

# SIMON ROBERTS

## Simon Roberts: Inscapes

by Harriet Judd, 2019

'There is one notable dead tree ... the inscape markedly holding its most simple and beautiful oneness up from the ground through a graceful swerve below (I think) the spring of the branches up to the tops of the timber. I saw the inscape freshly, as if my mind were still growing, though with a companion the eye and the ear are for the most part shut and instress cannot come.'

From the Journals of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 – 1889)

To mark the retrospective exhibition of Ivon Hitchens, Pallant House Gallery invited artist-photographer Simon Roberts to revisit some of the places where Hitchens painted to create a series of work from the fields, woodlands and hinterlands of West Sussex.

Travelling by foot, Roberts immersed himself in the landscape of the South Downs, amongst the 'scrubby hedgerows and thickets, open fields, lowland heath and chalk escarpments'. Hitchens' colour palette and the abstraction of his surroundings become evident in Roberts' studies: lime-green moss smothers gnarled and twisted tree trunks; muddy brown banks sit beneath rivers whilst reflected white sunlight skips across their surface; patches of bright blue sky are caught between the branches in the upper canopy of a pine forest.

In these photographs, Roberts moves beyond just looking at the fabric of the landscape and explores ideas of the 'modest beauty' of these secluded spaces. The title of the series 'Inscapes' was a term coined by the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins to suggest that every living thing has a unique set of characteristics which distinguish it from the next – something akin to a God-given essence. Hopkins suggested it was the artist or poet's responsibility to

recognise this 'inscape' within nature and convey this to others through their art. 'Instress' was the related term he used to describe the action of inscape being transmitted into the beholder's mind.

Through these intimate studies, Roberts focuses on the essence of the land. He asks us to consider our relationship to familiar landscapes and questions notions of identity and belonging. How does our natural environment affect us emotionally? Do we belong here?

These scenes are both ancient and modern; they remain hidden but are discoverable if one only takes the time to traverse to the end of the footpath and into the land.