

## Artron | Sean Kelly Gallery : Alec Soth “A Pound of Pictures”

8-10 minutes

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From January 14 to February 26, 2022, Sean Kelly Gallery in Manhattan presents Alec Soth's fourth solo show: A Pound of Pictures.



I entered the gallery hall with a sense of suspense stirred by the exhibition's title, "A Pound of Pictures." Why is this exhibition, which at first glance looks like so many photography exhibitions, given its interesting title? I perused the show in bewilderment, pausing at almost every image, fascinated by its evocative yet ineffable scent, then read word for word his short exhibition statement and even flipped through a photo album he kept at the front desk of the gallery. After an almost routine tour of the exhibition, I took a deep breath.

We know that millions of people around the world take countless pictures with their cameras every day, and like many photographers, Alec focuses his lens on life. Yet his attention fascinates you, even if it's suspenseful: the viewer's eye always has an instinctive desire to know what's going on behind the scenes, but not a strong desire to pursue it. Watching has an empathic effect: pictures make the eye look, but they make you forget what you're looking for. This is clearly due to the intuitive power of art rather than the political power of the narrative function of painting.

However, the artist said of his work and intentions: "If the pictures...are about anything other than their shimmering surfaces...they are about the process of their own making." From the artist's point of view, this is an exhibition of self-reflection on photography itself, that is, "A Pound" refers to photography itself. The first meaning here refers to the physical weight of photographic paper as a printing material. It's easy to go back to Greenberg's famous theory that the art of painting is essentially a flat plate. The logic of transforming the spiritual aspect of art into the material aspect is very similar.

Let's sort out this process of communication between the spiritual and the material: watching makes us feel a certain emotion and desire of the photographer, which he himself describes as "desire to pin down and crystallize experience, especially as it is represented and recollected by printed images." That is to say, through printing, spirit can exist on the material carrier, spiritualize as matter, and thus have "weight", with clear and concrete material attributes. However, "a pound" is not just "weight" in the physical sense, it is also metaphorically referred to as mental or even emotional weight.

The artist revealed that the name "A Pound of Pictures" actually came from an experience he had while traveling in Los Angeles, when he saw a vendor selling photos by the pound at a fair. What an impressive and ironic metaphor: the photographer, with a grand psychological desire, longs to "memorialize life while life continues to keep flipping by. What once meant is constantly transformed into a "pound," sold off as a trivial weight in an unimportant market, between countless pounds, just as our memories that once contained emotions are finally tossed into the void as vanishable matter.

Not only Alec's exhibition can be used to point to photography itself, in fact, Soth's artist statement can also be borrowed and extended to think about art itself: if art, besides brief glorious bloom in art field, have other meaning, that is they all point to the process of shaping art itself. All physical representations, such as exhibitions, is art itself.

Interestingly, among the artist's albums on display at the gallery's reception desk, each album is said to contain five randomly inserted local photos. As I turned the pages, the photos slid out of the book, and at that moment, it felt like a pound fell from my heart.

Alec Soth lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His work has been the subject of international exhibitions.

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