

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**Williams College Museum of Art Presents a Year of
Programs and Exhibitions Devoted to “Landscape,”
beginning
with *Alec Soth: NIAGARA***

Williamstown, Mass.– The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) announces a year of programs and exhibitions that explore the idea of art and landscape. Landscape can be described as topography, sustainer of life, site of conservation activism, cultural icon, metaphor, and object of awe and spiritual reverence. WCMA kicks off this thematic year with two complementary exhibitions that explore Niagara Falls: ***Alec Soth: NIAGARA***, beginning October 10, and ***A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt’s Niagara***, beginning October 17. On Thursday, October 29 at 5:00 pm, a Season Premiere Party will celebrate the opening of these fall exhibitions and will also feature a conversation between exhibition curator Kathryn Price and Williams College professors Marc Gotlieb and Michael Lewis about different views of Niagara Falls. This is a free event and all are invited to attend.

Alec Soth: NIAGARA and ***A Strong Impression*** contrast historical and contemporary views of Niagara Falls as sublime landscape, tourist destination, and romantic cliché. ***A Strong Impression*** (October 17, 2009-January 31, 2010) examines both the artistic and cultural context in which William Morris Hunt’s *Niagara Falls* (1878) was produced through paintings, drawings, photographs, films, rare books, and souvenirs. ***Alec Soth: NIAGARA*** (October 10, 2009–January 10, 2010) presents 22 photographs by contemporary photographer Alec Soth. From 2004 to 2005, Soth photographed sobering contemporary views of

life on both the American and Canadian sides of Niagara Falls. Oscar Wilde wrote, “The sight of the stupendous waterfall must be one of the earliest, if not the keenest, disappointments in American married life.”

Soth captures this passion and disappointment in **NIAGARA** by focusing on the motifs of romance that have long been associated with the Falls – young couples, run-down motels, and pawn shop wedding rings. Using a large-format camera, Soth creates lushly detailed photographs that often belie the bittersweet subject matter of romance associated with the Falls – the “aftermath of passion,” as Soth describes it. However, Soth admits that he was not documenting Niagara Falls: “There is so much I left out,” he says. “Niagara has millions of happy vacationing families and I didn’t photograph a single one.” “We are thrilled to be showing the work of Alec Soth for the first time in context with artists from the nineteenth century like William Morris Hunt and Frederic Edwin Church, who also depicted Niagara Falls. Hunt and Church painted the Falls in part because of its beauty and majesty, but also because the Falls symbolized the grandeur of American life. In contrast, Soth is interested in exploring the clichés and associations that have become part of the image of the Falls,” explains exhibition curator Kathryn Price. The artist will be at WCMA on Thursday, November 5 at 7:00 pm for a program titled “Inventing Niagara.” He will discuss his artwork with writer Ginger Strand, author of *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power and Lies*. A complete listing of programs follows.

About the Artist

Alec Soth (b. 1969) is a photographer born and based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is the recipient of several major fellowships from the Bush, McKnight and Jerome Foundations and was awarded the 2003 Santa Fe Prize for Photography. His work is represented in major public and private collections, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Soth's photographs have been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including the 2004 Whitney and São Paulo Biennials. His first monograph, *Sleeping by the Mississippi*, was published by Steidl in 2004 to critical acclaim. Since then Soth has published *NIAGARA* (2006), *Fashion Magazine* (2007), *Dog Days, Bogotá* (2007) and *The Last Days of W* (2008). Soth is represented by Gagosian Gallery in New York, Weinstein Gallery in Minneapolis, and is a member of Magnum Photos.

Dog Days, Bogotá by Alec Soth will also be on view at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston, Massachusetts September 9 through November 28, 2009. Visit <http://massart.edu/x3357.xml> for more information.

The Williams College Museum of Art

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 am to 5 pm, and on Sunday from 1 to 5 pm. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information, please contact: Suzanne Silitch, Director of Communications and Strategy, 413.597.3178.

Fall Programs

The Annual Plonsker Family Lecture in Contemporary Art

Artist Vik Muniz

Thursday, October 1

7:00 pm

Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall, Williams College

Brazilian-born artist Vik Muniz discusses his work and artistic process, which often incorporates unconventional materials and photography to explore issues of representation.

Gallery Talk

“Life Cycles: An African Journey Through Art”

Wednesday, October 14

4:00 pm

Gillian Pistell, Graduate Student in the History of Art, Class of 2010

Season Premiere Party: Views of Niagara

Thursday, October 29

5:00–7:00 pm

In conjunction with *A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara* and *Alec Soth: NIAGARA*, join us for a dialogue with Marc Gotlieb, Director of the Graduate Program in the History of Art and Class of 1955 Memorial Professor of Art; Michael Lewis, Faison-Pierson-Stoddard Professor of Art History; and Kathryn Price, Interim Associate Curator.

Inventing Niagara

Thursday, November 5

7:00 pm

A conversation with photographer Alec Soth, whose work is currently on view, and writer Ginger Strand, author of *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, and Lies*.

Gallery Talk

“Two Artists: Two Bodies of Work”

Wednesday, November 11

4:00 pm

Join studio art faculty members Mike Glier and Amy Podmore for a walk through their exhibition.

Holiday Walk Weekend and Museum Shop Sale

Saturday, December 5

3:00–7:00 pm

The Holiday Walk is a Williamstown tradition. The museum shop will be offering special discounts, along with hot cider and music, after the town parade.

Additional vendors will offer a variety of unique holiday gifts.