

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

January 11, 2007

Shit Week

Filed under: [shit](#) — alecsothblog @ 2:05 am

After the success of [Snow Week](#) and my recent post on [That Smell in New York](#), a reader suggested I launch Shit Week. It is worth consideration. As the parent of two small children and the owner of two dogs, the majority of my domestic life revolves around feces. I sometimes forget that this isn't true of everyone. Not long ago a friend took care of my dogs while we were on vacation. When we returned home, he told me that he'd devised a trick. "While walking the dogs," he said, "I realized that I could put my hand in the bag, pick up the poop, and pull my hand out." I didn't dare ask how he'd been doing it previously.

I'm reminded of that old Seinfeld line:

"On my block, a lot of people walk their dogs, and I always see them walking along with their little poop bags, which to me is just the lowest function of human life. If aliens are watching this through telescopes, they're gonna think the dogs are the leaders. If you see two life forms, one of them's making a poop, the other one's carrying it for him, who would you assume was in charge?"

There are plenty of examples of feces in the art world: Piero Manzoni's [Artist Shit](#), Chris Ofili's [The Holy Virgin Mary](#), Martin Creed's [Shit Film](#) and just about everything Paul McCarthy has ever done. There has even been a [serious group show](#) on the subject. But the greatest achievement in this arena is Wim Delvoye's [Cloaca](#). (Be sure to check out the fantastic [Cloaca Website](#)).

But what about photography and feces? Only one example comes to mind – a truly revolting picture by Terry Richardson. I recently posted the controversial question, [Where are the People?](#) Now I'm wondering, Where is the Poop? If disaster photography is more successful without people, is bowel movement photography better without the feces?



Excusado, 1925, by Edward Weston

29 Comments

1. Ah yes the kiddie connection – just say I pooped my pants and my 5 year old daughter and her friends are under the table – trouble is being English, they'll never really advance from there.

The cloaca machine is fabulous – didn't he do different kinds of shit from different meals as well – the Big Mac Shit, the pasta shit and so on. Or was that someone else. Other shit works – Colors Cacas: A coffee table book by Toscani and Keith Arnatt did a series on dog shits. But there must be so much more out there.

Comment by colin — January 11, 2007 @ [3:48 am](#)

2. go easy on Macca, he's having a hard time of it and when all is said and done was not responsible for Octopus's Garden, although thinking about it the Frog Chorus was an equally ugly moment.

Comment by dan banda lee — January 11, 2007 @ [6:50 am](#)

3. oh you said McCarthy not McCartney, it must be your accent. still a valid point none the less.

Comment by dan banda lee — January 11, 2007 @ [8:52 am](#)

4. Some shit of mine from 1990:

<http://www.proofsheets.com/streets/source/50.htm>

Comment by [Michal Daniel](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [8:58 am](#)

5. Alec re methods of 'capturing' Dog dejections

I spent a lot of time in Paris which was or maybe still is known for its problem with dog faeces. Apparently 650 people were hospitalised in one year after slipping over in the stuff and 15 fresh tonnes of it were deposited each day. They used to have "motocrotte" which were green scooters that had a huge vacuum on the back to deal with the problem. I used to hang out on the off chance of witnessing one being involved in a collision – is that normal?

Comment by dan banda lee — January 11, 2007 @ [9:21 am](#)

6. Sylvia Plachy features some lovely, expressive poops in her book Unguided Tour.

Comment by [kate milford](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [11:02 am](#)

7. As a catalan native, I'd like to point out a very old tradition that happens in Catalonia, Spain on christmas and that has become a kind of popular art. Is called "Caganer", which means "defecator", and is a little character placed on the nativity scenes, often tucked away in some corner.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caganer>

There's lots of Caganer collectors and today they also represent characters of the political, social and cultural modern life. Check out this gallery (take a look to Bush):

<http://www.caganer.com/galeria/index.html>

The Caganer represents the equality of all people e.g. regardless of status, race, gender, everyone defecates.

Comment by [Pep Ventosa](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [1:32 pm](#)

8. "But what about photography and feces?"

One of my favourite Doisneau photos (yes, I know he's not very fashionable) features a pile of poop. Or something that looks like it, with the culprit nearby...

http://www.masters-of-photography.com/D/doisneau/doisneau_wanda_full.html

Comment by [Paul Russell](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [2:01 pm](#)

9. That's fantastic Pep.

I'm surprised there isn't more shit-based art considering the obvious biblical and psychoanalytical connections between shit, money and the devil himself. So we get Piss-Christ yes, Shit-Christ no.

This posting reminded me of the IRA dirty protests in the 1970s – one of the few times political protest, installation and performance art have been on the verge of merging.

<http://www.irishhungerstrike.com/blanketmen.html>

Comment by [colin](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [2:08 pm](#)

10. To dan banda lee:

I just finished writing a poem today about Ringo Starr in which I agree Octopus' Garden is one of the band's lowest moments ever. Ironically enough, I posted it on a blog called Minnesotan-Ice (<http://minnesotan-ice.blogspot.com/2007/01/after-ringo-starr-said-beatles-were.html>).

Just thought I'd mention the coincidence...

To Herr Soth:

I agree about McCarthy's fascination with excremental activity, though I think his fascination is equally about defecation and copulation (not to get all Freudian or anything).

Comment by [Lux Iconic](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [2:17 pm](#)

11. For shit week:

Comment by [Will](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [2:22 pm](#)

12. Snow week was a success and resulted in some snow; what are your hopes for Shit week?

=)

/Adam
freelance photographer
Malmö, Sweden

Comment by [Adam Haglund](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [3:37 pm](#)

13. Eugene Richards did a series called 'A Procession of Them' about the neglect and abuse of the mentally ill that would mention toilets and body waste in captions but they weren't featured in the photographs.

My favorite shows a stream of urine flowing down the hallway of the men's ward in a psychiatric hospital. It's number 7.

http://www.soros.org/initiatives/photography/focus_areas/mw/10/

Comment by Raabia — January 11, 2007 @ 4:41 pm

14. [...] Sorry to be a leach, but Alec Soth has declared it shit week, quite literally on his blog. I hope he looks at work like this that are so shitty they are conceptual art. What is the difference between the excrement from your body and the leftover from your mind? [...]

Pingback by [mBrLOG » Blog Archive » Conceptual Shit](#) — January 11, 2007 @ 5:27 pm

15. a family member resolved the picking up poop issue by allowing his pet to shit in his backyard , then after it dries, he claims it's an excellent fertilizer

Comment by [Patrice](#) — January 11, 2007 @ 5:56 pm

16. Here's a slideshow on slate that fits just this subject.

<http://www.slate.com/id/2157288/>

There's no shit to be found anywhere

Comment by [Sean Cayton](#) — January 11, 2007 @ 7:33 pm

17. Mr. Soth,
We the undersigned agree that this particular post crosses a proverbial line in the cause of good taste. We ask you mend these broken leaking poop stained floors and move on to more important matters such as 'which is better film or digital?'. back to 'portraits vs. landscapes' and may I suggest crowning photographic prom king and queen 2007.
Some of us are very sensitive about bowels which we may or may not be in control of and do not appreciate the cheeks in tongue nature of your blogger.
-Alice B. Bunzinstuk
-Pete Pinchaloff
-Regal McFlushin
-Chauncey Wipesnuff

Comment by [Artie M. Poopzalott](#) — January 11, 2007 @ 7:58 pm

18. ArtForum chose as the best living-artist show in 1995 the South London Gallery show of GILBERT & GEORGE's "The Naked Shit Pictures". "G&G boldly exhibited their genitals, their feces, their most elemental fantasies, and their fears in the face of mortality. It is a poignant and weighty tragicomic work."

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n4_v34/ai_17837647/pg_8

<http://www.southlondongallery.org/docs/exh/exhibition.jsp?id=67>

Some images here (click on images and scroll):

<http://www.magasin3.com/exhibitions/gilbert.html>

Thanks god photography doesn't capture the smells ...so far.

Comment by [Pep Ventosa](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [8:03 pm](#)

19. Dear Mr. Poopzalott,

I appreciate your concerns. But I'm wondering if you and your colleague [Chauncey Wipesnbuff](#) have considered the potential of the magicky-shine-wax-away™ of Shammy™ in the excrement cleanup industry.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [8:14 pm](#)

20. Tonight, just hours after asking you to end the poo thing I went to Charles Long's opening. A favorite sculpture, you know I like. (One of the river men.) I could not shake the realty and could truly not believe it... he has made over 20 small albumen prints of bird poo -huge Heron bird poo. Then he has sculpted -white thin stringy Giacometti forms made from small debris found in the LA river. The forms mimic the splatted bird poo. What?! Any way I guess your fingers on it . I told Charles to follow the comments on your blog this week. His show is really good. (Tanya Bonakdar Gallery)

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Comment by [Wendy](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [9:43 pm](#)

21. how ironic. and i just watched little murders. the main character is a commercial photographer who can't photograph anything but poop anymore.

Comment by [Julia](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [11:12 pm](#)

22. Shitography

Comment by [Rachelle Friesen](#) — January 11, 2007 @ [11:30 pm](#)

23. The Stephen Shore show of '70s photos that was at PS1 last year featured a LOT of aerial views of unflushed toilets across America, in glorious '70s color.

Comment by [Sterling Hoyt](#) — January 12, 2007 @ [12:54 pm](#)

24. From a series I'm working on about a local park:

...and although it's not photography, what "shit in the arts" conversation would be complete without Odd Nerdrum's "Shit Rock:"



Comment by [Jamie Tolagson](#) — January 12, 2007 @ [1:59 pm](#)

25. here's one that rants and poops at the same time...

<http://www.newyorkshitty.com/>

Comment by [micheal mclaughlin](#) — January 12, 2007 @ [4:56 pm](#)

26. Interesting how everyone seems to have something scat-worthy to add to this subject. I wonder what it says about where people's heads are today.

Comment by [Lux Iconic](#) — January 13, 2007 @ [3:58 pm](#)

27. On touring Diego Rivera's house a few years ago I was told he kept a photograph by Bravo of a big pile of shit above his toilet. The photo apparently disappeared when the house became a museum. I've never seen a reference to this photo anywhere and have been meaning to track it down one day.

Comment by [raul](#) — January 13, 2007 @ [7:01 pm](#)

28. SHIT WEEK!

I have plenty of good poop stories (many have nothing to do with art). My favorite one ends with a new couch – my friend documents this great story on his blog.

<http://www.clogvert.com/?p=17>

Be sure to check the collage I made especially for the occasion at the end of his post.

Comment by [Timothy](#) — January 14, 2007 @ [12:53 am](#)

29. "I like the idea of life being laughable. I mean, panties are funny, kind of in the same way fire hydrants are funny for dogs. They're not funny in our society, but in France they're funny. My dad was born in Europe. Maybe that's part of it. There's the sense in America that we can't enjoy a good shit."

-(Mpls painter) Frank Gaard

Comment by [Lux Iconic](#) — January 15, 2007 @ [5:15 pm](#)