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Simon Roberts
We English
Chris Boot



Nuevas Historias
*A New View of Spanish Photography
and Video Art*
Hatje Cantz



Viviane Sassen
Flamboyant
Contrasto



William Eggleston
Paris
Steidl and Foundation Cartier



Doug DuBois
...all the days and nights
Aperture



Roger Ballen
Boarding House
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To photograph the unfamiliar and the exotic in a far-off land is one thing, but to turn your camera on your native country and extract beauty from the banal is quite another. Over the course of his career thus far, Simon Roberts has done both. Following on from his epic road trip around Russia in 2004-05 where he documented and detailed the personal lives of strangers for his project *Motherland*, the photographer has now travelled throughout England in a motorhome and looked at the English through the landscape of leisure. The subsequent book, *We English*, is an exceptionally handsome series of large-format landscape photographs – tableaux – of places that are regularly used for picnics, swimming and other outdoor pursuits at the weekend or during holidays. In them, we see groups of people interacting both with each other and the surrounding landscape.

Never has the influence of painting on Roberts' photography been more evident than in *We English*. Routinely photographing from a slightly elevated vantage point bears resemblance to sixteenth century Dutch and Flemish painters like Avercamp, Van Valckenborch and Bruegel. His lyrical and delicately coloured photographs certainly recall the sensitivity to light and atmosphere, reflecting appropriate human sentiments in weather conditions, times of day and poetic light effects.

That said, *We English* does not necessarily present a wholly Romantic view of the countryside for Roberts, more often than not, hones in on manufactured scenes. Indeed, Roberts also fits in largely within the tradition of photographing England. You can see in his work, thematic similarities to Tony Ray Jones, John Davies and Martin Parr, although it is not, of course, ironic or cynical. Still, it isn't social critique that he is after. His work is unashamedly beautiful, more subtle in its discovery and representation of forms of cultural character and identity which actually, upon closer inspection, reveals a much greater richness of detail and meaning. With a Simon Roberts it is a case of the more you look, the more you see. *We English* has tremendous historical and anthropological interest; it takes us on an amazing journey through ideas of belonging and memory, identity and place. It is one of those rare books that you can and will come back to time and time again.

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[Simon Roberts](#)

We english

Chris Boot

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