



Simon Roberts: Download Festival, Donington Park, Castle Donington, Leicestershire, 13 June 2008, Merrie Albion – Landscape Studies of a Small Island

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Simon Robert's photographs create a portrait of Britain over the last ten years



Words by [Rebecca Fulleylove](#), [Thursday 16 November 2017](#)

Simon Roberts has spent the last decade photographing various events and places across Britain in a bid to capture communal experiences and shared histories. The body of work has come together in a new book published by Dewi Lewis Publishing, called *Merrie Albion – Landscape Studies of a Small Island*, and sees images that record “social practices and customs linked to the British landscape”. Within the series, allusions to “the economic and political theatre” that have shaped recent history are also present, providing a detailed portrait of the UK.

“The nature of public, communal experience has been an implicit theme of my photographic work. Since I embarked on my project *We English* in 2007, I have documented events and places across Britain that have drawn people together, all the while compiling evidence that the desire for common presence and participation, for sharing a sense of being ‘in place’, not only endures but might also harbour something distinctive about our national character and identity,” explains Simon on the drive behind the work. “In Britain, my interests have gravitated towards evolving patterns of leisure, the consumption and commodification of history, militarisation, and to lines of demarcation and exclusion in the landscape. But in parallel to this, I have also chosen to photograph events and places that have a more immediate, topical significance in the turning of Britain’s recent history, and which – summoning the sense of a national survey – might collectively offer a form of pictorial chronicle of these times.”

The breadth Simon has covered is vast and this is in part due to the ten-year time period the images cover. Within the book single images from *We English* sit alongside pictures from the General Election in 2010 where Simon was commissioned as the Election Artist by Parliament. Other photographs were taken during the credit crunch, the 2012 Olympics and more recently the referendum vote in Scotland and the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower disaster.



Simon Roberts: Eid al-Fitr Celebrations, Jamia Mosque, Green Street, Bristol, 8 August 2013, Merrie Albion – Landscape Studies of a Small Island

“All my photographs deal with specifics – it’s details and facts that matter,” says Simon on what he looks for in an image. “Landscape photography is all about generalisation, sweeping views and atmosphere. Mine are not – the photographs have to read intently, spatially, figuratively. They are layered documents.” A strong emphasis on scale can be found in Simon’s documentary style images, where environments are portrayed to look more like grand film sets as vignettes seemingly play out within them.

The book is a record and exploration of national and individual identities and comes at a time where Simon has seen an increase in “soul-searching within our cultural establishments”. “The photographs in *Merrie Albion* offer an overriding sense of uncertainty and anxiety in my national chronicle,” says the photographer. Throughout the book are several chapter breaks where Simon includes extended captions about each photograph. “These are to provide a further reading of the photographs, providing the viewer with contemporary information about each location,” Simon says.

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.

Simon’s work will be on show in an exhibition of the same title at London’s [Flowers Gallery](#) opening in January and the book, *Merrie Albion – Landscape Studies of a Small Island*, published by [Dewi Lewis Publishing](#) is available next week.