

FRAENKEL

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For immediate release:



ALEC SOTH ADVICE FOR YOUNG ARTISTS

Apr. 17 – May 23, 2025

Fraenkel Gallery is pleased to present *Alec Soth: Advice for Young Artists*, an exhibition exploring the cultivation of creativity through playful and surprising photographs made at undergraduate art programs. Rather than offering the guidance promised by the show's title, the series presents reflections on artmaking at different stages of life, exploring the connections between photography, time, and aging. Inspired in part by Walker Evans's Polaroids of young people, the photographs range from bright still lifes made from art department props to enigmatic images of students and oblique self-portraits. A public reception with the artist will take place on Saturday, April 19, from 2-4pm. *Alec Soth: Advice for Young Artists* was recently published as a monograph by MACK.

The series grew from Soth's interest in portraits that Walker Evans made towards the end of his life, depicting young people at colleges and universities. Best known for his Farm Security Administration-era documentary work, in the 1970s Evans began working with the new Polaroid SX-70 camera, recording signs and lettering

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among other subjects. Many of Evans's celebrated Polaroids depict the vernacular subjects for which he was best known. But for Soth, "the work I love are his portraits of young people made while visiting universities," he writes. The Polaroids "sparked something," Soth notes, and looking for similar encounters, he began visiting art departments around the U.S. Rather than giving lectures, Soth met with students and classes in exchange for access, writing that he "liked just hanging around and pretending I was an art student."

With humor and humility, Soth's images sometimes suggest an unbridgeable distance between himself and the art school world he records. *Artist Lecture* presents Soth's view of a lecture hall seen from the podium. The photograph captures seats filled with students and faculty, recording their amused, bored, or distracted reactions to Soth's camera. In *Katherine's Drawing*, pictured on the monograph's cover, a pencil sketch of Soth's face is framed behind cracked glass. Drawn by Soth's intern at his request, the work's shattered surface undermines any authority or self-seriousness it might otherwise embody.

More often, the images find Soth at play, reclaiming the freedom and experimentation that belongs to beginners in any pursuit. Still lifes depict unexpected configurations of materials used to teach drawing and painting. In *Still Life II*, a colorful assembly of objects includes red apples and a scowling bust, and Soth himself hidden at the back of the classroom. In a number of portraits, Soth photographs art students framed by their work and their tools, peeking from behind canvases or holding a shutter release cable. In *Ameerah*, a young woman poses on a stool with her hands clasped. A study in blues, greys, and browns, the image also doubles as a self-portrait, with Soth's own reflection visible in a smudged mirror.

Alec Soth is based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Recent solo exhibitions include *Alec Soth: A Room of Rooms* at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, and *Alec Soth: Reading Room* at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, on view through May 4. His photographs have been featured in solo survey shows organized by Jeu de Paume, Paris; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and MediaSpace, London. In 2008, Soth created Little Brown Mushroom, a multi-media enterprise focused on visual storytelling. His work is in the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among many others. The artist's monographs include *Sleeping by the Mississippi*, *NIAGARA*, *The Last Days of W*, *Broken Manual*, *Gathered Leaves*, *Songbook*, *I Know How Furiously Your Heart Is Beating*, and *A Pound of Pictures*. Soth has been the recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2013. He is a member of Magnum Photos.

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Image: Alec Soth, *Katherine's Drawing*, 2024

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