

# SIMON ROBERTS



BREXAGEDDON, BREXAPOCALYPSE, BREXCELLENT, BREXCHOSIS, BREXCREMENT, BREXENOMICS, BREXFACTOR, BREXHAUSTED, BREXIETY, BREXILES, BREXIPITATED, BREXISTENTIAL, BREXITANNIA, BREXITED, BREXITEERS, BREXITERNITY, BREXITESQUE, BREXITING, BREXITISH, BREXITITES, BREXITOXICITY, BREXMAS, BREXODUS, BREXORCIST, BREXPATS, BREXPLOSION, BREXPOCALYPSE, BREXSHIT, BREXSHITSHOW, BREXSICK, BREXTENSION, BREXTERNITY, BREXTHROUGH, BREXTINCT

Oscillating between depictions of land and landscape, Simon Roberts usually chooses photography to share his reflections on geopolitics and cultural identity. He is acclaimed for his portrayals of vastness in tableaux-like compositions, with characters at play dotting the surface, not unlike in a Bruegel painting, narrating an allegory, full of wit and humour, of the relationship between persons and place. He has a deep interest in geocultural signifiers such as common history, collective memory, and shared love as a gateway to social impact, where a sense of identity and belonging shapes society and culture.

In true British fashion, Roberts is a master of delineating the deficiencies of persons and society, in a tongue-in-cheek playfulness, and with an understanding that beauty derives from the organic and the imperfect, from the quirks and flaws. His depictions lurch between being a documentation and portraiture — sometimes they seem to portray a specific occasion, but more often than not, to document a random passing moment, a picture of the chaos of life, where persons, places, and objects line up in a composition that only nature and human condition can allow.

I am fascinated, in particular, by Roberts's interest in democratising his art: from his crowdsourcing efforts for new ideas to the facilitation of a platform for public discourse, where the conceptual and a communal meet to redefine notions of patriotism and nationalism, in a new 21st-century-relevant fashion, celebrating diversity and nonconformity. The sense of community, a sense of identity and inclusion, enable movement, locality, work, and play — all to tally up as cultural and political currencies.

With days before the official separation of the UK from the EU, there is no more timely occasion to present Simon Roberts's *Brexshit Machine* in the confined space of The Container. Radiating monotonous "Brexit terms" in green LED letters, all bearing the prefix *Brex-*, as became ubiquitous in the UK since the decision to separate in 2016, to share the anxieties surrounding this moment of change. The work was initially created to mark 31 January 2020, the day that the UK's membership of the European Union ended and the start of the "transition period", and is reinstalled again, at The Container, symbolically at the end of this transition, still with many "brexieties". The installation doesn't only paint a portrait of a country during an identity crisis, but also of the discourse surrounding this moment of change.

The vocabulary used for the installation is a short excerpt from *The Brexit Lexicon* (2016-2020), a compiled selection of "notable headlines and terminology that has been used to describe the Brexit progress were gathered together to form a database containing over five thousand individual words," in Roberts's words. The Lexicon, collated by Roberts as research, is the foundation for a number of works the artist created in the last four years, examining the imminent break from the European Union. In the catalogue for the exhibition, we are republishing the full lexicon, along with some new additions and also with some images archived by the artist. The lexicon is arranged alphabetically to suggest a critical dictionary where the terms and phrases expose the contradictions, populist, and often rhetoric, vocabulary used by politicians, experts, and the media.

Lastly, the exhibition, *The Brexshit Machine*, at The Container is a collaboration with the UK-based project "Complex States: Art in the Years of Brexit" which examines works by more than thirty artists, in various venues worldwide, as a window on contemporary artist responses to Brexit.

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