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SPECIAL ISSUE

The secrets of SELLING

How to promote your work and create a fresh income stream



Simon Roberts:

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An established photographer with a track record of working on long-term personal projects, Simon Roberts spent a year travelling around Russia in 2004/5 to produce the material for 'Motherland' and he's recently been working closer to home on a set of pictures called 'We English,' which is a photographic journal of life in England in 2008.

Can you tell me a little more about the 'We English' project please and its theme. What motivated the project and how did you bring it all together?

We English is the result of a year's travel around England in a motorhome, documenting its landscape on a large format 5x4in camera. The project explores the notion that nationhood - what it means to be English - is to be found on the surface of contemporary life, encapsulated by banal everyday rituals. Since landscape has long been used as a commodity to be consumed, I focus on leisure activities as a way of looking at England's shifting cultural and aesthetic identity. It took a year for me to plan and raise the necessary funding for the project, and I received help in the form of grants from Arts Council England, the National Media Museum and the John Kobal Foundation. Chris Boot Ltd will publish a monograph of the photographs in September 2009 alongside a show at The Photographers' Gallery in London.

Your work has been very project-driven. How does this translate into print sales and how do you organise selling your work? My work is motivated by subject matter and not by demands of galleries or the art market. The fact I've been able to sell limited edition prints is a welcome outcome and one that has helped to support me financially over the last couple of years (nb. it will be interesting to see what happens this year!). My prints are represented by The Photographers' Gallery in London and Klompching in New York. They have sold well both to individuals and major collections, including the Deutsche Börse Art Collection, the National

Media Museum and the Michael G. Wilson Centre of Photography.



Given the kind of fine art work that you do, what kind of image is it that has the most appeal to collectors? It's difficult to define exactly what appeals to a collector, all of whom have very individual tastes. I have one American collector who is only interested in portraiture, while another collects photographs where an aeroplane can be seen somewhere in the frame! My most popular print, which has nearly sold out, is the Abandoned Warship in the Kola Peninsula, right. This is a striking, ethereal photograph, which has mass appeal.

Do you sell your work in limited editions or unlimited and how do you output your prints? Motherland prints are available in two edition sizes, a 40x30in (edition of 6) and 20x24in (edition of 10). Prints for We English will be larger in size but smaller edition numbers. I make digital C-type prints from Imacon scans, which are printed by Spectrum in Brighton. My prints start at £500 and go up to £5000. A box set of photographs from Motherland is priced at £15,000., with 50% of any sale going to the gallery!

Can you tell me a little about your methods please and do you find that the fact you use film gives you an edge in fine art terms? For the past four years I've worked almost exclusively with a Mamiya 7 camera, which is what I used for Motherland. For We English, I moved up a format to a 5x4in field camera, photographing with an Ebony 45S (and Schneider 150mm lens). There is something much more personal about my relationship with the camera, partly due to the amount of time and effort it takes to compose an image, where I find myself being more considered in framing every scene. This relationship also extends to my subjects who I find relate to me as a photographer in a more intimate way and, on the whole, tend to take the image making process more seriously than if I was snapping away with a smaller, hand held camera.

In a bizarre way, I also tend to get more spontaneous photographs mainly because by the time I've set-up and am ready, people have got bored looking at the camera and continue with what they were doing.

Personally I prefer using film - usually Fuji Pro 160S Quickload - due to the natural, soft colour palette it allows me to achieve. However, I don't think it makes any difference to galleries or collectors what camera you use and whether the photographs originated using film or digital.

"My work is motivated by subject matter and not by the demands of galleries"

