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ОФИЦИАЛЬНЫЙ СПОНСОР

НАЧАЛО В 19.00

**Context reader survey****in focus ....****Off the Beaten Track**

Simon Roberts took a slow tour of Russia, training his lens on the locals he met on the way. His travel photographs are published in a new book.

By Marina Kamenev  
Published: August 10, 2007

Traveling in Russian winter is difficult at the best of times, but for British photographer Simon Roberts, who was compiling his book, "Motherland," it was that extra bit challenging.

"No one is out in winter; it's impossible to meet people, so taking portraits was really difficult, and getting my camera to do what I wanted it to do at minus 40 degrees Celsius, was close to impossible," he said in a recent telephone interview.

The photographer became fascinated by Russia while studying Human Geography at the University of Sheffield. In 2004, he and his wife traveled for a year, covering a distance of over 75,000 kilometers, to capture the vastness of the country for the book of photographs, which came out earlier this year.

Choosing the photographs to go into the book, was another lengthy process: Roberts took over 5,000 frames, which he then had to narrow down to 150. "Coming from an anthropological background, it was critical that I had very different types of people in there," Roberts said. "The rest will eventually be published and, hopefully, be used as a historical archive."

One of the photographer's methods for finding a wide range of subjects was arranging home-stays as he traveled. In Omsk, he stayed with a family whose daughter was taking part in a ballroom dancing competition. Roberts went along, and his picture of one of the couples appears in the book: The girl with bright blue eyeshadow and red lipstick stares regally, while her partner looks slightly afraid.

Sometimes Roberts had to knock on doors to find his subjects, "In January, in Port Baikal, no one was walking around," he recalled. "It was midnight, we knocked on the closest house to the railway station, and Lyuba took us in."

The photograph of Lyuba shows a typical Russian babushka. She sits in her kitchen with clashing wallpaper, faux marble green cupboards, and a neon lemon-patterned table cloth, looking warily into the lens. The interior is familiar to anyone who has traveled in Russia, and like many of Roberts' images, it captures a small universality across a huge distance.



Simon Roberts

Roberts' hostess in Port Baikal, Lyuba, poses in her house's cozy kitchen.

In Murmansk, he was lucky enough to see the northern lights; a photograph of a New Year's tree in the middle of an empty square shows the stark isolation of the city in winter.

Roberts said that he didn't intend to take bleak photographs. "I wanted to show that there is beauty in places that others might see as drab." Nevertheless, he admitted that he avoided "chocolate-box" views of the country's prime tourist destinations. "You'll notice that there are no photos in there from the Golden Ring."

Apart from a photo of a poster on Red Square, the photographs of Moscow could have been taken in any of Russia's major cities: an elderly woman at the window of a tram, teenagers working at McDonald's, and an old man sitting on a bench in front of an uninspiring block of luxury apartments. Roberts struggled to say anything positive about Moscow, which was his final destination. "A capital city is always very different to the rest of the country," he said, "And it's a lot nicer in summer."

"Motherland" by Simon Roberts is published by Chris Boot. It can be pre-ordered at the Anglia British Bookshop, located at 6 Votronikovsky Pereulok. Tel. 699-7766. The book's web site is [www.motherlandbook.com](http://www.motherlandbook.com).



Simon Roberts

A food market in Grozny, Chechnya, trades alongside shelled-out buildings.

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