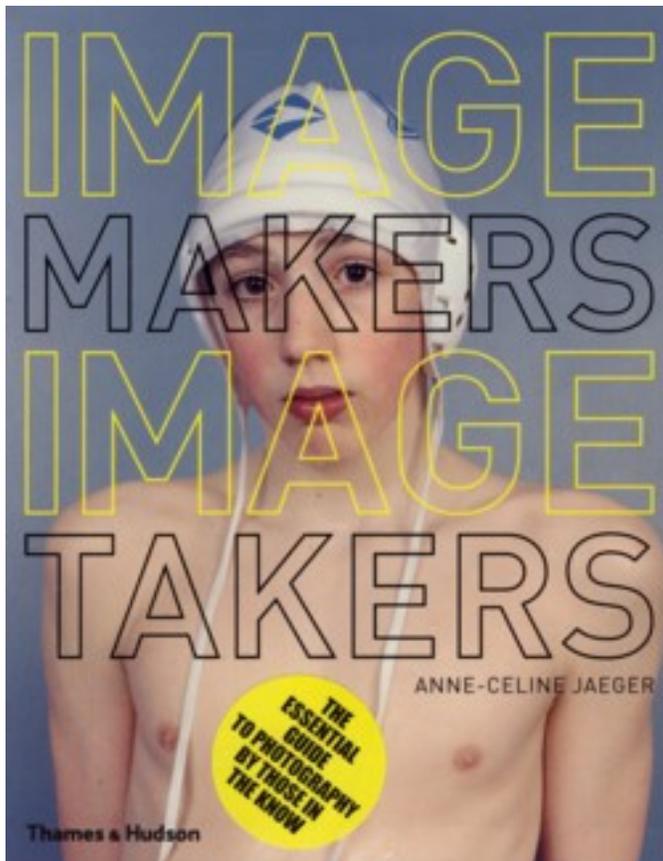


Alec Soth's Archived Blog

September 19, 2007

Image Makers / Image Takers

Filed under: books,education — alecsothblog @ 6:34 am



When I assemble reading lists for photo classes, I prefer to use texts by other photographers. My all-time must-read essay for students is Robert Adams' 'Making Art New' from *Beauty in Photography*. I'm also crazy about David Hurn and Bill Jay's conversation, 'Selecting A Subject' from *On Being a Photographer* ([free PDF here](#)).

There is a great new book featuring a huge number of photographic voices. The author, Anne-Celine Jaeger, selected twenty photographers to interview. The diverse group includes William Eggleston, Eugene Richards, Mario Sorrenti, Rineke Dijkstra and yours truly. You can read Thomas Demand talk about Titian and read me talk about, um, sweating:

Q: How did you overcome your fear of photographing people?

Soth: I started out with kids because that was less threatening. I eventually worked my way up to every type of person. At first, I trembled every time I took a picture. My confidence grew, but it took a long time. I still get nervous today. When I shoot assignments I'm notorious amongst my assistants for sweating. It's very

embarrassing. I did a picture for the *The New Yorker* recently and I was drenched in sweat by the end and it was the middle of winter.

Did I say that? Is there a publicist (or dermatologist) out there that help me?

In addition to the photographers, Jaeger interviews 10 professionals from the world of photography. I was particularly happy to read Jaeger's interview with Gerhard Steidl. After talking about his experience as a printmaker for legendary artists like Joseph Beuys and Nam June Paik, Steidl talks about why he gave up his own photography:

After printing for several years, I looked at what I'd done and was never really satisfied with myself. I thought I wasn't talented enough and didn't want to end up as a third rate artist in some Hicksville town and only ever look up to others better than me. I thought it would be much more exciting to work with and for those great artists...

I see myself as the artist's servant. I help the artist turn his vision into reality by offering the technical know how...Every book is produced a la carte and developed individually according to the artist. I'm not interested in knowing how much a book costs; I just want to do it the best possible way.

Too good to be true? Nope. As my friend Donovan Wylie said, being a photographer at Steidl right now is like being a musician at Stax Records in the 60's.

How do you get a book published by Steidl? Anne-Celine Jaeger asks Gerhard Steidl this very question. The great thing about *Image Makers / Image Takers* is that Jaeger isn't afraid to ask the simple things you want to know. "What advice would you give a young photographer," she asks Stephen Shore. "Is it hard to balance personal work with editorial work," she asks Mary Ellen Mark. "What advice would you give to photographers who would love to see their work published?" she asks Kathy Ryan.

Want to know the answers? Buy the book [here](#).

23 Comments

1. Thanks Alec for these great book tips. I have taught a class at the Art Institute of Boston that is called Professional Directions and at the PRC, we truly function as a resource center. In the AIB class, we have tons of guests and field trips as such things are passed on verbally, person to person. It's great to know that there is an attempt to capture advice and relay experience in writing. People are hungry for this!

Comment by Leslie K. Brown — September 19, 2007 @ 7:42 am

2. I got this book while visiting Chicago this summer. Very good read, very informative and entertaining (you sweating story almost tops it all)... But after reading the thoughts of all these great photographers you realize (every once in a while we have to get reminded of this simple fact)) there is no one way, everyone is different, very different, all of these greats will give you different answers to the same question, contradict each other even, and you only have to follow your own path... It wouldn't be fun if it was different... Very good book...

Comment by Velibor Bozovic — September 19, 2007 @ 8:38 am

3. Image Makers Image Takers is great. I came across it in a bookshop several months back and was quite broke at the time. It annoyed me so much that night that all this great advice from so many people I'd admired was in 1 book and that I couldn't have it. So the next day I arrived at the bookshop when they opened, found a chair, pulled out a pen and notebook and started reading. After an hour I stopped worrying about what the staff were thinking and started wondering how far I could get through this book without someone removing me. I got about 2/3's of the way!

Comment by Darren — September 19, 2007 @ 8:46 am

4. Thank you for the reading tips. I am curious to know what else is usually on the reading lists for your photo classes?

Comment by Charlotte — September 19, 2007 @ 8:55 am

5. So true what Velibor says. When I had some money come through i actually went back to purchase a copy. I started reading some parts again and had that very thought. What works for one doesn't necessarily work for others.

Comment by Darren — September 19, 2007 @ 8:56 am

6. [...] alec soth - blog » Blog Archive » Image Makers / Image Takers My all-time must-read essay for students is Robert Adams' 'Making Art New' from Beauty in Photography. I'm also crazy about David Hurn and Bill Jay's conversation, 'Selecting A Subject' from On Being a Photographer (tags: photography) [...]

Pingback by links for 2007-09-19 | TrentHead.Com — September 19, 2007 @ 9:30 am

7. Your problems are solved; they've now approved BOTOX for sweating. Or will you still need to move your limbs and stuff?
<http://www.botoxseveresweating.com/>

Comment by lexi — September 19, 2007 @ 9:56 am

8. Hey, I'm glad that you came out and said this. I have read Art & Fear a number of times, but my fear of photographing people really has hit me hard as of late, and it's refreshing that to know that you have dealt with this as well, and yes, kids are easy. They just move too much for the large format process. Only thing I got going for me is that I don't sweat. I just start to mumble.

Comment by Joseph Peila — September 19, 2007 @ 10:38 am

9. For the sheer poetry of it and the sublimely complex thinking there is no match for Szarkowski's Looking at Photographs. Open any page and read the essay to your students. A hush will fall on the room.

Comment by peggy nolan — September 19, 2007 @ 11:01 am

10. Oprah, will you please stop. My wife is going to shot me for buying all these books:)

Comment by Alan George — September 19, 2007 @ 11:32 am

11. If the students have a bit of experience behind them Frederick Sommer's 'An Extemporaneous Talk at the Art Institute of Chicago' is as good as it gets.

Comment by Marc Freidus — September 19, 2007 @ 5:51 pm

12. Alec – I enjoyed the David Hurn stuff on selecting a subject. Something I hve been thinking a lot about while trying to find a new project to work on. I think I finally have something – while working on a grant proposal – the project idea suddenly came to life. It's very exciting to have the light bulb go off. I hope you get a chance to look at <http://www.jefoto.com> and <http://jonathanelderfieldphotoblog.blogspot.com/>. Best, Jonathan

Comment by Jonathan Elderfield — September 19, 2007 @ 9:02 pm

13. My guess is your sweating is a manifestation of both the effort you put into the enterprise as well as your concern for high standards. Conquer the sweating and lose your edge. If it ain't broke...

Comment by Robert Holmgren — September 19, 2007 @ 9:44 pm

14. alec,

i sweat, too! it drives me crazy! i'm always afraid i come across as inept or incompetent but somehow i manage. still, i may invest in a headband. and great presentation in louisville, too. it's a shame i thought of all my questions on the drive home.

Comment by allen bryant — September 20, 2007 @ 1:08 am

15. Thanks for sharing the bit about the sweating.

Comment by Randy D — September 20, 2007 @ 11:38 am

16. Thanks for the suggestion. On Being a Photographer is a great read. This one sounds equally interesting.

Comment by Gordon McGregor — September 20, 2007 @ 1:03 pm

17. This book is just plain awesome. I'm finishing up, and it's been a great read. I enjoy reading interviews. It gives pretty good insight into the photographers thoughts and their work. And its quite interesting to view all the diferent viewpoints within a genre and some correlation of thoughts in diferent styles of photography. It's helped alot on thinking about images and process and that comun question on philosophy of life. Really great read!

Comment by Miguel Alho — September 20, 2007 @ 7:05 pm

18. Imho Imagemakers/ Imagetakers is a good but not a great book. It looks like most interviews have been taken via email or telephone. No real dialogue takes place. First and foremost you will find hasty short answers to an questionnaire.

If Ms. Jaeger would have invested a little more time and effort this could have become a classic.

Comment by Randolph — September 21, 2007 @ 2:09 am

19. alec, thanks for admitting to the sweating, which for me is really about wanting to look calm and in control while making pictures. my problem is blushing and turning red in the face – hard to look like i'm comfortable when my face is red as a tomato. or maybe that's a good thing.

Comment by heej — September 21, 2007 @ 8:59 am

20. I enjoyed the book and also translated into Japanese, that will be published in next April!

Comment by MIka Kobayashi — September 25, 2007 @ 1:18 pm

21. [...] Thanks to Conscientious for posting about this totally insane online journal. This is one hell of a great read if you want to get into the mind of a photo director at a magazine based in New York City. In a way it also relates to Alec Soth's recent post about the book Image Makers / Image Takers which will get you into the mind of photographers. [...]

Pingback by Horses Think » Blog Archive » A Photo Editor — September 26, 2007 @ 2:04 am

22. I enjoyed reading this book a few months ago. I highly recommend it to anybody who would like to get an insight of today's 'photography all stars' and their predecessors. Thinking of the Anton Corbijn interview, the music of Depeche Mode comes to my head. I loved his Lars von Trier photo. Having seen some of Rineke Dijkstra's photos in an exhibition last year I asked myself 'how the hell did she get these look in the eyes of the people?'. After reading her interview I am still impressed. And Alec Soth has already quoted his best answer in this blog. I wish that Ms Jaeger continues her interviews with other great photographers as well and makes a new extended edition of the book. Ms Jaeger could you please include Juergen Teller and Graciela Iturbide in a next edition?

Comment by Jay Watkins — September 28, 2007 @ 4:03 am

23. [...] Soth has already plugged this book on his blog, but as one of the people interviewed for the book, he obviously doesn't have an objective perspective. I thought I'd add my own plug as someone who most definitely was not interviewed for the book. [...]

Pingback by Not When but if... » Blog Archive » Image Makers Image Takers — October 15, 2007 @ 8:57 pm