

# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

September 3, 2007

## Careers in Photography

Filed under: career,education — alecsothblog @ 10:19 pm

Today is the first anniversary of this blog. I'm happy to have made it this far, but I'm feeling a little guilty. With an average of 2,000 unique visitors per day (and 220,000 visitors in total), I fear I've squandered the opportunity to provide much of a public service. Too many of my 310 posts have been devoted to subjects like Erotic Baseball Photography, Pamela Anderson, Rabbits n' Circles, Jesse 'the body' Ventura and, of course, Sandwich Jumping. So in hopes of doing some good for the photo-blog community, I'm posting something that might be helpful:

[Career Guide for Photographers](#)

## 39 Comments

1. Your blog is an oasis to me. Thank you for all the work you've done. We need the Erotic Baseball and the Sandwich Jumping and all the rest of it.  
To put it more simply:  
Your blog kicks ass!  
Thanks-

*Comment by ford — September 3, 2007 @ 10:43 pm*

2. After I clicked through I realized that you tongue was in your cheek-  
thanks anyway-

*Comment by ford — September 3, 2007 @ 10:45 pm*

3. I really need to get me one of them plaid portrait photographer jackets. Thats what's been missing! I'll be set once I'm wearing that baby.

Jeff

*Comment by Jeff Singer — September 3, 2007 @ 11:31 pm*

4. I don't know whether to laugh or cry. I may do both.

*Comment by Phillip Carpenter — September 3, 2007 @ 11:50 pm*

5. Love it. Thanks.

*Comment by dawn — September 3, 2007 @ 11:56 pm*

6. That was a very helpful post this book should be distributed on the first day of school at every MFA program worth a damn. I wonder if they already do... maybe I'll get one tomorrow.

*Comment by Harlan Erskine — September 4, 2007 @ 12:04 am*

7. Now I will know how to *specialize* so that I can maybe be experienced enough to *shoot* in a *studio*! Thank you , Alec, for sharing such *vital* information. Now that I know that the pictures we see have been *developed* from *negatives* I will have much more positive job prospects!

\*falls over laughing\*

You Win at The Internets!

*Comment by Rachel Hawthorn — September 4, 2007 @ 12:22 am*

8. ahahahaahhah – so George W and Will Ferrell are not the only funny Americans afterall! I'm missing an introduction to the legendary photo vest.

many black and white printers are very old – classic

*Comment by ff — September 4, 2007 @ 2:40 am*

9. hahaha

If you don't find any of these positions interesting enough, you can edit a book about careers in photography

great blog, alec,  
an rss subscriber from London (uk)

*Comment by David B — September 4, 2007 @ 4:05 am*

10. So so so good. Thanks for this ultimate guide, Alec! I've been stuck and lost in the university system for almost four years, but I learnt more from this post in 10 minutes than I did in all that time before those ten minutes!

xo

*Comment by Olle — September 4, 2007 @ 4:17 am*

11. Loved it – like the commenter above, I feel the plaid jacket will cement my status in portraiture.

I do wonder what the modern equivalent of this book would look like...

*Comment by John C — September 4, 2007 @ 4:19 am*

12. I've been searching the B&H website for an hour for that plaid jacket. Does anyone know where I can find one?

*Comment by John Sarsgard — September 4, 2007 @ 5:54 am*

13. Hi Alec,

I am posting this, in light of today's piece on careers in photography.

I'm wondering how to deal with a less than stellar review of my 2006/2007 McKnight work recently published in the Star Tribune.

Now if the words would had come from Mary Abbe, the Grand Dame of art, it may have meant more since she's reviewed the McKnight New Photography shows for these last few years I've been interested in the fellowship.

But this review was by Doug Hanson, <http://www.startribune.com/art/story/1392545.html>, so my hope to be reviewed by someone who had context and history with the event and past fellows evaporated and Hanson's words linger on in my mind.

I don't take issue with exceptional, I'll settle for good. But not developing the theme? The whole body of work was the theme. He had no idea of who I was, where I came from and the work that got me to this point. Should such a person be reviewing others only knowing what they see on the surface? Shouldn't comment come with context?

My friend and collaborator, Star Tribune writer Chris Welsch commented:

just remember: the whole struggle of being an artist consists in knowing and expressing your own heart, and the vision given to you from wherever those visions come from. when you start caring about what others think, or trying to shape the work to curry others' favor, it ceases to be art.

so this is a test of being an artist. it's you who decides that you are an artist and that the work is a true expression. not anybody else. this is the real zen deal. it means letting go of the internal dialogue about the wording of the review (who knows what exceptional means? and who cares?)

as franklin roosevelt said, comparisons are odious. so keep your head out of that game, too. your work is your work. that's it. you make it, and then you make another one. you put it out in the world and then you lose control. other people will make what they will of it. that's the joy and pain of making art of any kind.

also just remember, only a very very small number of artists ever even get reviewed, for good or bad. just to get to that point is a major accomplishment.

I want to believe what he says. But none the less, cold water has brought me to some sense of self evaluation and I'm struggling.

I am recovering and have been reminded by others about the less than complimentary words of past McKnight fellows by Marry Abbe, you included.

What do you make of it all? Do you bask in the good ones and hide from the bad? Do you learn? Does it hurt?

Thanks, Orie

*Comment by Orin Rutchick — September 4, 2007 @ 6:29 am*

14. Wow, after reading that I finally realize what I've been doing wrong all this time. I haven't been wearing the right photographer clothes!

*Comment by Mike M — September 4, 2007 @ 8:08 am*

15. "The black and white printer works only with black and white photographs. Many of them are very old."

While this may be true, I don't consider myself at (nearly) 48 to be very old...

*Comment by Keith Taylor — September 4, 2007 @ 8:46 am*

16. Alec,

Awesome. no other word to describe that.

I'll trade you a copy of Careers for my copy of this: <http://tinyurl.com/2vs773>

JMG

*Comment by J.M. Giordano — September 4, 2007 @ 8:50 am*

17. to think i have been struggling for the last couple of years searching and searching for a meaningful career. my midlife crisis is over!! thank you for showing all the wonderful opportunities available in the world of professional photography.

*Comment by erik — September 4, 2007 @ 8:52 am*

18. Thank you, now I know what I am: a freelance photographer! I work from home and pay a lab to process my films.

*Comment by Francois Gaboury — September 4, 2007 @ 9:23 am*

19. So you don't think what you post is "valuable" in that we are "better" for having read it, but let me tell you that your meanderings on topics and things that interest you have done a lot to pique the same interest in me. I think that is the most useful trait to have as an artist - curiosity. Well, that and someone to share it with and you have done much sharing.

*Comment by Glenn — September 4, 2007 @ 9:53 am*

20. In a similar vein- <http://www.robertwrightphoto.com/writing/?p=105>

"Shooting your way to a \$-million" has been highly influential in my life...

*Comment by Robert Wright — September 4, 2007 @ 10:02 am*

21. Saw that one coming a mile away!

*Comment by Nolan Smock — September 4, 2007 @ 10:07 am*

22. thanks for your time!!

Donovan willie (from Magnum) told me years ago to follow you and some months ago ago i discovered this present,,,witch i love to check every morning!!!  
thanks again and don't stop!!!

*Comment by ruben — September 4, 2007 @ 10:55 am*

23. Congrats Alec and thanks for all your time sharing with us!

I think you need to make a set of " Career Guide" small books with you doing the, printing, shooting, retouching, lab work, marketing.....

*Comment by karolina — September 4, 2007 @ 11:18 am*

24. I'm pretty sure the customer visiting the Photography Salesperson is Fletch. I can just imagine him saying, "This little proposition doesn't entail me dressing up as Little Bo-Peep, does it?"

*Comment by ND — September 4, 2007 @ 11:56 am*

25. classic.

*Comment by bryanF — September 4, 2007 @ 12:24 pm*

26. happy birthday to your little one too.

*Comment by David Wilson Burnham — September 4, 2007 @ 12:56 pm*

27. This is very creative.

*Comment by tomé duarte — September 4, 2007 @ 4:03 pm*

28. (re)creative.

*Comment by tomé duarte — September 4, 2007 @ 4:04 pm*

29. Thanks! Gives a lot!

*Comment by maga — September 4, 2007 @ 4:32 pm*

30. So which one did you choose?

*Comment by Darrell — September 4, 2007 @ 5:26 pm*

31. Orin, *art critics* were exempted from the "Career Guide for Photographers" book, but these folks play a role, too. By eating dead things and excreting out a rich mulch they provide a fertile *soil* in which plants can grow and thrive. Photographers pick the images from those plants to make all sorts of delightful photography products like jam and wine. Eventually those photographers return to the soil and are eaten by worms. It's all part of the circle of life.

The lesson: photos grow on trees. They don't call it photosynthesis for nothin'.

*Comment by Jesse Mullan — September 4, 2007 @ 5:44 pm*

32. Amy Stein's blog today brings us further Tutorials, on how to be in the photo business. She features:

Evidently, a grey suit will also get you in the door...

*Comment by Mark Tucker — September 4, 2007 @ 6:58 pm*

33. Love it. It's all the information most schools impart to their new students. Thanks for keeping things light. This world is TOO heavy.

All the best

*Comment by Christine — September 4, 2007 @ 7:32 pm*

34. love the guide's italics and scotch dork. and what are all those careerists (retoucher, colorist, etc) doing now? i think the photography instructor (p.10) is growing pot in the class as plan b.. or c. anyway, a blog isn't to fulfill societal obligations but to share your thoughts & personal voice, and that's why i come back: for your interests and personality (including tongue in cheek moments) cover a topical realm i don't get elsewhere in person at the moment. grateful also for the weekly poems.

*Comment by joslyn — September 4, 2007 @ 9:30 pm*

35. To celebrate your 12 month blog, Alec, lets have a digi v film debate! 12 months well I've had wives not last that long.

*Comment by mark page — September 5, 2007 @ 4:23 am*

36. Thank you Alec, I now know what do do with my life. Ha ha.

*Comment by Warren van Rensburg — September 5, 2007 @ 11:57 am*

37. So will Aperature be re-publishing this? Or is this only given to Magnum members when they achieve Associate status?

*Comment by Max — September 5, 2007 @ 12:15 pm*

38. A chuckle a page, great find. The developmentally handicapped tone of voice is a treasure. I'll be sure to remember it, should come in handy...

*Comment by Videbaek — September 12, 2007 @ 12:12 pm*

39. Wow. Truly awe-inspiring. Yet, one nagging thought still lingers. Even though I'm a freelance photographer, and I've photographed at a family's home, I never get to go to the zoo on assignment. After reading this very informative manual, I'm now obsessed with landing me a sweet zoo gig.

*Comment by Aaron — September 12, 2007 @ 9:00 pm*