

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Christopher Roche

Christopher Roche is an Irish travel photographer specialising in hard-to-reach destinations. By trade he directs TV commercials, which means he's always working with some form of pictorial image. Nick Smith puts him in the spotlight



NICK SMITH Is it fair to describe you as a travel photographer?

CHRISTOPHER ROCHE I honestly don't know. I love to photograph people, but I started off photographing black & white landscapes in the west of Ireland. It's hard to categorise my photography as travel. After all, that could equally mean anywhere in England. A lot of my work tends to feature people in landscapes, which is probably why it ends up being called travel photography.

NS The places you photograph aren't exactly holiday destinations...

CR That's right. A lot of my work is in places such as Ethiopia, Tibet and India. One of the reasons for this is that I am always looking for something original. Today you can find images of anywhere just by Googling it. So I am trying to add something by showing things that perhaps haven't been seen before.

NS Would you say that including people is the key to your work?

CR I am interested in the human spirit, particularly in my Ethiopia project. People that live in the remoter, harsh environments tend to have a depth and simplicity to their lives. Part of capturing something different is to try to find people who are in some way different. But I also love the sense of adventure, going up to altitude and escaping the city... going somewhere that's a challenge.

NS Is this an antidote to your real life?

CR Professionally, I direct television commercials and corporate videos. This is of course a very different way of working with the visual image. But underneath it all, what these threads have in common, is the idea that I am telling a story, whether it's a film script or a photo-essay. At the end of it all, I'm describing a narrative with a camera.



There are different stories to be told. But I do find that travelling with my camera can be quite meaningful.

NS What are the characteristics of a Chris Roche photo?

CR I am trying to capture the emotion or the character I'm photographing. I try not to simply take pretty pictures. If there is something slightly off-balance, anticipated or awkward, I'm drawn to that. They're all classically composed, I think. But I do try to take photos from other people's viewpoints, so quite a lot end up being taken from behind people's heads. I'm trying to enter their world, their environment. Keep it simple and graphic, but also intimate and epic.

NS Some of the work is quite gritty and real...

CR I do tend to leave in things like

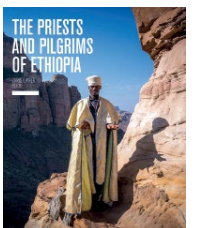
telegraph wires and vans. None of this gets edited out because I like the idea of presenting what you see. But I'm not really going for pure photojournalism either. Maybe something painterly or poetic, too. Also, I don't have the patience to spend ages fiddling around in post-production on the computer. And besides, some of the images that might be perhaps a little out of focus are probably the most interesting.

NS Do you like mainstream travel photography?

CR Well, I'm certainly not interested in creating that sort of perfect photography that you see in travel brochures. I'm far more interested in trying to capture the essence of the world we live in.

NS Is that a good summary of your new book on Ethiopia?

CR I grew up in Africa for a while and so had a sense of this biblical and extraordinary country that was so different from the rest of Africa. It was a several-year project, with a theme of devotion and a book at the end of it. I wanted to show the country as I saw it, and wanted others to see it too.



Christopher Roche's new book, *The Priests and Pilgrims of Ethiopia*, is out now

CHRISTOPHER'S TOP TIPS

- » **One thing I never go on a shoot without is...** a notebook and pencil. I take a lot of notes as I go along about the people I meet.
- » **My one piece of advice would be to...** follow the direction your heart wants you to go in. Passion and enthusiasm are more important than discipline.
- » **Something I try to avoid is...** dust. Clean your kit every night. I just don't understand how all that dust gets into the camera. It's soul destroying.

CHRISTOPHER'S CRITICAL MOMENTS

1970s As a seven-year-old seeing Rembrandts in the National Gallery.

1990s Started selling black & white landscape photographs of the west of Ireland.

1997 Inspired by Salgado's exhibition *Workers*, in Prague.

2008 Travelled to Spiti Valley and started shooting in colour.

2009 Held first exhibition in London.

2014 Started photographic project on Devotion. Published first book. Exhibited at RGS.

2015 Travelled to Tibet. Working on photographic book on Varanasi.

To see more of Christopher's work visit chrisrocephotographer.co.uk