

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

November 13, 2006

Roger Ballen & the Lyrebird

Filed under: [artists](#) — alecsothblog @ 11:23 pm



Untitled (2004) Roger Ballen

Just returned home from a panel discussion on the photographs of [Roger Ballen](#). The panelists ([Katherin Turczan](#), [Vince Leo](#) and myself) worked up a pretty good lather about Ballen's controversial work. I'd try to recap the discussion but I'm too tired. Instead I'd like to share this [video of a bird mimicking a camera](#). Amazing. (Found via [State of the Art](#)).

16 Comments

1. don't know what's controversial exactly. superb pictures. most have the look of being found.

Comment by [j zorn](#) — November 13, 2006 @ [11:55 pm](#)

2. That lyrebird just blew my mind.

Comment by [John](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [12:26 am](#)

3. Shadow Chamber is fantastic. This one, miroesque. Together, Arbusesque. Gotta love his scrawly dusky greys. This one looks blue to me. One photographer whose execution is as pleasing as his concept.

Comment by [rob](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [3:12 am](#)

4. Roger Ballen & the Lyrebird... hmm isn't it amazing what male species try to reproduce in order to attract female species?
I wander if there is a Lyrebird-chainsaw ringtone for nokia ... fantastic!

Comment by [Christophe](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [6:04 am](#)

5. I've seen his latest work in Brussels recently, makes me think about Meatyard in some way. I'm more fond of his older work like Platteland. Those are really good documentary...

Comment by [roland](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [6:37 am](#)

6. I can't get enough of the Lyrebird.

Comment by [Zoe Strauss](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [11:33 am](#)

7. Love that bird. Surely, someone jests.

Comment by [George LeChat](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [2:40 pm](#)

8. I dont believe my ears... !

Comment by [B. S. Ilktac](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [4:18 pm](#)

9. the lyrebird is amazing! although its a little upsetting to hear it mimic a chainsaw.

Comment by [Jonee](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [10:14 pm](#)

10. It appears to be real. See [this](#) and [this](#)

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — November 14, 2006 @ [10:26 pm](#)

11. Love the irony.

Ballen's series – Platteland: Images from Rural S. Africa – those are pretty hard in my view. Not a subtle approach or commentary. Do you think there is too much distortion – too much manipulation of what's really out there (skewed documentary by the photographer) or is that OK (all the more poignant) in the context of S. Africa ? Distortion of Fact / Fiction – still an interesting thread...

That said, the lyrebird Ballen knew what things to copy with the camera to really stir the pot. Rewarded for it too.

The other lyrebird is pretty innocent -it's a biological condition- he's only doing it to get some - can't fault him for that !

Comment by [Matt Niebuhr](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [12:17 am](#)

12. You have to hear Roger Ballen give a talk – he's amazing. It's like a performance piece where he turns the tables on the audience and starts banging out all these rhetorical questions about exactly what is real, what isn't and what happens to all those animals and people he photographs – he turns the tables on the audience. He's got a joint show with Mark Cohen at the Robert Klein Gallery in Boston in March 2007. Which has got to be a double dose of weirdness.

Comment by [colin](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [6:40 am](#)

13. You want art? Record a lyrebird mimicking a parot who is mimicking Tammy Wynette singing "Stand By Your Man." Play that recording for another lyrebird and record him mimicking the recording. Repeat fifty times.

Comment by [John](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [11:51 am](#)

14. I can't believe that you stumbled upon the lyrebird! I originally saw the clip in an ornithology class form from the film 'The Wonderful World of Birds' or something of that nature. Great film, but even better clip; can't wait to see you in Chicago tomorrow!

Comment by [meica](#) — November 15, 2006 @ [1:27 pm](#)

15. I would be interested to hear some of the discussion about Roger Ballen's work from the panel. I have a student working on a paper about him and it would interesting to hear photographers responses to his work rather than critics.

Comment by [Kristopher](#) — November 16, 2006 @ [2:01 am](#)

16. Alec, I'd still really love to hear your recap of the panel on Roger Ballen. I'm fascinated by his images and unfortunately missed the talk.

Comment by [Patti](#) — November 27, 2006 @ [8:29 pm](#)