

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

October 23, 2006

Perpetual Battlefields

Filed under: [on blogging](#) — alecsothblog @ 10:41 pm

Earlier today I received an email from a fellow photographer whom I've never met. He asked me about prices, editions, why I switched from one gallery to another, why I make some of my prints large ('just about art economics'...he assumed) and so forth. While he didn't ask me to look at his work, I found some examples online and it looked quite good. But in my reply I sort of lashed out at him. I probably overdid it (it has been a long day).

I guess one of the reason I enjoy this blog is because I spend most of my day being pestered with talk of money, editions, printing, mounting, shipping, storage and the rest. I want a place where I can talk about issues of substance or, well, just joke around. I understand there is a hunger amongst photographers to talk about these financial matters but I am utterly bored with the topic.

As I said, it has been a long day. My crabbiness even had me considering a prolonged break from the blogosphere. But after reading Brian Ulrich's [humorous reply](#) to my Cat Power request, I made a visit to Brian's blog where I discovered his story of [Ron's Perpetual Battlefields](#). It made my day. It made me want to write something down.

8 Comments

1. The emails you mention are endless and I understand weariness of the same questions over and over. The business of the work can often times overwhelm the work and it is frustrating when even the hopefuls and admirers go there. What film, what paper, how many and how much? All I need to do is remember what it was like before and where it can easily be again in the fickle world of art. I use it as my 10 count before getting crabby with a client or collector.

Comment by [B Schwab](#) — October 24, 2006 @ [1:18 am](#)

2. Business school artists can be very depressing. They should read more Kant:

'Art is also distinguished from handicraft: the first is called liberal, the second can also be called remunerative art. The first is regarded as if it could turn out purposively (be successful) only as play, i.e., an occupation that is agreeable in itself; the second is regarded as labor, i.e., an occupation that is disagreeable (burdensome) in itself and is attractive only because of its effect (e.g., the remuneration), and hence as something that can be compulsorily imposed.'

'Hence everything contrived or laborious in it [in beautiful art] must be avoided; for beautiful art must be free art in a double sense: it must not be a matter for remuneration, a labor whose magnitude can be judged, enforced, or paid for in accordance with a determinate standard; but also, while the mind is certainly occupied, it must feel itself to be satisfied and stimulated (independently of remuneration) without looking beyond to another end.'

One of the many things I like about your blog is that it reminds me that being an artist can and should be about curiosity, play, exploration, uncertainty, generosity to other artists, and even having a bit of a laugh now and again.

Comment by [guybatey](#) — October 24, 2006 @ [2:50 am](#)

3. Uh? Cat and I are just waking up over a bowl of Mini wheats. We were up all night watching the game show network. She really does check your blog.
Thanks Alec!!

Comment by [Brian Ulrich](#) — October 24, 2006 @ [9:06 am](#)

4. People! Leave this poor man alone! I dig the blog alot and have written to Alec once or twice times. Each time the man has been cool!
I do have one question though:
At the Gagosian, there was that one pic on the back wall, how many inches of border did you have around it? And why? ;0)

Actually, back to the purpose of this blog, I do recommend that any one who gets to D.C. check out the National Gallery NY Street Photograph show. The best I've seen in a long time and very important to those interested in photo history!

Comment by [imgiordano](#) — October 24, 2006 @ [4:30 pm](#)

5. Alec, When I was pushing hard to help the Ogden Museum in New Orleans build a photography collection by artist donation (thanks for yours by the way), I had asked Chris Jordan to participate and he declined. I got this long winded reply, all about editions, prices....blah , blah. Ironically, he comes to New Orleans after Katrina and does a book, but in any case, it never occurred to me that maybe he was just having a bad day? Wm.

Comment by [William Greiner](#) — October 24, 2006 @ [4:49 pm](#)

6. How times have changed! I was at a lecture given by Robert Mapplethorpe long ago and he grew irritated and frustrated as the evening wore on because all any one wanted to ask about were the

aesthetics and inspiration of his work. He much rather wanted to talk about the business side of photography as art. I thought it odd at the time but now regret not taking him up on the opportunity. He obviously did at least a few things right and was quite prescient of the mentality of many in today's art market.

Comment by [David Kern](#) — October 26, 2006 @ [2:57 pm](#)

7. I'm not sure what artist this Alec is talking about...but maybe in a discreet kind way discuss the dirty deeds. You have chosen this blog to laugh, critically analyze, and I believe- ultimately, to educate others through your thoughts and experiences. Just as some of your readers are looking for intellectual, aesthetic discussion, others would really appreciate a real candid look into a photographer who with all intents and purposes is currently at the pinnacle: Gagolian Gallery-Museum Shows. For you to allow yourself to be this accessible its unfortunate for you to not jump at the opportunity to help anyone out because, ultimately it just makes you a better person.

Comment by [Douglas Takeshi Wolfe](#) — October 26, 2006 @ [5:29 pm](#)

8. Reminds me of a theater joke in Chicago that probably originated somewhere else.

Director A. comes home early from rehearsal and finds his wife in bed with Director B.

"What are you doing??" asks Director A.

Director B. says, "Well, I'm doing 'Glass Menagerie' at the Goodman next spring and teaching a course at the U of C, and then in the summer I'm supposed to do 'As You Like It' at Oregon Shakes, and then..."

Comment by [Eric Z.](#) — November 1, 2006 @ [11:14 am](#)