

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

April 23, 2007

Letter to the editor

Filed under: [editorial photo](#) — alecsothblog @ 8:59 am

W Letters Volume 36 Issue 5 **May '07**

The Big Chill

I like Alec Soth and I like W magazine. I love ketchup and ice cream too, but the idea of them together is gross. I'm sure you get my point. Soth's shoot for you ("Perseverance," April)—what you called a fashion story—was a waste of paper. Please, stick to veteran fashion photographers such as David Sims and Michael Thompson. If you're looking for someone fresh and new, I'm sure there's undiscovered talent out there. But they probably aren't to be found in the Chelsea gallery scene.

GRAEME MITCHELL
BROOKLYN, N.Y.

32 Comments

1. According to the fountain of moderated knowledge and hearsay, Wikipedia, W magazine has frequently "provoked mixed responses from its intended audience." I take it that by printing this frothy little letter they're just tooting their own horn that they were successful again.

Comment by Michael — April 23, 2007 @ [9:18 am](#)

2. Dear Mr. Soth — Every time you leave your art cave and forage beyond your niche, you take food out of the mouths of hungry fashion photographers like [Mr. Mitchell](#)

Comment by Juan — April 23, 2007 @ [10:28 am](#)

3. That letter is a bit self-serving, no?

<http://www.graememitchell.com/index.html>

"Graeme Mitchell is a fashion photographer."

Comment by [Todd W.](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [10:29 am](#)

4. Self serving, not really. I know b/c I wrote, it and don't really have any illusions of getting a 20page story in W anytime soon. Rather, it's just my opinion and the hope to keep a dialogue open around the work we all do. When they asked me if they could print it, I actually thought that Alec would be the kind of guy to recognize it as a artistic dialog and not anything personal.

B/c I really dig your work Alec, but just didn't think it fit W, at least not at this particular moment. Which I criticize their editors for, not you. Though now, in retrospect, the tone of the letter was a bit, uh, terse, but wasn't meant to be.

I stand by the opinion though, liked the pics, just not where they were.

To make up for it, next time you're in NYC, let's have a beer and you can give your unabashed opinion on things I've done.

Comment by [GM](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [10:41 am](#)

5. gosh, pardon the sloppy grammer and spelling, crazy day...

Comment by [GM](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [10:43 am](#)

6. Graeme. I posted your letter because it fit in with my recent post on backlash. No offense taken.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [11:15 am](#)

7. Alec, I didn't put that connection together. Just noticed that people were actually visiting my website...and they were coming from here. Then I saw why and thought, shit, probably should have kept my mouth shut.

I appreciate the community you've allowed here where this sort of conversation can take place.

Anyway, keep at it and keep pushing.

Comment by [GM](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [12:33 pm](#)

8. The reason I look at and admire W magazine is because they do not continually use the usual suspects. If I wanted Italian Vogue I would buy it; but I don't. W's use of fine art photographers

like Alec Soth and Stephen Shore helps to push our notion of what fashion photography is – and thankfully so. Besides isn't fashion about changing our perception of what it is in itself, is?

GM – did you have the same feeling with last September's Bruce Weber spread? Aside from the fact they used Kate Moss the content of the shoot was similar albeit with different emotion. Conversely, if Alec would have used Kate would that also have affected your opinion?

Alec, that is question I have for you then as well – did you and W talk about using models given your subject matter never deals with them?

Comment by myles — April 23, 2007 @ [1:08 pm](#)

9. I recently had wasabi ice cream at the Chinatown ice cream factory and I loved it! I ate it in the park while viewing Alec's story in W and was so very thankful for those 10 minutes of inspiration! Now i'm going to request ketchup and pistachio ice cream just to see if Graeme is wrong about that too – maybe I'll even make money off of that idea!

So what's not "fashionable" about Alec's story? And why can't an artist shoot fashion? Alec isn't taking anyone's money or food, if GM or strictly "fashion photographers" aren't getting the gigs they want it's not because of Alec or any other photographer – it's more likely that he and everyone else who complains needs to step their game up and get creative! If you keep trying to shoot like Michael Thompson you'll probably have to wait until he quits to get in there, otherwise creatives like Alec and anyone who has a unique vision are going to print because they inspire...because they don't just shoot pretty people or use the same old composition...they shoot great photographs. Period.

So thanks Alec for something different. I'm hoping your shoot inspires fashion to continue to move in different directions. If nothing else it's inspired new flavors of ice cream!

Comment by [Jason Lewis](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [2:19 pm](#)

10. My daughter hates it when different foods touch each other. But the other day I caught her eating pretzels dipped into yogurt.

Last night I had orange-flavored chocolate sauce. It was terrible.

Different strokes for different folks.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [2:30 pm](#)

11. We had chocolate sauce with bananas and pound cake last nite! It looked good too!

Comment by [William Greiner](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [3:04 pm](#)

12. I think food combinations are what make the world go round. How about this, best bruschetta in the lower east side is at Mangiami. It's a slice of fresh mozzarella di bufala, anchovy paste and fresh olive oil on toasted italian bread. I've never craved a combo like this one.

And if you think that's nasty, fine. As Alec said, different strokes... I don't think anything quite compares to the combination craving of my friend Jersey J. He grew up in New Jersey (home of DQ) and had his first job at the venerable soft-ice cream purveyor of the Blizzard. His ultimate combination was Mint Oreo, Heath Bar, and Nerds! Sugar blast to the head.

Comment by [Dustin Ross](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [3:24 pm](#)

13. The other day my cat rubbed up against my hard spot. I love my cat and I love my hard spot, but mixing my cat and my hard spot?

I have to tell you I loved it!

Comment by [Tim](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [3:35 pm](#)

14. I think it was a good move for Alec to extend himself by doing a 'fashion' story. I personally like seeing art photographers shoot fashion (and not the other way round) I like that they are interested in trying things out in the commercial arena. Its nice to do something different every once in a while. If I see a strong editorial by someone who doesn't generally work in that context I feel more respect for them and their work.

Sure you won't please everyone by doing things that YOU want but if you please yourself by fulfilling your own creative ambitions you got to be happy!

Comment by [Theodore Williams](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [3:49 pm](#)

15. The best food combination is peanut butter and a hamburger named after Duane Purvis at the Triple XXX Family Restaurant in West Lafayette, Ind.

Comment by [Tom Leininger](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [4:01 pm](#)

16. Oh and Alec, unrelated but what do you think of all these young photographers (at University and recently graduated) who are aping your style right now....?

Comment by [Theodore Williams](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [4:03 pm](#)

17. Myles, actually I did feel the same way about Weber's story, despite Kate Moss being in it. I'd say I preferred Alec's story to Weber's though if asked, for what it's worth. Bruce has his great moments (a lot of them) but in my opinion that one didn't work. Many people loved it though, b/c I remember it being talked about when it ran.

Jason, it was an opinion, not a complaint. Granted the waste of paper bit was too much, admitted, and I regret using what was intended as hyperbole.

Look, I like things that are different too (not ketchup on ice cream; though maybe ketchup flavored ice cream...), and of course that's how new shit is discovered. I think it's rad Alec got to shoot a W story; anyone doing that is doing something right, but that doesn't mean I have to think it's effective, certainly not just b/c it's different. The pics themselves were dope, just didn't like it in W. With that, there are a # of top fashion photographers who's work couldn't come close to hanging alongside Alec's work in a gallery. And maybe Alec will move into the realm of fashion and start killing it. I don't know.

Comment by [GM](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [4:25 pm](#)

18. Alec, will you have these pictures up on your site? I missed picking up the W issue

Comment by [Donny From The Big Lebowski](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [5:00 pm](#)

19. I still haven't managed to see the W pics, but how fantastic to be given a job like that with total creative freedom. I remember seeing a Stephen Shore (?) interview where he said he did a commercial shoot once (for MGM I think) and he was assured total freedom - which it transpired he didn't get. I don't think he did any more after that.

Here's a nice link for you ice cream fanatics....

http://www.alacuisine.org/alacuisine/2006/02/smoked_bacon_an.html

Apparently it is fantastic.

Comment by [Robert Phillips](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [5:31 pm](#)

20. I'm sorry, [I couldn't help myself](#).

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [7:07 pm](#)

21. I'm so glad you didn't – that made me laugh!

Comment by [Ondine](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [8:48 pm](#)

22. I actually really liked the portfolio in W, but especially because of the questions it raises. It will be some time before I can decide what relationship they may have to other Soth photos. But the issue is much more complex than when photographers do assignments that are 'separate' from their 'personal' work (Garry Winogrand used to travel with a camera loaded with color film to shoot 'stock' photos which paid the rent). Certainly the statement of the W group of photos is different (more compromised) than in Alec's books.

When a photographer develops a 'signature style' of sorts after years of hard work and experimentation on their own, what exactly is the nature of photographs they then make with collaborators (stylists, etc.). I think the results can be better, worse, or equal but it's great to mess with the idea of the solitary creator that is so strong in fine art photo, painting, novel writing and a few other arts (but not film, architecture, etc.). It reminded me of photos Cindy Sherman did in the 80's for *comme des garçons*.

I don't read fashion mags enough to have an opinion on the original letter to the editor, but I'm glad this project happened. And fashion mags have so many ads that they are really cheap compared to photo books.

Comment by [Marc Freidus](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [9:10 pm](#)

23. I don't read fashion magazines. I bought W just to see the pictures of Alec printed. They are great.

I didn't like the fact that after a few pages there was a feature on Imelda Marcos. This is for me the problem with fashion magazines. Not the mix with art.

Comment by [Jay Watkins](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [3:06 am](#)

24. The issue was great, as a whole. And I think the resistance against change in any field is interesting, and this was a huge step in a direction I imagine not everyone likes, say, fashion photographers. But I think we've gone through a backlash against the non-famous and people not a formal part of the entertainment industry with bad and often humiliating reality television shows for several years now. A return to what people are doing outside of that paradigm seems refreshing to me. A fetishization of the Impressive Productive and NotFamous seems inevitable.

I appreciate looking at earthy and beautiful work in a fashion magazine that is not dictated by those in the fashion world. And I appreciate that the models are not models, that they don't have their professional eyes on. And I anticipate that may charm many, in time.

Rant, over.

Comment by [Rose](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [6:43 am](#)

25. Journalists are allowed to write fiction and film makers make drama and documentary if they like. Since when have photographers been expected to sit in a nicely labelled pigeon hole and only photograph one thing? Never mind that fashion has consistently borrowed from art and documentary photography – never mind the long and illustrious list of photographers who have

photographed both, from Munkasci on. Why not say that Penn should only photograph frocks and leave the still lifes to the professionals? And let us not begin on the difficult subject of William Klein. There's no divine right of kings or fashion photographers.

Comment by Amy de Wit — April 24, 2007 @ [7:32 am](#)

26. I like my name. And I like semi-disturbing stories about cats. But I in no way like the two of them together. I hereby reject and renounce any perceived connection between myself and the "The other day my cat rubbed up against my hard spot" comment. Which, I have to say, I would like A) connected to someone else's name and B) accompanied by some Ben & Jerry's Chubby Hubby.

Oh, and another point, but quickly — if a person has ninety-ish words to say any one thing in a national publication, I think it would be a good idea to choose those words carefully enough so that, when asked about them, he or she doesn't have to backpedal.

Comment by A (different) Tim. — April 24, 2007 @ [2:03 pm](#)

27. I snatched up the W ish (soon to be a collector's item no doubt) and was so pleased to see that it was not the standard fare. You HAVE to applaud W for not acting like a high NY glossy, but something more along the lines of Swindle and Flaunt and Soma. As the founder of an on-line fashion feature magazine based in Baltimore, I wish more pubs would take the same chance as W. We try to in our humble pub. I guess my only problem with the W spread is that they asked Alec to shoot in what's essentially his own backyard, which we all know he can do in his sleep. It was kinda like Sleeping by the Issey Miyake. Note to future editors, unleash Soth unto the world!

Comment by [J.M. Giordano](#) — April 25, 2007 @ [3:45 pm](#)

28. I had Banana Ketchup the other night with fries, served at a local Ballard[Washington] diner. It was fantastic; now I plan on making my own, I never would have come up with it on my own, and the same with the magazine shoot, nice work, and way to shake it up, in a bottle of course!

Comment by [harold hollingsworth](#) — April 26, 2007 @ [1:46 am](#)

29. i agree with (the other) Tim. I can admire the chutzpa of anyone to speak their mind even if i disagree with their opinion...as long as when pressed about it, they stand up for their thoughts and dont let their argument crumble to pieces.

Comment by [jami](#) — April 27, 2007 @ [11:15 pm](#)

30. Wow, came back and saw I was dismantled here...

I stand by the initial criticism; if you read what I wrote I always did (or at least I meant to). All I wished was to reiterate my respect for Alec's other work. Other than that I mentioned some rhetorical regret and also pointed out that I'm just one opinion, no biggie.

There never was an argument let alone a discussion, just my criticism and a harangue of mostly one-liner retorts. So I wholeheartedly disagree with any argument crumbling.

Finally, I'm only writing this b/c I'm bummed that something can spark so much talk but nothing more than personal snides. If someone says they don't like something I like, my first inclination might be to ask, "why's that?"

Comment by GM — April 28, 2007 @ [9:32 pm](#)

31. *Finally, I'm only writing this b/c I'm bummed that something can spark so much talk but nothing more than personal snides. If someone says they don't like something I like, my first inclination might be to ask, "why's that?"*

i checked your site. nice work. i always wanted to be a fashion dude, after i realized being a fine art photographer was a pipe dream. then i realized being a fashion dude was a pipe dream. i haven't seen alec's W piece, but you both are in the game. be happy for that. i hate you both. it's the internet, where some doofus with 6 beers in him might say anything.

Comment by [charley](#) — April 29, 2007 @ [4:48 pm](#)

32. Alec I dont know what the some people are talking about but my friend Rob and I both agree that the work you did for W was spectacular, excellent work! thanks for doing that.

Comment by [w robert angell](#) — July 28, 2007 @ [12:31 am](#)