

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

September 6, 2007

Schjeldahl on Teaching

Filed under: education — alecsothblog @ 9:35 pm

I had a lot of fun with *Schjeldahl Week* last January. Today a reader brought to my attention Peter Schjeldahl's lecture, *Why Artists Make the Worst Students*. At first he sounds a bit cynical:

A college education is, and should be, people wanting typical careers in the structure of the world. Education must not distort itself in service to the tiny minority of narcissistic and ungrateful misfits who are, or might be, artists.

But Schjeldahl ends sweetly:

A lot of education is like teaching marching; I try to make it more like dancing. Education is this funny thing. You deal for several years with organized information, and then you go out into the world and you never see any of that ever again. There's no more organized information. I'm trying to establish within my seminars disorganized information, which students can start practicing their moves on.

Sounds like a great class. Read the whole lecture [here](#).

5 Comments

1. That's an interesting, very humane article — reminds me of Kurt Vonnegut's graduation speeches (both the real ones and the hoax one). However, I'm curious about the persistence of this idea of the "true" artist as a "maimed shaman", communing with the Otherworld in a stinky hut on the edge of the village... The suspicion that art can't be taught without paying a high personal price may be related to this myth (it may also be true, of course). I have to say that most professional artists I've encountered have had the organisation and business sense of a McKinsey consultant, whereas most art teachers have not...

Comment by [Mike C.](#) — September 7, 2007 @ [4:16 am](#)

2. "Very often the flashiest, most seemingly talented person turns out to be not an artist at all, and some hopeless klutz ends up being Jackson Pollock."

all too true.

Comment by [paul](#) — September 7, 2007 @ [6:35 am](#)

3. so much good stuff to read, thanks!

Comment by [einars o](#) — September 7, 2007 @ [7:32 am](#)

4. After crashing out of an MFA program in photography years ago (via a car crash), I am now coming here to complete my education. So far I have not been disappointed — except when you were away teaching elsewhere.

Price and time commitment are very good too. Considering I do not want to teach, it is about all I can really justify. ;>)

Thanks, & best!!

Comment by [Michael T. Murphy](#) — September 7, 2007 @ [7:38 pm](#)

5. [...] Teaching has been a current topic on Alec Soth's blog [here](#), [here](#), and especially [here](#), and then there was a thoughtful follow up piece by Mike Johnston over on The Online Photographer. Ironically, the reason I'm writing less is that in addition to my day job at Pictopia.com, I'm teaching Photoshop for Photographers at the Academy of Art in San Francisco. Unlike the things that apparently go on in some MFA programs, this course is a practical, career oriented, skill building affair. [...]

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