



"THE SOCIAL: Landscapes of Leisure"

by Simon Roberts



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THE SOCIAL: Landscapes of Leisure

Extending his exploration of the English social landscape, Simon Roberts has created a series of large-scale colour photographs, made in various locations throughout Sunderland, in the North-East of England. The photographs are echoingly familiar, yet also distanced. As in the traditions of history painting that inform them, we encounter highly socialized and deliberately lyrical environments. Yet these are thoroughly contemporary landscapes, where ordinary people get on with their various activities and pursuits. Some of these are solitary – taking the dog for a walk, or lost in reverie on a park bench. But most of all these are sociable and socialized environments, full of activity. To some viewers the locations will be immediately recognizable, while for many others the ways in which people use and inhabit the spaces – having a picnic, flying a kite, playing football or cycling – provide the more immediate points of connection.

Roberts' post-industrial landscapes were all taken on sites of former heavy industry, such as Silksworth Ski Slope, sited on a former slagheap of the Silksworth Colliery or St. Peter's Riverside, once the centre of Sunderland's shipbuilding industry. As in many of his projects, themes of memory and identity attach to the otherwise ordinary past-times and vistas. The relationships between people and places create a rich tapestry of social observation, while the high and often distant vantage points give a sense of the contemporary existence of each different landscape, as well as the accretions of historical use, social transformation and reinvention.

ABOUT SIMON ROBERTS

Simon Roberts (b.1974) is a British photographic artist whose work deals with our relationship to landscape and notions of identity and belonging. His large format photographs are taken with great technical precision, often from elevated positions. The distanced vantage point allows the relationship of individual bodies and groups to the landscape to be clearly observed, and echoes the visual language of history painting.

He has exhibited widely and his photographs reside in major public and private collections, including the George Eastman House, Deutsche Börse Art Collection and Wilson Centre for Photography. In 2010 he was commissioned as the official Election Artist by the House of Commons Works of Art Committee to produce a record of the General Election on behalf of the UK Parliamentary Art Collection. In 2012 he was granted access by the International Olympic Committee to photograph the London Olympics and most recently was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society.

He has published three critically acclaimed monographs, *Motherland* (Chris Boot, 2007), *We English* (Chris Boot, 2009) – voted as one of the best photography books of the past decade – and *Pierdom* (Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2013).

[Simon Roberts Website](#)