

# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

November 4, 2006

## Haunted Houses & Slideshows

Filed under: [filmmaking](#) — alecsothblog @ 11:11 pm



Carmen Soth being stalked by a Walker guard. "No pictures in the galleries!"

Today my family and I visited the Walker where we saw Thomas Hirschhorn's stunning installation, [Cavemanman](#). Going with my daughter made me consider how much installation work is built on the model of the haunted house. This isn't the first time I've had this thought. Last year I had to wait half an hour in the cold for my daughter to fall asleep in her stroller before seeing Mike Kelley's scary [Day is Done](#) show. The exhibition was essentially a haunted house for grown ups traumatized by high school.



I don't mean to be derisive in this comparison to haunted houses. I sometimes think art is best when it mimics more vernacular forms of expression.

One of the great things about photography is that it is a popular and democratic medium. This makes it easy for fine-art photography to maintain close ties to its popular usages (family snapshots, legal documentation, etc). One of the most powerful vernacular forms used to be the slideshow. The use of this form within the art world was well documented in last year's [Slideshow](#), an exhibition organized by the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Kodak may have quit making slide projectors, but the medium is still alive. Years ago I bought a CD-ROM of Pedro Meyer's [I Photograph to Remember](#). I used to turn out the lights and show it to my classes. When I turned the lights back on there wasn't a dry eye in the room. Though my computer can no longer read the CD-ROM, the piece is available for free [online](#).

Now, of course, there is a lot of sophisticated software allowing these presentations to incorporate video, interactivity, and so on. All of this is fine, but there is something to be said for staying close in spirit to the vernacular precedent. Installation art can be like haunted houses. Digital presentations can be like slideshows.

- see Thomas Hirschhorn lecturing at the Walker [here](#)
- see Mike Kelley working on *Day is Done* [here](#)

- listen to an NPR story on *Slideshow* [here](#)

#### 4 Comments

1. Alec — Thanks for the pointer to Pedro Meyer's wonderful collection. I've been holding onto my old CD-ROM for years hoping I'd find a way to see it again. Now I don't have to.

*Comment by [J. Holmes](#) — November 4, 2006 @ [11:32 pm](#)*

2. I had some similar thoughts when I visited Dia:Beacon a couple of years ago, which I describe as "a bobo Disneyland". Contemporary art aims for the spectacle, novelty and, sometimes, the shock of the amusement park. There's a certain value in that, but I think it is less than the grandiose claims typically made of art's position and role in culture.

*Comment by [Todd W.](#) — November 5, 2006 @ [8:19 am](#)*

3. Noooooo! My dreams of Alec permanently attached to an 8x10 are shattered. This picture was taken with a Nikon Coolpix S3. Is this a sign of things to come or is this the cary everywhere and I am just imagining you never use digital.

As far as the Haunted house is concerned I would say your daughter is spot on most of the time. But I have seen sever installations based upon utopia, Dionysian like parties and Grafitti (Barry Mcgee, OS gemeos)

*Comment by [Harlan Erskine](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [2:41 am](#)*

4. My next project, Sleeping by the Information SuperHighway, is all going to be shot with a camera phone.

Good point about the utopian installations. That is sort of like Todd's idea that some installation art is based on the Disneyland model. Again, for me, this is not meant to be a put down.

*Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [8:29 am](#)*