

Polyarnye Nochi (Polar Nights) Simon Roberts

Crane Kalman Brighton is pleased to host the first major showing of **Polyarnye Nochi (Polar Nights)** – a stunning body of work from the critically acclaimed British photographer, Simon Roberts – which was previewed at the 2009 FORMAT Festival in Derby.

Polyarnye Nochi will be exhibited at the Crane Kalman Brighton Gallery opening on the 7th January to coincide with the traditional Russian Orthodox Christmas celebrations and running until 7th February 2010.

The work featured in **Polyarnye Nochi** extends from Roberts' highly successful and widely exhibited project, *Motherland*. Roberts' photographic exploration of contemporary Russian society received much critical acclaim following the publishing of a monograph in 2007 and major solo shows at The Photographer's Gallery, Pushkin House and Photofusion in London, as well as exhibitions in Brighton, Belfast, Lodz (Poland), New York, and Shanghai.

Polyarnye Nochi focuses on winter in northern Russia, finding a region shrouded in darkness nearly 24 hours a day, a phenomenon known as Polyarnye Nochi (Polar Nights). Throughout December until mid-January, the sun remains below the horizon and there is only a faint glow of light visible around midday. One third of Russia's population live and work in these inhospitable climatic conditions. It is perhaps miraculous that factories, apartment blocks, towns and entire cities have been constructed in what should be a deserted, Arctic wasteland.

Often, the human figures that populate these winter landscapes appear dwarfed not just by nature, but by the very things they have created: a railway, a factory, a warship. In Murmansk, at least a hundred nuclear-powered submarines, some equipped with warheads and loaded with radioactive materials, languish in the harbour. The electric lights that burn in apartment blocks speak of warmth and comfort, yet the mural on a Soviet apartment block tells of the brute force and fierce regime that went into building and defending them. While the snowy fields around Monchegorsk disguise the fact that it is one of the most polluted towns in Russia.

Man's ingenuity in the face of nature's might is one aspect of these photographs. But they are also studies of the way in which nature, and specifically, winter, despite being temporarily and often brutally tamed, is able to consume, transform, beautify and disguise the man-made world. The photographs hint at the uneasy co-existence of man and nature, but also capture the indefinable and elusive beauty that emerges as a result of this precarious alliance. The ethereal quality of light; the starkness of a limited palette: an inky sky, the black, stencil-like quality of trees, roads or people; the raised perspective – all combine to surprise the viewer with a sense of vastness and grandeur.

Roberts' work has been published and exhibited widely, with recent shows at Klompching Gallery in New York and the Museum of Modern Art in Shanghai. His photographs are represented in major public and private collections, including the Deutsche Börse Art Collection and the Wilson Centre for Photography. In recognition for his work, Roberts has received several accolades, including the Vic Odden Award from the Royal Photographic Society (2007), offered for a notable achievement in the art of photography by a British photographer; a National Media Museum Bursary (2007) and a grant from the John Kobal Foundation (2008). *Motherland*, his first monograph, was published in 2007 (Chris Boot Ltd) to critical acclaim. Work from his most recent book published in the autumn of 2009, *We English* (Chris Boot Ltd) was shown at The Photographers' Gallery and will be exhibited at the National Media Museum, Bradford, from March - September 2010.

Simon Roberts - Polyarnye Nochi will run from 4th January to 7th February 2010 at the Crane Kalman Gallery, Brighton, 38 Kensington Gardens, North Laine, Brighton BN1 4AL (www.cranekalmanbrighton.com). For further information, or a selection of images, please contact Richard Kalman on 01273 697096 or via email on enquiries@cranekalmanbrighton.com

Crane Kalman Brighton is a member of the **Own Art** scheme run by the Arts Council. The scheme provides interest-free loans of up to £2,000 to buy contemporary art work.