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BOOKLIST

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Simon Roberts | Motherland

INTRODUCTION BY ROSAMUND BARTLETT.

EDITED BY BRUNO CESCHEL.

Chris Boot Ltd., London, 2007. Designed by Murray and Sorrell FUEL. Printed in China. Paper-wrapped boards. 192 pp., numerous four-color illustrations, 9½ x 8 \$40.00

Between August 2004 and July 2005 British photographer Simon Roberts fulfilled a childhood fascination with Russia by completing an epic 47,000-mile journey, from the federation's Far East, to the Northern Caucasus, the Altai Mountains and along the Volga River. The result of this remarkable journey is the photographer's first book, *Motherland*.

The publication exemplifies the magnificence of the traditional photo-essay, coupled with images made by a talented photographer who demonstrates a contemporary and original eye for detail. Fifteen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the book contains 150 images which portray a positive and defiant Russia, against a backdrop of brutality. Whilst Roberts states that he did not set out with any specific political agenda, his images do convey what he discovered to be at the heart of Russian life—the sense of home, or *rodina*. We witness a father and son plunging into a lake following a sauna in Yekaterinburg, elderly people cruising on the Volga River, a pair of sturgeon poachers in Kamchatka. Throughout this body of work, there is a deep, old-world connection to the land that reads as a pride in the "motherland," despite the challenges of everyday life.

The images are uplifting despite the bleakness which also pervades. Part of the reason for this might be the perceptive editing and pacing of the book. Arranged chronologically to mirror Roberts' journey, there is a well-conceived balance between landscape and portrait. The photographs are accompanied by carefully measured text to contextualize them, providing the reader with enough insight to appreciate the story behind the photographs without overwhelming them. The sense of motherland which Roberts explores is also present in the intermittent quotations from Russian thinkers, writers and travelers.

Motherland is an exemplary photobook that melds together objectivity, wonder and desire. Finally, it is a great example of a successful collaboration between publisher and photographer. I can imagine Chris Boot (publisher) and Simon Roberts sneakily opening the book themselves and feeling quite proud—and so they should. **DEBRA KLOMP CHING**

Gregory Crewdson | Fireflies

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT BY GREGORY CREWDSON.

Skarstedt Fine Art and Lühring Augustine, New York, 2006.

Designed by Giampietro+Smith. Printed by Oddi Printers, Iceland. Clothbound. 128 pp., 61 tritones, 12 x 9 \$45.00

Being a pretty jaded spectator of Gregory Crewdson's usual Spectacle, I found myself pleasantly surprised by his newly published collection of firefly pictures. Taken eleven years ago when the photographer spent a couple of months in a rural cabin in Massachusetts, the pictures are charming, informal and relaxing, a far cry from the elaborate artifice and vague menace of much of Crewdson's oeuvre. As far as it's possible to tell, all of the black and white images were made outdoors, by a crew of one, with minimal resources expended in training, rehearsing, enhancing or adjusting the fireflies themselves. This makes the experience of moving through the images a strange associative journey; one might relive the sound, humidity and smells of youthful summer nights (if one's youth was spent in firefly country, as mine was). Or the images might resurrect the work of Frank Gilbreath, with its purposeful dashed filigrees of light, or Robert Adams' *Summer Nights*, or deep-ocean scenes of luminescent creatures from *National Geographic*. The insects' light traces begin, in some of the pictures, to merge with stars, star trails (if the exposure was long enough), or the contrails of light left by passing planes. Crewdson's signature control over the image is only hinted at by sequences of different exposures in the same locations, and a few experiments with jars and a conical net/tent, which allows the fireflies to strut their stuff in more geometrically-contained spaces. Perhaps the pictures work as well as they do for me because I can feel the photographer's excitement, his curiosity about what will happen when he opens his shutter, sits back and allows the show to unfold. As for the romance of the fireflies themselves—well, all we mammals can really know is the languid wait, the brilliant flare-up and the swift fade of the afterglow.

PHIL HARRIS**Donovan Wylie | The Maze**

ESSAY BY LOUISE PURBRICK.

Granta, London, 2004. Designed by Donovan Wylie, Liz Jobey, Bernard Fischer. Printed by Steidl, Göttingen. Clothbound with photo-illustrated dustjacket. 112 pp., 60 four-color illustrations, 11¼ x 9¼ \$45.00

The Maze takes its name from the prison opened just south of Belfast in 1976 to house Republican and Loyalist prisoners during the apex of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. The book depicts the abstraction of space into a

Plate 2, *Untitled*, 1996, from *Fireflies*, by Gregory CrewdsonAlexander Zhukov and Pavel Lipatov, *Esso, Kamchatka* from *Motherland*, by Simon Roberts