

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

November 5, 2006

Kiki Smith & Nan Goldin

Filed under: [artists](#), [editorial photo](#) — alecsothblog @ 9:37 pm

I was recently asked by a magazine (not the NY Times) to photograph Kiki Smith. Because of a scheduling conflict I was unable to do it. I'm both disappointed and relieved. I'm disappointed because this Sunday's [New York Times Magazine profile](#) by Michael Kimmelman described her as an electrifying character. She seems to have great insight into sustaining the creative impulse:

The hardest thing is to get past your taste – past your own formulaic way of doing things. Otherwise you're stopped by what you know, which is limited. Chance is what a lot of artists use. In my case, I'll arrange ways for things to be unpredictable.

The reason I'm relieved is because I'd hate to make a picture of Smith after seeing Nan Goldin's fantastic portrait:



Nan Goldin for The New York Times

Goldin doesn't do a ton of editorial work, but when she does it is very good. I still haven't forgotten the NY Times Magazine [story](#) she did in 1996 on the model James King (see one of the images [here](#)).

At times I think Goldin has fallen into the 'formulaic way of doing things' that Smith describes. What photographer hasn't? Editorial work, it seems to me, is one way to push into something unpredictable.

12 Comments

1. Hi Alec,

Just wanted to tell you about, if you didn't see it already, a great interview with Tod Papageorge in BOMB. You can see the whole thing online at <http://www.bombsite.com>

Ari

Comment by [Ari](#) — November 5, 2006 @ [9:41 pm](#)

2. yeah true with Goldin, i love her work but she has not produced a varied body of work and seems to have slipped into a further nihilism and self abuse for inspiration which seems strange to me. editorial work takes away -to a degree- the choice of subject and perhaps in freedom in fewer choices.

Comment by [Paul](#) — November 5, 2006 @ [11:40 pm](#)

3. james king/jamie king also has a pretty good acting career, ha dnot seen that photo before, appreciate the link.

Comment by [Tarsh](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [12:26 am](#)

4. That is one beautiful color portrait..

Comment by [Stan Banos](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [12:28 am](#)

5. Wonderful portrait and wonderful quote.

Most "good" and succesful artists I know use chance and even error without ever letting on.

Who made the comment about avoiding "the fallacy of intention?"

Comment by [GM](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [7:59 am](#)

6. This, like the Laura Letinsky advertisement in the same issue, was another shot where I recognized the photographer immediately. Another fine example of a photographer's strong, undeniable style. In the case of Goldin, the cool, blue tone that we've come to know in many of her portraits.

Comment by [Christian](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [10:04 am](#)

7. I hope Nan sees this posting! Nan where is my book that you owe me?????

Comment by [William Greiner](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [10:16 am](#)

8. So ironic; just before heading over to your blog, Alec, I was browsing the NYTimes online and admiring Nan's photograph.

Comment by [Shane Lavalette](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [10:22 am](#)

9. The NYT Magazine's sponsored some terrific projects with art photographers over the last few years. I remember strong work by Gary Schneider, and a magisterial portrait of Gerhard Richter by Thomas Struth a couple of years ago.

Comment by [Tom Morrissey](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [10:31 am](#)

10. is formulaic really a word that can be used to describe goldin's photography? i guess in that life is formulaic?

Comment by [davin](#) — November 6, 2006 @ [1:58 pm](#)

11. The images in that James King New York Times magazine story were incredible. I actually tore them out and filed them in-between the pages of one of my Nan Goldin books. Several years later, I met James King at a couple of parties in LA. Meeting her made the photographs all the more striking because in person she gave the impression of a somewhat shy country girl. And sitting down with her in an LA backyard at a bbq talking about nighttime in Nebraska it was hard to reconcile those searing Goldin images of beautiful damaged youth. The times article, (sans the photos unfortunately) can be found [here](#).

Comment by [raul](#) — November 7, 2006 @ [9:53 am](#)

12. hallo
please visit my site
thanks

Comment by [tamir sher](#) — December 19, 2006 @ [5:27 am](#)