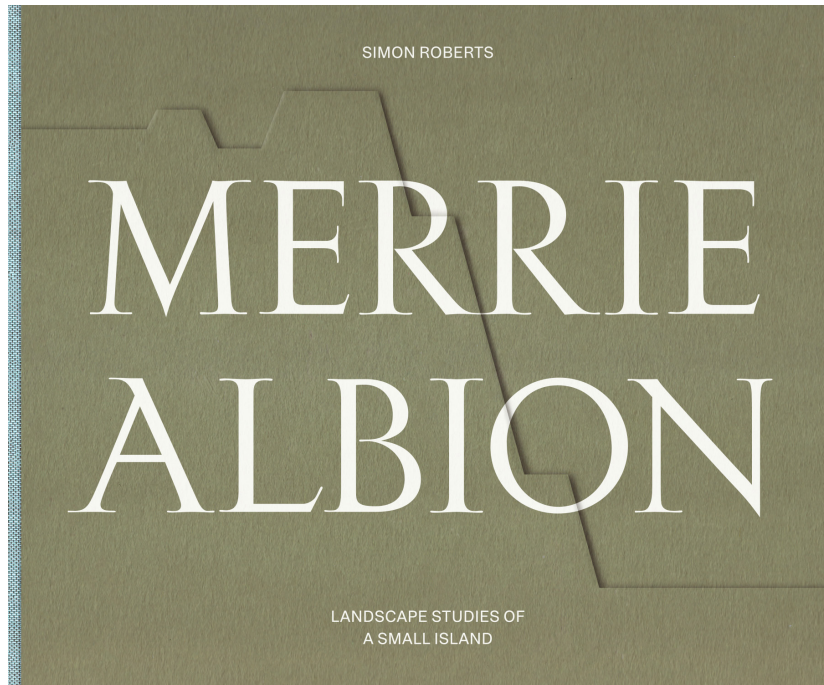


SIMON ROBERTS



Published: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2017

For over a decade, Simon Roberts has photographed events and places across Britain that have drawn people together in public, reflecting on the nature of our shared histories and communal experiences. Merrie Albion – Landscape Studies of a Small Island brings together iconic images and many previously unpublished photographs, recording social practices and customs linked to the British landscape, as well as some of the economic and political theatre that has helped define recent history. While Roberts’s interests have often gravitated towards evolving patterns of leisure, and the complex relationship between history, place and culture, he has also photographed events that have a more immediate, topical significance in Britain’s recent past, and which collectively form a detached visual chronicle of the times in which we live. Creating a view of contemporary society that is far from straightforward, Roberts critically conflates the traditional genre of landscape with social documentary, layering ideas of national character through relationships to both place and particular moments in time.

SELECTED REVIEWS

"Roberts has remained faithful to the style he mastered in 2007, characterized by a complex multiplane composition, elevated perspective (he often photographs from the top of his motor home), and the tableau format, to use art historian and curator Jean-François Chevrier's term for a form of photography that, like painting, relates to the wall rather than to the page, and in which characters are otherwise absorbed and seem unaware of the existence of the viewer."

Sylwia Serafinowicz, ArtForum, 2018

"A portrait of contemporary Britain, it presents the nation in all its complexity, from city traders to Muslim worshippers, while somehow evincing a sense of place that is palpable and oddly reassuring.....A book that speaks quietly and powerfully about this increasingly disunited kingdom at a pivotal moment."

Sean O'Hagan, The Guardian, 2017

"A visual chronicler, Simon Roberts' scenes of public gatherings conflate traditional landscape painting with social documentary. His latest exhibition, featuring photos taken during the past 10 years, focuses on events and places that define recent British history, such as student protests, Grenfell Tower and Shoreham Air Show... In his Brueghel-like compositions of congregation, carnival and revolt, Roberts resists simplistic notions of nationhood. His landscapes, woven with juxtapositions, tensions and ironies, show the fracture of contemporary society."

Kitty Grady, Financial Times, 2018

"A contemporary master of the 'long look' style of social landscape photography. Large format, high camera angle, wide view: it is a style of picture-making that presents a vast array of visual facts and through its godlike gaze encourages searching examination, immersion and reverie."

Simon Denison, Source Magazine, 2018

"Released in the wake of the nationalist triumph of Brexit, this brilliant new book takes the temperature of the UK, offering insights most necessary into notions of identity and belonging and, specifically, what it means to be British at this significant moment in contemporary history. With his customary elevated perspective and tableaux style, we oversee views of places and the people that populate them to form a survey: not only of spaces used for leisure and cultural activity but also subjects and events that can now be viewed as defining locations in recent times. A real socio-political mood piece, the power and urgency of which reminds us why Roberts is regarded as one of the leading UK photographers working today."

Tim Clark, 1000 words, 2017

"Merrie Albion offers a never-less-than-arresting photographic survey of Britain at work, rest and restlessness."

Travis Elborough, World of Interiors, May 2018

"This body of work serves as a reminder that the landscapes and environments we live in are shaped by the people that inhabit them. Simon not only provides a survey of Britain's public spaces but also offers commentary and a topical look at what's happened in Britain over the last ten years."

Rebecca Fulleylove, It's Nice That, 2017

"Roberts' scenes range from the joyful – a festival on a Kentish beach, a Diamond Jubilee street party on an estate, Eid al-Fitr celebrations – to the poignant, such as an image of Grenfell Tower in the wake of last summer's tragic fire. He is interested in the drama that is inherent in certain social customs, religious practices or community rituals, where humans become characters within shared stories. He brings the eye of a documentary photographer to the genre of landscape art, highlighting the complexities of our relationships with both people and our lived environment. At a time when the question of British identity is at the forefront of our national conversations, Roberts' works paint a challenging picture of a country whose differences are as much a cause for celebration as the characteristics its people have in common."

Frances Hedges, Town & Country, 2018

"Roberts' interest in history and politics brings a nuance and an enquiry to his depiction of the British; reading the detailed captions gives the viewer a greater understanding of what is going on, transforming a photograph of say, the reenactment of the Battle of Bannockburn from a nostalgic pantomime to a critique of contemporary politics."

Lottie Davies, Professional Photography, 2018

"The photographs examine rich and complex variations of Britain that are now even more poignant after last year's [Brexit] vote. Images of election campaigning in clean and tidy suburbia, protests, the aftermath of riots in London, diamond jubilee celebrations, rock concerts, a family enjoying Brighton beach, computer screens of the trading floor of Lloyds – the list goes on....Contained within each photograph are mini dramas, cheap-looking high streets with pound shops set against Victorian architecture. Roberts shows a Britain at odds with itself. Rather than a harmonious society, we sense fragmentation and awkwardness and a yearning for a glorious past that never existed."

Michael Grieve, British Journal of Photography, 2017

"Redolent of classic English landscape paintings with their slightly elevated viewpoints and people scattered in the middle-distance (think Constable), they also carry a very contemporary air of detachment and a level of societal detail which invites repeated viewings."

Simon Bowcock, Photomonitor, 2017

"The book offers an insiders' critique, and can be seen as an effort to contribute by illuminating the psychological landscape of Britain by looking at its physical landscape."

Conor Risch, Photo District News, 2018

"Roberts uses landscape brilliantly to tap into a feeling that identity is rooted in place, that we are all shaped by our surroundings. He steps back to capture the scene, often taking a high vantage point, like a modern-day Brueghel, and, in doing so, he takes in as much of the drama as possible. His photographs remind us that, often, it is the environment that ties us together. Our Britishness lies in the buildings and the weather, the cities and the beaches that shape our lives with shared experiences. There is discord and there is unity in this land of multiple identities. There is serenity and there is discontent. This complex little island is teeming with contradictions."

Emily Spicer, Studio International, 2017

"In his new book, *Merrie Albion*, which charts the 10-year period between the collapse of New Labour and the Brexit vote, Simon Roberts has curated a series of images that perfectly capture contemporary Britain. Each image details our attempts to carve out some sense of identity for ourselves, whether it's by taking part in war re-enactments, gathering in parks or lining the streets to honour dead soldiers. But as we all know, Britain is a fractured nation – one actually uncertain of its collective identity and, most importantly, what the future holds."

Oliver Atwell, Amateur Photographer, 2018

"I love Simon's approach – he took the basic Andreas Gursky idea and applied it very cunningly to British leisure pursuits."

Martin Parr, 2018

"Together, the images read almost as a visual journey to Brexit. From riots to campaign elections, the Diamond Jubilee to rock concerts, the photographs depict a country at odds with itself. The fragments provide a rich tapestry into the lives of people across the UK almost as epistolary episodes, love-letters from residents yearning for an imagined glorious yesteryear."

Alex Jackson, British Journal of Photography, 2017

"A multi-layered picture is drawn of Britain and its people."

Elizabeth Roberts, Black & White photography, 2018

"Simon Roberts records the spaces, places and events that define the British social landscape. Chronicling the communal experience through shared idiosyncrasies, the photographer reveals truths hidden in the collective consciousness. A nostalgic practice conflates past and present, disrupting traditional notions of the picturesque by responding to political events."

Aesthetica, 2018

"Throughout Roberts' fascinating, sometimes gently ironic, always thoughtful and considered visual survey, we see not so much a *Merrie Albion* but rather a fractured UK riddled with complex concerns. This is the land on which we live, the air that we breathe."

Adrian Burnham, The New European, 2018