
How did we get here?

An exhibition by Simon Roberts

T.S. Eliot once wrote that the point of any journey is to find out where you came from. This urge to document one's homeland and question our collective identity is a powerful one. It has occupied the efforts of writers and artists for centuries. In this vein, much of Simon Roberts' practice over the past fifteen years has been based on journeys around Britain. His work, which spans photography, video, and installation, explores identity, belonging and the complex relationship between history, place and culture. It exposes our post-imperial predicament, the complications of New Commonwealth immigration, the Brexit schism, and the possibilities of UK devolution.

Often creating expansive, tableaux photographs, Roberts sets up visual narratives which chart the ambiguities and complexities of post-industrial Britain. The photographs require scrutiny and contemplation. They have a visual command that comes from their expansive nature and scale, where most are taken from an elevated perspective (often from the roof of his motorhome) and with a large-format camera.

The exhibition, housed over two floors of a former H&M store that shut its doors in summer 2021 in Chester's Grosvenor Shopping Centre, brings together several different projects that Roberts has worked on since 2007. As well as a journey through a changing Britain, it is also one through Roberts' evolving artistic practice over the past fifteen years.

Where do we go now?

We English (2007-2008) and Pierdom (2010-2013) cover the external walls of the upper floor of the store and are laid out geographically, forming the four compass points. These record an idyllic portrayal of Britain seemingly at ease with itself. The central area of the upper floor concentrates on his Merrie Albion (2007-2017) and The Brexit Lexicon (2016-2018) series, which chart the mood swings of a diverse national culture grappling with various social, political and economic challenges. There's also the premier of a new video piece, An Avoidable Loss, A Failure of State (2023) exploring the UK government's response to the corona virus pandemic.

In the lower floor of the store Roberts presents a large, immersive installation work, Beneath the Pilgrim Moon (2021) where a series of fabric prints are suspended and illuminated in the darkness. Each print depicts a veiled sculpture photographed during the second Covid-19 lockdown whilst London's Victoria and Albert Museum was closed to the public. The work speaks of these extraordinary recent events.

During the course of the exhibition visitors are encouraged to participate in a series of workshops and open sessions where they are given a unique opportunity to respond creatively to the current social climate and ideas raised in Roberts' exhibition, culminating in a new artwork - The Public Gallery - that will develop over the course of the exhibition and will be unveiled in the third week of June in the storefront window.

The exhibition has been made possible thanks to:

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