



Alec Soth—Courtesy Kominek Books

OUT THERE

Looking For Love in 90's by Alec Soth

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Love makes people do strange things. The history of mankind is rife with love producing illogical and oddball behavior. When it comes to photography, falling in love with the medium is hardly an exception. For example, someone painfully shy might find themselves impulsively photographing strangers without asking for permission. Or, they instinctively photograph something without any ability to later explain why. Alec Soth's newest book *Looking for Love, 1996* is, in its way, about both—the search for love guided by the heart and the search of love guided by the eye.

Soth, a Minnesota native, came to national attention in 2004 after his project *Sleeping by the Mississippi* was featured at the Whitney museum during its Biennial exhibition and consequently released in book form by the prestigious German publisher Steidl to critical acclaim. Rapidly thrust into the worlds of art and commerce he followed up his debut with equally strong and provocative bookworks: *Niagara* (2006), *Dog Days Bogota* (2007) and *Broken Manual* (2010). *Looking for Love, 1996* (Kominek Books, 2012) is a look to the past at his early beginnings as a photographer working with black and white film and a medium format camera.

In his brief introduction to the work Soth describes that time as one of working a miserable job (printing photos at a large commercial lab) and retreating to a bar to be comforted by "the solitude I found among strangers." He began to concentrate on his own pictures, slyly using the lab to make prints which he smuggled, concealed under his jeans, out to his car. He writes of imagining one day "a stranger would fall in love with me."

The first photographs of couples we encounter in *Looking for Love* cling possessively to their partners and leer at Soth's camera as if to ask, "this is mine, where is yours?" While his journey takes us through the outside landscape and various social gatherings—the aforementioned bar; a convention hall that seems to bridge religion, spirituality and dating under one roof; poker games; singles parties; high school proms—we can sense a young photographer eager to hone his photographic instincts for metaphor and craving the fruits of collaboration between artist, medium and world. A photo of a flirtatious blonde cheerleader sits on the opposite page of a lone, slightly gothic teen outside a music club. The prom king and queen stand proudly before an auditorium empty but for a few hidden background observers and a basketball court scoreboard. An older man sits phone to ear at a 'Psychic Friends Network' booth while a quaffed blonde with a #1 ribbon pinned to her lapel passes by paying no mind. Alongside the underlying melancholy of some of these pictures is also the excitement of a photographer discovering their talent and seeing an affirmation of life stilled in photographs.

That affirmation makes the parting photograph all the more important. In it we see Soth himself sitting sprawl-legged in a rental tuxedo as if his own prom has just ended. Perhaps it had. I hope the love he may have found, lasts.

Looking for Love, 1996 is available from [Kominek Books](#).

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