



David Creedon
Ghosts of the Faithful Departed



David Creedon, born in Cork in the late '50s, took up an interest in photography in his late teens, photographing local anti-boring bands in his native Ireland. Since then, Creedon has regularly been published in different magazines and has exhibited in Ireland and internationally. Creedon has worked on a variety of projects: from portraits of Irish musicians with a film noir feeling to a colourful and stylish reportage of the Venice Carnival.

Creedon has spent over a year working on his latest project, *Ghosts of the Faithful Departed*, which "looks at isolation, loneliness and decay in rural Ireland set against a backdrop of mass emigration of the 1950s to the 1980s," Creedon explains. "It has been estimated that in the period from the 1950s to the 1980s over 800,000 people were forced to emigrate from Ireland." This Diaspora of Irish people reached its peak in 1953 when 95,000 young people left Ireland, furthermore, in a census taken the year after, the population of Ireland fell to 2.8 million, the lowest ever recorded.

I must admit that the first time I looked at Creedon's photographs the first thing I thought was that they were staged, that Creedon had in some way arranged some objects in the houses in order to make more dramatic and effective photographs, to accentuate the feeling of "life" within these abandoned houses. But Creedon is very clear about this, from the very beginning he wanted to show the houses as they were. "I have strived at all times not to move or arrange items but to photograph as found," Creedon clarifies. "I did not want to touch other people's possessions."

Surprisingly after being abandoned for more than 30 years, some of these houses look like they had been left the day before yesterday. A dress hung on a hanger, an ironed jacket in a wardrobe ready for Sunday service, a just opened letter from someone who emigrated a few months ago or a suitcase just unpacked after a visit to some relatives give traces of, not only the past inhabitants of these houses, but also their lives. "While visiting these unoccupied houses,"

Creedon explains, "I felt like an intruder disturbing the spirits that still haunt every room." If we can still "see" these houses as inhabited through Creedon's photographs, it is not surprising that Creedon felt their occupants' presence when he was there.

Although Creedon clearly states that nothing was arranged or staged, I still think there was. There is some kind of theatricality about them, something that has been performed within them. But not by him, by time. It seems as if time has kept everything as it was, preserving these houses from the passing of time. Time has, by not marking these houses with its irreversible and permanent sentence, performed some theatrics. It is as if time had built a monument to remember those who lived there, a remembrance which is waiting for the inhabitants to come back and take up their interrupted lives where they left off.

There are two elements that stand out in these houses as photographed "as found" by Creedon: colour and religious imagery. "I decided at an early stage to shoot in colour rather than black and white because this allowed me to capture the uniquely rich colours within the houses which were in contrast to the poverty of the streets," he explains. The colours on the walls and tiles of these houses tell us a bit more about the people who lived there: their hopes and beliefs for a better future, their optimism and happiness even in tough times. The presence of religious imagery is also ubiquitous: crucifixes, images of the Virgin Mary with her child, different images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, small religious pictures of saints or representations of Jesus' crucifixion have a constant presence and a privileged place in all the houses.

In *Ghosts of the Faithful Departed*, Creedon rescues those people's memories and our collective memory of them from oblivion. For Creedon, for Irish people, and for all of us, to photograph these spaces, to name these stories, to visualise and name that Diaspora, have healing effects: we should learn from our own history which, more often than not, is full of mistakes. But, unfortunately, and as many things in life, to name it does not necessarily solve it; but, at least, it is a promising beginning.

Text by Peter J. Moran-Muñoz

in collaboration with David Creedon
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