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McDermott, Emily. "Alec Soth turns his gaze inward." *Wallpaper**. April 5, 2019.

Wallpaper*

Alec Soth turns his gaze inward

After a transcendental experience inspired a yearlong hiatus from photography, the Minnesota native finds a renewed focus in his intimate book *I Know How Furiously Your Heart Is Beating*



Simone. Los Angeles, 2017, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York

Eschewing a linear narrative, photographer Alec Soth's new body of work unfurls like a compilation of poetry about people and their personal spaces. Presented in the book *I Know How Furiously Your Heart is Beating* (as well as four concurrent exhibitions in San Francisco, New York, Berlin and his native Minneapolis), his annals of Middle America at times focuses on the people themselves, but in many images their surroundings take centre stage. After all, our homes often reveal more about our innermost selves than our clothing or faces.

'All of my work in the past has been about place to some extent, and I didn't want that to define this work,' Soth says when we meet at Berlin's Look Galerie the day after his exhibition opening. 'I wanted to define it as this engagement in a space – that simple.' This shift in his approach resulted from a kind of transcendental experience or reawakening that followed a deep meditation during a flight to Helsinki in 2015.

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Anna. Kentfield, California, 2017, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York

After he landed, Soth began to question his position of power as a photographer, and what it meant to make and put images out into the world. Upon his return to his Minnesota home, he stopped traveling, stopped making images, and retreated to a farmhouse for nearly an entire year. It sounds daunting to put a halt on life as you know it, but Soth reflects on the experience differently: 'My gallerist in New York always refers to that time as a crisis,' he says, 'but I was the happiest I've ever been, it wasn't a crisis. This was a positive retreat.'

In fact, the slowness and appreciation of time, space and people that he experienced during his time on the farm is clearly reflected in the intimate images that followed, 35 of which are printed in *I Know How Furiously Your Heart is Beating*. In *Dan-Georg, Dusseldorf* (2018), for example, a vast black-and-white painting instantly recognisable as a Picasso adorns the wall in the background, while the titular man stands in the foreground, rubbing his eyes with a tissue and wearing a bathrobe. (A quick Google search of 'Dan', 'Dusseldorf' and 'art' reveals the man as a well-known art patron in the German city.)

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In an image like *Leon, Berlin* (2018), we see a man wearing only white underwear as he gazes out a window, his back reflected in a wall-covering mirror. The room itself is starkly white and empty, save for a blue exercise gadget and wigs scattered in a small circle. In further images, the picture frame is filled entirely by unending stacks of old books or a stuffed owl, wings spread, hanging above a bedroom door in Bucharest. We're taken from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City and Cincinnati, from Warsaw to Bucharest and Giurgiu. The places and people may seem random, but we gain an intimate sense about the life they might live, yet one that's open enough for us to create our own stories. And that's exactly the point.

'I didn't want to over plan how I would get to where I'm going, and I didn't want to make it about place. I wanted to make pictures with a large-format camera again and I wanted to be with people,' Soth explains. 'I'm sometimes reluctant to tell the stories [because] I want people to imagine their own experience. The fact that someone can be drawn to a picture through their own personal experience – that's what I want.'



Ute's Books. Odessa, 2018, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York

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Yuko. Berlin, 2018, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York



Galina. Odessa, 2018, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York

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Leyla and Sabine. New Orleans, 2018, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York



Vince. New York City, 2018, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York

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Keni. New Orleans, 2018, by Alec Soth. © The artist. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York