

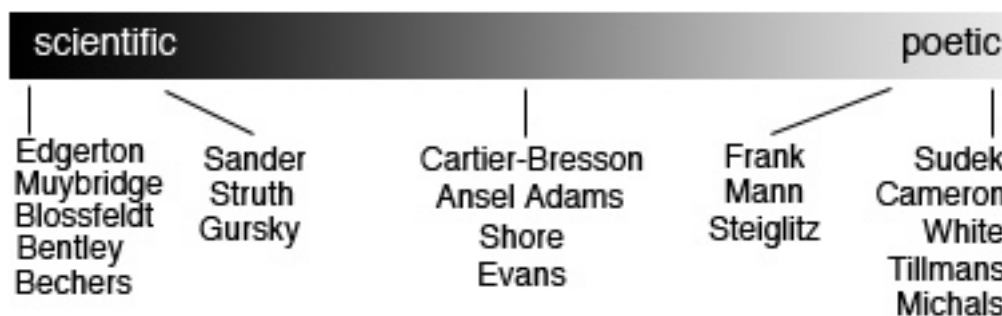
# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

December 19, 2006

## The scientist of Minneapolis & the poet of Prague

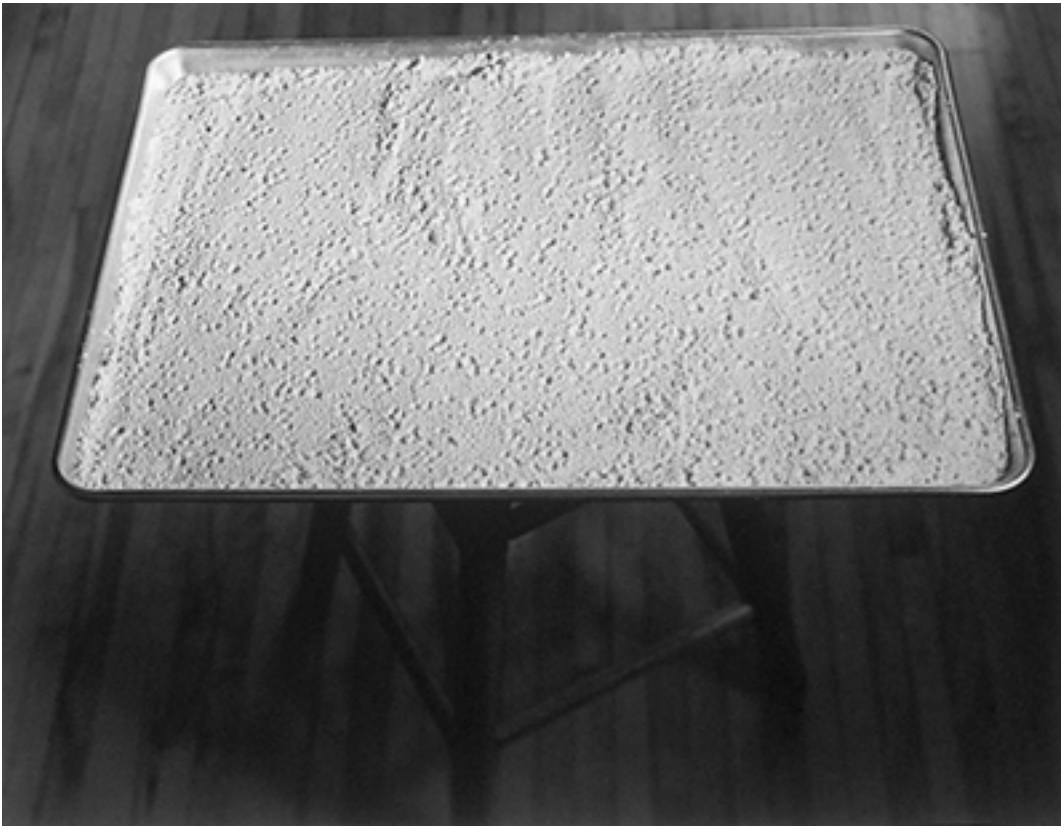
Filed under: [aesthetics](#), [artists](#), [snow](#) — alecsothblog @ 11:46 pm

I've recently discussed on the blog the close relationship between photography and poetry. The process of making and putting together pictures is often linked to the lyrical sensibility. But photography is as much a child of science as poetry. I see this as a spectrum. I've even toyed around with charting different photographers on this spectrum:



But it is hard to pinpoint the location of certain photographers. A real brainteaser is the work of [David Goldes](#). Goldes has an M.A. in Molecular Genetics from Harvard. His work is rooted in scientific investigation. But David is also a poetry enthusiast and his sensual prints are hardly straightforward experimental documents. It is as though his work oscillates between both extremes through his own brew of creative quantum logic.

This morning I emailed David to ask him about one of his snow pictures. Knowing about my interest in [Wilson Bentley](#), David emailed me the following image:



*Rain on Flour*, David Goldes

David explained the making of the picture:

*Rain on Flour* is something I made a while ago and the idea behind it is this: I put a sifted tray of flour out in the rain for a few minutes and could see on the flour surface that the rain drops were different sizes. Who knew? After I made this picture I read elsewhere that Bentley had done the same thing but had gone several steps further. He strained out the unaltered flour and was left with little glue balls made by each rain drop and then he sorted the balls to see how many of each size were made. So the flour tray became a method to measure size distribution of droplets in what we crudely call "the rain".

It would appear that David is a scientific photographer. Or is he? Have a look at these two images:



The picture on the left, by Goldes, is titled, *Growing Sugar Crystals* (2002). The picture on the right, by Josef Sudek (the 'Poet of Prague'), is titled *Simple Still Life* (1954). Only the title differentiates the scientist from the poet.

Now take a look at the image I originally requested from David:



*Walk the Dog*, David Goldes

Why did Goldes take this picture? I imagine his original interest was snow crystals (most of his pictures make some reference to water). But if I were to chart this picture it would be deep on the poetic side of the spectrum. In fact it resembles this snow picture by Josef Sudek:



*The Window of my Studio*, Josef Sudek, 1948

Is it poetry or is it science? Like so much of my blather on this blog, it really doesn't matter. What is curious is how much I love these two pictures. They really are two of my favorites. But it gets weirder. If I were to make a list of my top ten all-time favorite photographs, I would likely include these two:



Gregory Watching the Snow Fall, Kyoto, Feb 21st 1983, David Hockney



Apres Ski in der Schweiz, Ed van der Elsen

Snow, windows, and a touch of erotic longing – This seems to be the formula. It makes me want to do a scientific experiment. If someone were to take a picture with these three elements, what are the chances I'd like it?

Email your pictures to [studio@alecsoth.com](mailto:studio@alecsoth.com)

Disclaimer for regular blog readers: I'm not suggesting that 'The Scientist of Minneapolis' should be '[the sentence](#)' for David Goldes. I used it because it sort of works to the tune of *My Favorite Things*:

Raindrops on flour and windows of fog

The scientist of Minneapolis & the poet of Prague

These are a few of my favorite things.

## 11 Comments

### 1. Alec,

I am fascinated by personal public disclosure. Since so much art embodies that fascination, I can easily see why I am so interested in it. What really intrigues me is the self disclosure through other means—such as a personal journal, conversation, public announcements, and etcetera.

The main reason I check your blog every day is because there is a large amount—intentional or unintentional—of very public self disclosure.

I know it is a positively trite description, but it's great to read a blog that is so "real." You're a man to be admired, Alec Soth, a man to be admired.

Er...sorry for being completely off topic.

R

*Comment by [Ryan](#) — December 20, 2006 @ [12:35 am](#)*

### 2. Rain on Flour kinda reminds me of something you'd find in the book Evidence.

*Comment by [Danny G](#) — December 20, 2006 @ [3:52 am](#)*

### 3. Where on the spectrum do you fall? I was thinking about it, but I can't really decide. I don't think you're completely poetic, but I don't know if you'd be the left or the right of Frank, Mann... What's throwing me, I think, is your treatment of Tillmans. What do you think?

*Comment by [Greg](#) — December 20, 2006 @ [5:52 am](#)*

### 4. It is Tillman's abstractions that push him down to the edge. Frank's later work pushes him more on the poetic side. I'd say I'm a few clicks to the left of Mann. Of course, this is all just blogosphere horsefeathers.

*Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — December 20, 2006 @ [10:58 am](#)*

### 5. Where would everyone place Paul Strand?

*Comment by [Ryan](#) — December 20, 2006 @ [5:06 pm](#)*

### 6. "They really are two of my favorites. But it gets weirder." I'm very, very curious how much weirder it goes... or are you just teasing your readers...

*Comment by [Velibor Bozovic](#) — December 20, 2006 @ [6:44 pm](#)*

### 7. [...] alec soth – blog photographica, miscellanea, etcetera « The scientist of Minneapolis & the poet of Prague Humiliation + Sexual Selection = Art » [...]

*Pingback by [alec soth - blog](#) » [Blog Archive](#) » [Spectrum 2.0](#) — December 21, 2006 @ [1:00 pm](#)*

### 8. Unfortunately, i cannot find a source for this, but...

Baudelaire proposed that we require

1. luxury 2. calm 3. sexual pleasure



from great art.

It's interesting because both the Hockney and Eisken you've included seem to meet his parameters. You could trace these features through much of art history: Degas, Titan, Picasso, etc., etc., but I often found it curious that a poet, of all people, would be so quick to undercut the strangely alluring pathos of "Beauty and Sadness," as Yasunari Kawabata so aptly said. While I guess a strong case could be made even for the likes of Bentley—it's certainly calm, whist the delicate nature of the snowflakes do liken to a luxurious item, and, well, it seems anything can be made into being sexual somehow—does it somehow detract the art to reduce their traits to the lowest common denominator? Or maybe by calm, he's really hinting at something more sad, more melancholic. His own work could hardly be considered calm. But this is all a whole other can of beans; I really just wanted to share the thought.

Congratulations on your 'snow dance,' by the way.

*Comment by Meica. — December 22, 2006 @ [1:09 am](#)*

9. These also make me think of Cocteau's "Blood of a Poet"—or is it "Orpheus"—when the poet gets transmissions of all these great lines of poetry he copies down off of a car radio—including "One glass of water lights the whole world." —So evocative, like the "Simple Still Life" and "Sugar Crystals" photos. Thanks so much for this very wonderful blog, by the way. I am a sculptor/installation person and get so much from the images and the poetry and insightful, generous writing!

*Comment by Susan — December 22, 2006 @ [12:12 pm](#)*

10. [...] Ok, it took me a week or two to recover from that post on categorizing photography over there at the Alec Soth blog. Not that I don't have other things to recover from. I have listed his blog here (to your right), considering it, generally, very worthwhile reading. And now this. I thought that, almost twenty years after the movie Dead Poets Society, nobody could possibly come up with some sort of a \*chart\* (the kind of thing you know from math, or some sociological study, with an axis) that is supposed to give you a formula for evaluating or categorizing art. Soth juxtaposes "scientific" and "poetic" and "even toyed around with charting different photographers on this spectrum." [...]

*Pingback by [Oh Captain! My Captain! at Notes From Nowhere](#) — December 30, 2006 @ [4:58 pm](#)*

11. [...] Là [...]

*Pingback by [Apareillages \(11\) « SECOUSESSES](#) — July 29, 2007 @ [6:28 am](#)*