

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

January 15, 2007

Mr. Cotter

Filed under: [critics & curators, education](#) — alecsothblog @ 11:24 pm



It is not exactly Rosie vs. Trump, but critics [Tyler Green](#) and [Regina Hackett](#) have tried to suggest a philosophical difference between NYTimes critic Holland Cotter and myself. For the record, Mr. Cotter gave me one of my [first national reviews](#). It was a good one. I forever kiss his critical feet. If he wants art to be educational, I'm ready to be his Vinnie Barbarino.

All joking aside, I don't think there is a big battle between beauty vs. education. To quote another critic, Peter Schjeldahl, "Beauty is not a concept. It is the animal joy of the mind."

5 Comments

1. Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all you need to know.

Comment by rob — January 16, 2007 @ [3:42 am](#)

2. I think the question you pose builds on the themes of Shit Week: “beauty” has become a shorthand for the despised visual equivalent of the Sentimental (as in “unearned emotion”): one thinks of the endless “red rocks’n’blue skies” landscape photographs that populate the web. Any serious artist wants to avoid this trap, and the three easy ways to avoid it are (a) to portray Shit or (b) to deploy Irony or (c) to focus on a message or concept. In other words, to avoid siding with Beauty because “the beautiful” has been given a bad name.

But Beauty is a word that needs rescuing from this fate: the fact is that “beauty” is the name of a process or pursuit, not an object or a goal, and it needs constant redefinition (a bit like T.S. Eliot’s idea of poetry “purifying the language of the tribe”). As I think you are suggesting, the honest pursuit of new definitions of Beauty is what artists are for, and in the process of doing this, “education” happens. To wish that someone may “Walk in Beauty” has nothing to do with interior decorating ...

Comment by [Mike C.](#) — January 16, 2007 @ [5:09 am](#)

3. Speaking of Shit Week and beauty, Mike, you reminded me of what Edward Weston said about the toilet image that was posted by Alec: “ I have been photographing our toilet, that glossy enameled receptacle of extraordinary beauty....Here was every sensuous curve of the ‘human figure divine’ but minus the imperfections. Never did the Greeks reach a more significant consummation to their culture, and it somehow reminded me, forward movement of finely progressing contours, of the Victory of Samothrace. –

Comment by [Michal Daniel](#) — January 16, 2007 @ [8:14 am](#)

4. being educated by artists is a scary thought

Comment by dan — January 16, 2007 @ [1:57 pm](#)

5. This post somehow reminded me of the comic strip partially clips from a few weeks ago: <http://news.eastbayexpress.com/php/comics/partially/2007-01-03.html>

Cheers,

Joe

Comment by [Joe Reifer](#) — January 16, 2007 @ [4:52 pm](#)