

SIMON ROBERTS

BENEATH THE PILGRIM MOON

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16 September - 5 November, 2022
Private View Thursday 15 September, 6-8 PM

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Press Preview: Wednesday 14 September, 9AM-12PM
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Flowers Gallery is delighted to present an exhibition of recent work by British photographer Simon Roberts. *Beneath the Pilgrim Moon* (2021) is a collection of photographs taken at London's Victoria and Albert Museum while it was closed to the public in the second COVID-19 lockdown. Photographing the marble sculptures housed in the Dorothy and Michael Hintze Galleries, which at the time were covered for their protection during the site's renovation, Roberts conceived of the veiled statues as metaphors for our wider experience of the pandemic. He says: "*The images speak of the extraordinary events of the past years, of us as a nation shrouded by PPE and covered up behind our masks, suspended in time, restricted of movement and freedoms. We were forced to separate from one another, or if we were to meet, to hug through thick plastic sheeting, or wave through windows.*"

Roberts is well known for work that explores the relationship between people and place, often focused on spaces in which people gather to share a sense of collective history and cultural identity. Recently, by contrast, he has turned his attention to more introspective themes, including *The Weeds in the Wilderness* (2017-2019), a meditative take on our cultural and sociological insularity post Brexit, and *Cathedrals are Built in the Future* (2019-2021), a typological compendium of unoccupied Cuban places of worship. In this series, the images reflect an empty museum where the shrouded sculptures, once passed and admired by thousands a day, stood solitary for almost a year. Photographed at night, and isolated from their environment and one another by darkness, they appear immersed in their own, private worlds.



Shrouded Sculpture #2 (Eve listening to the voice by Edward Hodges Bailey), 2021, pigment print, 147.3 x 111.8 cm

The resulting photographs fuse ancient mythology and elegant eighteenth-century neoclassicism with the harsh sterility of twenty-first century plastic and gaffa tape, a juxtaposition that is at once eerie, disorientating, and compelling. Roberts's decision to photograph the sculptures from unusual, unexpected angles gives the images a further sense of unease and vulnerability. In his image of Foggini's *Samson and the Philistines*, he crops out the scene's hero, concentrating only on the wailing victim, while his choice to photograph just the protagonist's pained face behind the plastic in Claude David's *Vulcan (or possibly Prometheus) chained to a rock* gives the appearance of suffering. His photograph of Canova's *Theseus and the Minotaur* taken at a sharp side angle and captured from a distance, appears despondent, pensive and lonely.

Roberts says: "*they speak, to me at least, of their own undiminished materiality, and yet there is a fragility conferred upon them by their more humble, temporary circumstances. This paradox is so compelling. It's a pause before a revelation. Maybe even, a hope of what's to come.*"

A central image, *Shrouded Sculpture #8 (Monument to Lady Winchilsea by Lawrence MacDonald)*, is presented on translucent mesh fabric, tethered to the ceiling of the gallery. It was first shown in the outdoor exhibition curated by Meadow Arts entitled *All Alone* (July 24th - October 31st 2021), held in the grounds of Croft Castle, Herefordshire, and is installed here in a gallery space for the first time. The printed fabric is subtly responsive to airflow and movements of passers-by, which endows the frozen marbles with a sense of fluidity and vitality, chiming with Robert's desire to "*animate these figures and breathe life into their static forms.*"

For images and more information please contact Ellie Jeans: press@flowersgallery.com



Shrouded Sculpture #1 (Theseus and the Minotaur by Antonio Canova), 2021, pigment print, 147.3 x 111.8 cm; *Shrouded Sculpture #5 (Vulcan chained to a rock by Claude David)*, 2021, pigment print, 78.7 x 61 cm

ABOUT SIMON ROBERTS

Simon Roberts (b.1974) is based in Brighton, UK. In 2010 he was appointed the official British Election Artist by the House of Commons Works of Art Committee to produce a visual record of the General Election on behalf of the UK Parliamentary Art Collection; and in 2014 he represented Britain during the UK-Russia Year of Culture. He has exhibited widely with recent solo shows at Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, The Container, Tokyo, and The Art Foundation, Athens, amongst others. His work is held in major collections internationally, including the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, Deutsche Börse Art Collection and Victoria & Albert Museum. He has produced several critically acclaimed monographs including *Motherland* (Chris Boot, 2007), *We English* (Chris Boot, 2009), *Pierdom* (Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2013) and *Merrie Albion – Landscape Studies of a Small Island* (Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2017).

Exhibition Opening Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 11am - 6pm.

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