

SIMON ROBERTS



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Simon Roberts travelled throughout Russia between July 2004 and August 2005, making pictures in over 200 locations and creating one of the most extensive, comprehensive photographic accounts of this vast country by a Westerner. His images are not clichéd representations of a Russia ground down by poverty and despair; rather, he presents a beautiful and awe-inspiring land, with a dignified people empowered by a growing optimism and a deep rooted sense of national esteem. Intimate and revealing portraits of contemporary Russians show us a diverse people, united by a sense of common identity and connected by a shared love of 'the Motherland', while breathtaking landscapes reveal the complexity and uniqueness of the country.

"Motherland is a beautifully resolved body of work and the pervading air of melancholy, so suited the subject. The editing together of landscapes and figure studies work powerfully together – and Simon's eye for the special detail that lifts a picture above a record to become a kind of poetry is evident in every image."

Martin Barnes, Senior Curator, Photographs, V&A, 2006

"Motherland is a remarkably sensitive, optimistic and empathic comment on Russian identity during a time of enormous change. Roberts' work is significant because it returns to traditional documentary values, eschewing representations of Russia as a decaying country defined by alcoholism, drug abuse and violence. It is his connection with and understanding of his subjects that distinguish Roberts as a documentary photographer. His work reminds us of the importance of documentary in leaving a legacy of a particular time and place, and does so through eloquent and arresting photographs. It is rare to see work today that engages us so absolutely, and without judgement, without resorting to sentimentality."

Greg Hobson, Curator, National Media Museum, 2007

"Motherland exemplifies the magnificence of the traditional photo-essay, coupled with images made by a talented photographer who demonstrates a contemporary and original eye for detail.... The images are uplifting despite the bleakness, which also pervades. Part of the reason for this might be the perceptive editing and pacing of the book. Arranged chronologically to mirror Roberts' journey, there is a well-conceived balance between landscape and portrait....This is an exemplary photobook that melds together objectivity, wonder and desire."

Debra Klomp Ching, Photo-eye Booklist, 2007

"Roberts' pictures are intimate, they are technically accomplished, and they carry an extraordinary narrative charge....How he has managed to make every last photo memorable is debatable, but he has, and if there has been a better photographic exploration of Russia in recent years, I haven't seen it."

Jonathan Wright, Geographical Magazine, 2007

"In the new documentary mode objectivity is almost invariably melded with desire. The photographs of Britain's Simon Roberts from his series Motherland are, paradoxically, both bleak and raw and yet almost distressingly pleasing to the eye."

Gary Michael Dault, Magenta Foundation, 2006

"Because the photographs in Motherland depict a nation that is alien to most of us, you could almost begin to convince yourself that the scenes are, in fact, elaborately constructed film sets. The landscapes have an air of suspension about them, rather like the split second before a film director calls 'Action', while the portraits – as formal and static in nature as they are – have a connection between both photographer and subject seen all too rarely these days. There are echoes of August Sander about these."
Ailsa McWhinnie, Outdoor Photography, 2007

"Motherland was a journey taken in the spirit of the American road trips of Stephen Shore and Joel Meyerowitz in the 1970s. Wide-ranging in subject and humanistic in spirit, Roberts' photographs reveal a country with an unorthodox and often unexpected beauty. History may weigh heavily on the country, but, in his photographs, it doesn't define it....Roberts' photographs give expression to a sense of pride and belonging. The thread that links his pictures in this sweeping project is his genuine curiosity and warm regard for his subject."
Jean Dykstra, Art on Paper, 2008

"This empathic and captivating collection of photographs, which combines intimate portraits and expansive landscapes, coalesces into a picture of post-Soviet Russia that is more complex and optimistic than clichéd portrayals of poverty in the wake of communism. Offering equal measures of beauty and disorder, pride and melancholy, the images speak to feelings of belonging and a common spirit amidst evident diversity. Coming through centrally in Motherland is the importance of place and the native landscape to the Russians. It also embodies the sense of a nation moving into a new and unfamiliar era, even as it reflects the artist's own journey."
Karen Irvine, Curator, Museum of Contemporary Photography Chicago, 2007

"In his ground-breaking photographic collection, Roberts took in over 60 destinations on a 12-month trip. There is a universal quality to these images: they end up more a portrait of humanity than of Russia. In fact, seen through Roberts' eyes Russia is a place suffused with a peculiar, bright-eyed happiness – a sort of enthusiastic defiance....and unexpectedly beautiful."
Viv Groskop, Saturday Telegraph Magazine, 2007

"The work makes a refreshing change from much of the pessimistic documentary we have seen from the former Soviet Union. Roberts' images record the diversity of the country and its people, who through their shared national pride, attachment to place and modest self-esteem make clear that, although for many life remains hard, the Motherland is not the miserable place some would have us believe."
Chris Dickie, AG Magazine, 2007

"Roberts' large format photographs capture the vastness, simplicity and complexity, hope, struggle and heart of the Russian territories, peoples and cultures."

Nova Clutch, 2007

"Simon Roberts wants to break down the stereotypes that own you...His journey through Russia is one of liberation, not exploitation...it is a journey to uncover truth and dignity, timelessness and respect...rather than magnify crime or inflate historical myth. It is a vision speaking of majesty, community and grace, not vice, guns and titillation. He would like to take the epic land that is 'Russia' and make it intimate...reel it in and soften it...let you see the beauty and hope, not the suffering and pain. Simon deals in optimism and humanity, not tragedy, corruption and misery..."

Doug Rickard, American Suburb X, 2008

"Rising British photography star Simon Roberts distilled his year's travels around Russia between 2004 and 2005 into Motherland – an extensive photo-essay which captures something essential about this vast, complex nation. Rather than focus on Russia's deterioration since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Roberts's images have a brutal seductiveness and are surprisingly optimistic, showing a proud people who share an innate sense of the history of their homeland and an ability to appreciate beauty in the most unexpected places."

Ben East, Metro, 2007

"Simon Roberts's passion for photography is like a seam running through his life; a constant presence, which has resurfaced time and time again, via magical moments and turning points. Now, with his first book, Motherland, Roberts continues his journey through the medium."

Miranda Gavin, Hotshoe, 2007