

New Books

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Motherland

Simon Roberts

£25, hardback

Chris Boot Ltd

ISBN: 978 1 9057 1203 8

In the afterword of his book, photographer Simon Roberts states, 'Motherland is meant as a visual statement about contemporary Russia, 15 years after the fall of the Soviet Union.' He set off with his wife, Sarah, in June 2005, to begin this statement. In the ensuing year, they

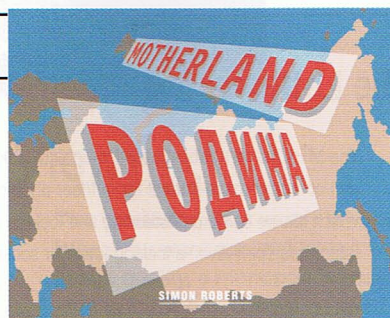


travelled more than 46,000 miles, covering from the easternmost regions, all the way across to the west. Isolation doesn't even begin to describe how remote some of these areas are.

Because the photographs in *Motherland* depict a nation that is alien to most of us, you could almost begin to convince yourself that the scenes are, in fact, elaborately constructed film sets: two Soviet fighter jets, atop a kind of scaffolding, straddle a river in Magadan; a torpedoed American warship from World War II embeds itself in the ice of the Barents Sea; three white vans, set against white snow, make their way across the frozen Lena River.

The wider, 'scene setting' images have an air of suspension about them, rather like the split second before a film director calls 'Action', while

LEFT Alexander Zhukov and Pavel Lipatov, Esso, Kamchatka, October 2004



the portraits – as formal and static in nature as they are – have a connection between both photographer and subject seen all too

rarely these days. There are echoes of August Sander about these, portraying, as they do, the likes of a Cossack, a sanatorium receptionist or the staff at a branch of McDonald's.

It takes quite some commitment to capture not only the immensity and variety of a country like Russia, but also the reader's imagination. Roberts succeeds on both counts.

Ailsa McWhinnie

Book offer

Readers of *OP* can purchase copies of *Motherland* at the special price of £16.25 plus delivery (RRP £25). Simply call 020 7639 2908 and quote *Outdoor Photography* offer

How to Photograph Absolutely Everything: Successful Images from your Digital Camera

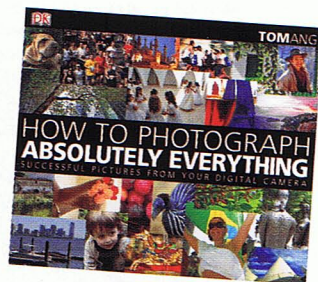
Tom Ang

£25, hardback

Dorling Kindersley

ISBN: 9 78140531985 0

How to Photograph Absolutely Everything – what a bold claim, and to be honest hardly a realistic one! However, taking its larger-than-life title with an appropriate pinch of salt, I was quietly impressed by this book. It's aimed squarely at compact users, and in line with this it concentrates on the practicalities of taking shots of a huge range of subjects, rather than too many technical intricacies. On the downside, this means that the book skims the surface of each topic rather than going into much depth, and as a consequence



won't be of as much interest to those with a general foundation of skills, as it will to those who are just beginning their photographic journey.

The book looks fine, a lot of the images are pleasant, but very few are inspirational. Personally I find the design distracting, without much flow to the text; instead the information is presented in bite-sized chunks and laid out in a slightly distracting way. In short, if you're already confident of your photographic basics then don't bother with *How to Photograph Absolutely Everything*, it won't tell you much that you don't already know, or that you can't find out easily; however, if you've

got a digital compact and you're new to photography then it will definitely help you to take things on to the next level.

James Beattie

Art and Photography

David Campany

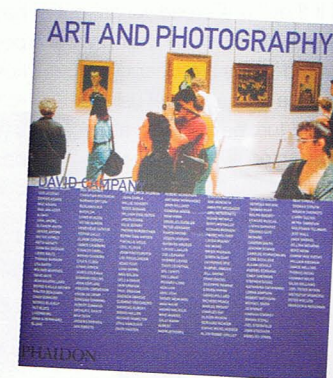
Phaidon

£24.95, paperback

ISBN: 9 78 071484756 6

The validity of photography as art has always been a hotly debated topic; but unarguably the acceptance of the medium on this basis is becoming widespread. This is evident not just in its critical reception, but also in the prices fetched at auction and the wider audience such images are finding.

Rather than tracing the interweaving of art and photography back to its roots this book focuses on the transformation and perception of photography over the second half of the 20th century. It's split into three sections: an introduction that offers an overview of the changes that have taken place in the last half a century or so; a core of images – many from such heavyweights as Gursky, the Bechers and Eggleston – accompanied by extended captions; and a textual discussion drawn from



a wide variety of writers and photographers. The combination of images and captions that make up the bulk of the project is illuminating, and while the opening and closing discussions can be slightly high-flown, they do provide additional insight, and are leavened by the inclusion of a number of interviews.

Whether or not you agree with much of the theory is perhaps incidental. Art is like that, and this book is testament to the fact that photography's strengthening claims to its newfound status lie, in part, in the confusion rather than the clarification of what constitutes art.

James Beattie

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