

## The human condition with Christopher Roche

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© Christopher Roche

Chris Roche won the 2016 Ireland National Award winner. He has recently exhibited at The Other Art Fair and is currently working on his latest project 'Devotion'.

Born in Canada to Irish parents, Chris Roche grew up in Africa and several cities around Europe. Dividing his time between working as a filmmaker and photographer he is now based in London.

He has won several awards including a Sony World Photo of the Year National Award 2016, PX3 Prix de La Photographie, Paris (Press) Gold 2016, the Wanderlust Portfolio of the Year 2015, International Photographer of the Year (People, Travel) 2015 and the Wild Frontiers Photo of the Year 2014. He has had his photographs published in the national press and exhibited in the Royal Geographical Society in London and at the UN office at Geneva.

### Hi Chris. Can you tell us about your winning image?

I would describe my photography as an expression of my journey to understand certain aspects of the human condition – aspects that deeply move and inspire me and that I hope, through my images, move and inspire others.

Currently I am working on a project 'Devotion' that explores different faith traditions around the world in which I seek to capture the common humanity rather than the dogma behind such traditions. From the cave churches of Ethiopia to the holy Mountains of the Andes, from the dervishes of Kurdistan to the monks of Tibet, the project captures both intimate moments of prayer and meditation alongside epic scenes with tens of thousands of pilgrims.

It's my experience that many of the ancient devotional traditions that have been central to the culture of these regions for hundreds if not thousands of years are now under threat from the forces of globalization, mass tourism, political oppression and even global warming. This photographic project hopes be a testament to the importance of these traditions.

Although I follow in the documentary tradition of photography in that I capture scenes rather than create them, I strive to make works that are poetic or painterly rather than purely literal, using my tools of light and composition, to hopefully reveal universal truths.

*Since the beginning of time men and women have had faith traditions and I was interested in trying to capture that common thirst for spiritual fulfillment.*



© Christopher Roche

### Your work is currently being shown at the Other Art Fair, what was it like to be picked as one of the best emerging artists?

I recently exhibited at The Other Art Fair which was an exciting venture in seeing how people react to my photography. Many questioned whether they were actual photographs, several people thinking that they were collages or paintings.

### Where does your interest in faith and their traditions come from?

I think my primary interest has always been in the human condition and what connects us all. Since the beginning of time men and women have had faith traditions and I was interested in trying to capture that common thirst for spiritual fulfillment. Of course this is also a personal ongoing journey to find my place on this planet. For me, if there is a god, it is a creative force that expresses itself through us. Through the research, the traveling, the photography and the witnessing of these traditions I feel expansive, connected, challenged and creative - and that's a great feeling.



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### Do you see yourself as an observer in these traditional ceremonies or part of them?

I definitely feel myself as an observer rather than a participant in the scenes that I have shot. It would be disingenuous of me to claim otherwise. The people I photograph have lived very different lives than I have. However, the most important aspect of my photography is to make that connection with them. I do believe that my best photographs have come from those moments when the subject has realised that I have seen their inner beauty. That is the connection that hopefully translates into the photograph and yes, I want the audience to see that beauty too. I have been told that people see compassion in my photographs. I could not ask for a greater compliment.



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### Are you planning to enter the awards again this year?

I will indeed enter the Sony Awards again. It was a great honour to receive an award last year and to be part of the whole celebration of the event. I met many other inspiring photographers and it offered a great platform for my own work. I've also been putting my prize of a Sony a7RII to great use – so hopefully I've another award winning image to submit.

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