

Distance tells a story in ‘Merrie Albion’

Photographer Simon Roberts's images turn scenes into large-scale dioramas.



Prime Minister Theresa May, Downing Street, London, 13 July 2016. From Simon Roberts - Merrie Albion.

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During many public events, a ring of crouching news photographers can be seen pressing uncomfortably close to the action, almost pouncing to create images they hope convey immediacy and intimacy through proximity. Photos that end up on front pages often place the subject front and center in an attempt to spark a connection with the action. While these images can grab our attention, they can also lack context, leaving so much out of the frame.

Photographer Simon Roberts takes the opposite approach in **Merrie Albion**, using distance to tell a richer story. Roberts's images turn scenes into large-scale dioramas, with the action only a piece of the larger landscape. The result is a sometimes humorous but rarely comfortable viewing experience.



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Roberts uses a large format camera, often positioning himself above and apart from the action, producing a kind of human approximation of a low-hovering drone. The results are hardly robotic, though. With this unexpected view, he captures the pageantry of gatherings large and small in his home country of England in a way that encourages examination and empathy. He considers newsworthy flashpoints from a quiet space, and the viewer wonders what this captured calm might say about the English.

In one arresting image, Theresa May gives her first speech as British prime minister to a wall of cameras and reporters. The attention of the moment is focused on Ms. May behind an official podium. To Roberts, this drama is a small component of the scene, and details from the periphery – the imposing buildings, the scattered security – are as important as the main event. The drama of transition at a time of political division fades into the landscape.