading this post for the first time allmost a year later I can't find the "I want to fotograph everything" interview from the above links. Does anyone know a new address?

Comment by [Stavro](#) – September 25, 2007 @ [8:56 am](#)

30. i would be very interested in what camera Alex Majoli is using now, as I was very inspired by his photos, but the olympus C-series of cameras have been discontinued. Thank you very much for an answer. molto grazie .

Comment by [jennifer gordon](#) – November 21, 2007 @ [3:20 pm](#)