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Exhibition Review: Alec Soth's "A Pound of Pictures" — Photo-Spark

Jan 25 Written By Gabriel H. Sanchez : 3-4 minutes

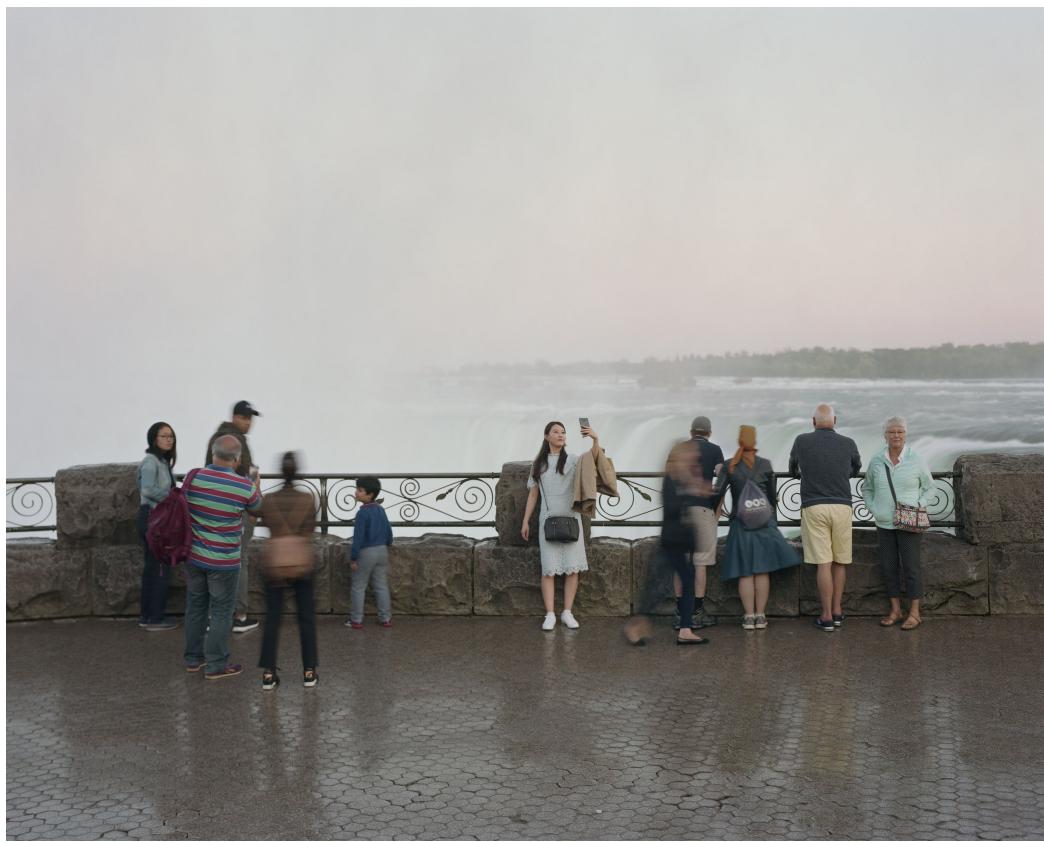
Alec Soth: A Pound of Pictures

Sean Kelly Gallery | 475 10th Ave, New York, NY 10018

Jan. 14-Feb. 26, 2022

How much does a photograph weigh? Photographer Alec Soth has likely spent his entire career in pursuit of the answer. Soth's meticulous approach to image making is labored and deliberate, often produced over extended periods of time and across vast stretches of the American cultural landscape. The resulting photographs are measured ounce-by-ounce for their emotional weight until each picture overflows with humanity, transcending the place and context of their making into something deeper, perhaps even spiritual.

Sometimes the deepest, most profound lesson can lie hidden behind the shallowest of puns — which is the modus operandi of the exhibition's title, *A Pound of Pictures*. While shooting in Los Angeles, Soth discovered a small storefront by the same name, selling masses of discarded family photos, priced by their weight in pounds. Many of the pictures he purchased there appear throughout the exhibition — in *Tim and Vanessa's. Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania*, 2019, and *Abandoned house. Coahoma, Mississippi*, 2021, stacks of nameless faces are arranged with an anthropomorphic sensibility as the focus of Soth's camera, positioned as delicate still lifes composed of lost memories.



Niagara Falls, Ontario., 2019. (Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery.)

Large-scale photographs like *Niagara Falls, Ontario., 2019*, and *Megan. Belle Island, Detroit, Michigan, 2021*, appears to echo Soth's previous bodies of work, as if recalibrating the scale for which to measure their emotional bandwidth. Portraits like *Calian & Keslea. Lincoln's tomb. Springfield, Illinois, 2021*, which depicts a couple in a heartfelt embrace on a park bench, are leveled against scenes as delicate and ephemeral as a butterfly taking perch on an orange slice in *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania., 2021*.

It's not without irony that the heaviest pieces on view are in fact the smallest — five untitled pictures, each no larger than 8"x10" are culled from the lots of found photographs, depicting intimate moments in the lives of strangers: a woman resting beneath her bed sheets, the gentle gaze of a newborn baby, and a joyful gathering of friends and family for a group portrait. What's been stripped away here — the absence of names, places, and context — has been replaced in equal measure with the weight of collective memory on the American experience.

A Pound of Pictures is on view at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City from Jan. 14-Feb. 26, 2022.