



Lesley Barnes, Model Yacht Pond, St Peter Port Harbour, 7 May 2022

SIMON ROBERTS

BETWEEN TIDES

FRI 30 JUN - MON 28 AUG

GUERNSEY MUSEUM AT CANDIE | 10AM TO 5PM DAILY



GUERNSEY
PHOTOGRAPHY
FESTIVAL

GPF2023

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM



States Diver Billy Simon and the Salvage boat crew. Photographed by F.W Guerin, c. 1900.



Stohtert & Pitt Cargo crane on the New Jetty, St Peter Port Harbour, c. 1950s



Careening Hard Pier, St. Peter Port Harbour, c.1950s



Passengers boarding the mailboat, c. 1900-1910.



Guernsey Border Agency staff (Airriana, Marc, Becky, Jordan & Nena), St Peter Port Harbour, 5 August 2022



Sarnia Liberty, North Pier, St Sampson's Harbour, 6 December 2021

SIMON ROBERTS BETWEEN TIDES

Between Tides is a remarkable exhibition documenting Guernsey's harbours - St Peter Port and St Sampson's - in which internationally-acclaimed artist Simon Roberts explores with large format tableaux landscape photographs, portraits and a 3-screen video, the notion of territory and identity. Guernsey's harbours symbolise the gradual but constant tides of cultural and physical alteration that occurs over time and offer us a unique perspective of what we value and who we are. The exhibition is the result of Simon's 2022 artist residency in Guernsey.

The artist in residence programme is a collaboration developed since 2016 between the Guernsey Photography Festival and Guernsey Museums & Galleries. The aim is to create a collection of contemporary photography by world famous artists about the Bailiwick of Guernsey. So far it has welcomed Martin Parr (UK), Klavdij Sluban (Slovenia), Michelle Sank (South Africa), Jason Wilde (UK), Mark Power (UK), Gregoire Eloy (France), Sian Davey (UK) and Cristina De Middel (Spain/ Mexico).

'Simon's project has offered him the opportunity to record the changing aspects of the island's harbours across an entire calendar year,' explained Matt Harvey, senior curator at Guernsey Museums & Galleries. 'He has witnessed the complex web of occupations and pastimes that the harbours support, as well as documenting many of the people whose lives are intertwined with them. He has been fortunate to have gained access to areas of the ports that the public do not routinely get to see.

He has created an insightful portfolio of work and Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery is delighted and privileged to be exhibiting it.'

Biography

Simon Roberts (b.1974) is a visual artist based in Brighton, UK. Widely recognised for his large-format, tableaux photographs of the British landscape, his practice also encompasses video, text and installation work, which together, interrogate notions of identity and belonging, and the complex relationship between history, place and culture. He has exhibited widely, and his photographs reside in major public and private collections, including the George Eastman House, Deutsche Börse Art Collection and Victoria & Albert Museum. In 2010 he was commissioned as the official British Election Artist by the House of Commons Works of Art Committee. He is the author of several monographs including *Motherland* (2007), *We English* (2009), *Pierdom* (2013) and *Merrie Albion - Landscape Studies of a Small Island* (2017).

We would like to thank: Harbour Master - David Barker, Duty Harbour Masters - Jerome Davis, Kieran Higgs & Mike Harris, Alderney Shipping Ltd, Boatworks, Condor Passenger & Freight Services, Guernsey Boatmen, Guernsey Border Agency, Guernsey Stevedores, Harbour Pilots, Marine & General, Boat Yard, RNLI, Trident Ferries



Peter Le Sauvage, retired fisherman, St Peter Port Harbour, 10 May 2022



Clare Chapple, Principal, Guernsey Sailing Trust, St Peter Port Harbour, 14 October 2022



Jay Ferbrache, Boatworks employee, St Peter Port Harbour, 1 August 2022



Dale Osborne, Crane Operator, St Peter Port Harbour, 10 October 2022





Sarnia workboat, Berth 6, St Peter Port Harbour, 2 August 2022



Commercial Boatman (Jeff, Dave, Rachel & Graham), St Peter Port Harbour, 12 October 2022

INTERVIEW WITH SIMON ROBERTS BY SHAUN SHACKLETON

You were invited by Jean-Christophe Godet to undertake this project for the Guernsey Photography Festival. When it comes to projects, how do you pick them? Have each of your projects been deliberate or have you ever come across something by chance?

My career has been built on a combination of self-generated, long-term projects interspersed with commissions from public-art organisations, museums, and photography festivals. I like working on a combination of both. On the one hand I have time to explore my own interests and on the other, I'm offered the challenge of delving into topics and exploring places that I may not have considered. I think it's also important to leave some projects to come about by chance, as you never quite know where they might take you.

What is the duty of being an 'artist in residence'? What was the remit of this one?

Often with commissions you don't have the luxury of time and it can sometimes feel like you're parachuting into a place with little opportunity to really engage with communities or the landscape, thereby missing some of the nuances of the place. An artist in residence scheme generally affords you an extended working period, allowing for a deeper involvement and hopefully, a more complete, albeit, subjective picture to emerge.

You travelled to Guernsey five times between the end of 2021 and now, so captured different seasons. Did you deliberately want to capture the harbours in different weather conditions? Did this affect where and when you photographed?

If a port fails on an island, it can have significant economic, social, and environmental consequences. It is probably the most vital asset for an island like Guernsey, which now must import almost all goods, and therefore there isn't an opportunity for the work of the port authorities to pause, no matter what the weather. So given the harbours are in near constant operation, 365 days a year, I felt it vital that my work reflected both the daily and seasonal changes that take place here. My exhibition title, *Between Tides*, is an attempt to reflect this sense of the passage of time.

Did you plan and map out the locations before you photographed them? Do you carry a camera with you at all times? Do you take test shots? What equipment do you use?

I work with a large, tripod-mounted camera, a Cambo Actus with Phase One digital back, so don't tend to carry it around with me at all times – my iPhone is now my digital scrapbook. My initial point of reference for any new project is always to source archival material; paintings, maps, photographs, etc. On my first trip in December 2021 I spent a good deal of time exploring the archives of both the Guernsey Museum and the Priaulx Library.

Obviously you're recording two huge areas full of both planned and random human movement – how much is left to chance?

Running a port is a hugely complex task requiring careful planning and coordination of various activities such as ship schedules, cargo handling, foot passengers, etc. Therefore, I couldn't leave much to chance as the commission was predicated on having security clearance to certain areas of the harbour. Also important was knowing arrival times of various vessels and understanding tidal changes, for instance, the Sarnia Liberty tanker can only dock in St Sampson's on certain tides. I needed to plan the dates of each visit and each day very carefully. I worked closely with the port operations team to get briefings on what was taking place in each section of the harbours on the days I was visiting to be able to plan my movements and timetable access.

There are parts of St Peter Port harbour that people won't recognise, because they aren't open to the public. Do you think these 'unseen' places are essential to a project like this? Is showing the familiar in an unfamiliar way – or just the unfamiliar – all part of the photographer's skill?

Most definitely. One of the things that most fascinated me about this commission was the opportunity to provide an insight into some of the unseen places and faces in these two landscapes. St Peter Port Harbour is particularly interesting in this regard, given it is one of the most vital components to island life, yet most islanders no longer have access to large parts of it. Interestingly

I had conversations with several locals who remember fondly being able to cycle around the cranes as ships were being unloaded; safety and security concerns have unfortunately made this a distant memory. Given these restrictions, workers at both harbours are often hidden from view, both physically and metaphorically.

There are several photographs that show 'events' at the harbour, such as the marching band and preparations for the landing of cruise ship passengers. Were these planned for? (I imagine the fluorescent 80s-themed party to Herm wasn't.) Did you have a diary of events that you thought you needed to record?

Yes, that was quite a moment. I'd spent the day travelling to and from Herm with Captain Gary Ward on Trident Ferries and he mentioned in passing that an 80s party was taking place on Herm that evening and it could be an interesting photo opportunity. It didn't disappoint.

In my planning for the commission, it was useful to have a forward diary of events for the year so I could iron out any logistics beforehand as I knew some would require a great deal of preparation. One example being the visit by Their Royal Highnesses The Earl and Countess of Wessex on Liberation Day, which was quite an intricate procedure to photograph. On this occasion, Boatworks came to my aid erecting a high, free-standing platform for me near the Model Yacht Pond to allow for a birds-eye perspective of the Royals watching the military parade.

Was there a particular place or view that you kept going back to?

The more time I spent on the island, the more I was struck by how the harbours operate like a highly choreographed dance with the – mostly – seamless movement of ships, cargo, tourists, and workers. One of my favourite viewpoints to record this performance were the cranes on Berth 4, which offered unrivalled views over the harbour and the backdrop of St Peter Port.

I could also often be found in the White Rock Cafe, whose clientele never failed to provide some good tips about what was happening in and around the harbour that day and reminisced about how the harbours used to be. Graham's Fishy Tales was always a welcome stop for some late-afternoon sustenance.

You have captured the essence of Britishness in other projects, such as Merrie Albion and Pierdom, did Guernsey feel different?

Whilst many of the older inhabitants I spoke with talked about how important their sense of Guernsey identity was, this didn't seem to be in opposition to a British identity, for instance, on Liberation Day the Union Jack was in full flutter. The younger voices, however, were much more concerned about whether they could afford to stay on the island due to spiralling costs of rent and dwindling job opportunities.

With the portraits you took, especially the boat man at the Model Yacht Pond, did you speak to them about this project? If so, what were their reactions? Did they think it was a good idea?

Where possible I would always chat with the people I was photographing, partly to get a deeper understanding of their experience of the harbour but also to help me build a better mental picture of the place. It became very clear that both sites reflect different things to different people:

for some they are a place of work, others a place of play, for some a place of beauty, others an eyesore with cars and cruise ship tourists over-running the site. It was important to also reflect this sense of tension.

Most people I met were very happy to talk about their experiences and get involved in the project, happy in the knowledge that it would be shown in the museum. Lesley Barnes, who I came across sailing his model yacht, told me he had been coming to the pond since he was nine, soon after he returned from Bolton where he'd been evacuated during the war. He makes all the model boats himself, and in the foreground of this scene is his replica of the RNLi's Spirit of Guernsey, which he built in 2021 to celebrate the maiden voyage of Guernsey's newest lifeboat.

The portraits were very respectful. Some photographers seem to invade people's privacy and go for the 'shock shot' or something provocative. Is this something you avoid?

I don't think there's anything wrong with being provocative, good art should elicit a strong reaction in the viewer. However, the aesthetic approach for my portraits in *Between Tides* were influenced by a collection of glass plate negatives I was shown by Matt Harvey, Guernsey Museum's social history curator. Several had been taken in and around the harbours in the early 20th Century, and pictured groups of people posing for the camera. I was taken by the obvious sense of pride those photographed were offering, particularly in the images of the labourers. I felt it was important to echo these historic experiences, given the legacy of those trades and the family connections of those who now work at the harbour, such as the fisherman.

When you were learning your craft, were there certain photographers who inspired or influenced you? Are there any contemporary photographers who you admire?

My influences are extremely varied, from the history paintings of William Powell-Frith and the narrative tableaux-scenes of Breugel to artists such as Stephen Shore, Candida Hoffer, and Tacita Dean to filmmakers like Andrei Tarkovsky and Patrick Keiller.

How do you feel about *Between Tides* being part of an essential archive of Guernsey along with Martin Parr, Klavdij Sluban, Gregoire Eloy, Mark Power and Sian Davey? Will there be a book of *Between Tides*?

It's all credit to Jean-Christophe Godet, director of the Guernsey Photography Festival, that he's managed to bring such important contemporary photographers to make work here, and an honour for me to be in their company. Each commissioned artist is adding another intriguing piece to a wider tableaux of Guernsey's cultural heritage and island story. As yet there are no plans for a book specifically on my work, partly because an important element of my exhibition is a three-screen video piece I've created alongside the photographs. In due course, it will be great to see a wider exhibition or publication that brings together elements of all the artist in residence commissions over the past decade.

Are you currently working on any new projects?

I'm currently planning an exhibition in Cuba later this year which explores the religious and spiritual landscapes of Havana.





Marine & General Boat Yard, St Sampson's Harbour, 1 August 2022



James Piprell, Marine Surveyor, St Peter Port Harbour, 10 October 2022



Tender boat for Emerald Princess docking, Albert Pier, St Peter Port Harbour, 2 August 2022