

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

July 9, 2007

Pam and Tod

Filed under: Pamela Anderson, Papageorge — alecsothblog @ 4:27 pm



Hermosa Beach #6, 1976 by Tod Papageorge

In the introduction to his series of California Beach pictures, Tod Papageorge writes:

We all carry a picture of Hollywood around in our minds, picked up from the movies and the shreds of scandals we've heard about. And if we're men and under forty, even the best of us treasures an image of the California surfer girl. What I wanted to do on this project was examine those preconceptions and describe what two semi-myths – Hollywood and the life of southern California beaches – really looked like.

In his review of a Papageorge's exhibition in 1981, Andy Grundberg wrote about his depiction of women:

Papageorge's photography is pervaded by sensuality. One finds it here not only on the beaches, where skin is displayed with seeming nonchalance, but also on the Acropolis, where young American tourists stand idly in tight cut-off jeans, or behind the refreshment table of a woman's road race. Unfortunately, Papageorge is too self-conscious to let his penchant for sexual suggestiveness run riot, so he often undercuts it with the inclusion of a foolish gesture or an incongruous detail.

This self-consciousness, ultimately, is Papageorge's biggest enemy, for it accounts for the principle shortcomings of these pictures. One is that the formal strategies he employs seem arbitrary. When he tilts the frame, we are inescapably reminded of Winogrand. This works when Papageorge's camera is looking up a woman's skirt, since it references us to Winogrand's consummately sexist book "Women Are Beautiful," but otherwise it looks willful, educated and arch.



Central Park, 1991 by Tod Papageorge

Papageorge's recent publication, *Passing Through Eden*, certainly includes pictures of scantily clad gals. I believe some of the pictures were included in the exhibition that Grundberg refers to. But in this context, his depiction of sexuality steers clear of sexism. With his brilliant sequencing and overall themes of sensuality and temptation, Papageorge's girlie pictures aren't just honest – they are essential. They are also balanced by some beefcake:



Central Park, 1982 by Tod Papageorge

- [See Papageorge beach pictures here](#)
- [Read my Pamela Anderson posts here, here, here, here](#)

3 Comments

1. These ones feel much less engaged than the central park ones.

Comment by Dan — July 9, 2007 @ 4:41 pm

2. The beach shots bring to mind that campy "Hey I'm trying to take a hip photo to hang on the wall at MoMa" sequence at the beginning of Douglas Sirk's "Imitation of Life." Of course, Papageorge's photos look nothing like the ones James Gavin's Steve Archer manages to capture in the film.

For the longest time, the only thing I knew of Tod Papageorge were the essay and eight photographs he contributed to the 1974 Aperture publication, "The Snapshot" (19:1). The photos are from his American sports series, which is going to be published this coming fall under the title, "American Sports, 1970; or How We Spent the War in Vietnam." The essay's a reflection on the snapshot tradition and its links, both accidental and exaggerated, to the humble arts of the family photo album. There's much to recommend in the essay. One of my favorite lines being: "Cameras are like dogs, but dumb, and toward quarry, even more faithful."

Comment by drew Levy — July 9, 2007 @ 6:27 pm

3. July 9—Mr. Soth leaves most posts in one day, ever! will he ever run out of TP?

Comment by pinocchio — July 9, 2007 @ 7:49 pm