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ROAD SHOW

By Vince Aletti

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Photograph by © Alec Soth

The Minneapolis-based photographer Alec Soth, who got his first big break in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, has turned into a popular, influential, and remarkably productive powerhouse in the years since then. The Mississippi River and Niagara Falls were early focal points, and the American landscape and the American character have remained his prime meat. He went back on the road for “Broken Manual,” a four-year project that he finished in 2010, now on view at the Sean Kelly gallery. (A related documentary film, titled “Somewhere to Disappear,” is also being screened.) Soth’s subject here is elusive: he seeks out people who’ve gone off the grid, tracking survivalists, drifters, and recluses to their makeshift lairs. When he finds a bearded man in the wilderness, the pictures he brings back can suggest surveillance records or mug shots, but other portraits are unexpectedly lovely

and sympathetic. Working through his own ambivalence—what he describes as “the desire to run away and the knowledge that you can’t”—Soth takes us to a place that’s almost as seductive as it is forbidding. ♦

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*Vince Aletti reviews photography exhibitions for *Goings On About Town*.*
