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Russia: A World Apart

Duncan McLaren, Simon Marsden

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Russia: A World Apart is a haunting evocation of the ruined country estates of the Russian aristocracy of the 18th and 19th centuries. Revolution, civil war, invasion, anarchy and casual indifference have conspired against many of the grand buildings of Russia's rich and complex past. The architectural riches of Moscow and St Petersburg still exist for everyone to see, but when the photographer Simon Marsden and author Duncan McLaren entered the Russian countryside, away from the obvious tourist trails, they encountered a very different world.

McLaren relates how "The further from Moscow and St Petersburg, the more
desolate and derelict the landscape became. Endless pot-holed roads pass through one dead or dying village after another whose vandalized churches are now the refuge of owls and pigeons. This is the plight of modern-day Russia where the countryside is dying and its population declining while the big cities are thriving. Hidden away within all this desolation and chaos, many devastated country estates can be found. The statuary and formal gardens gone forever, replaced by an overgrown wilderness where stray dogs forage amongst the crumbling outhouses, garbage and rotting tyres."

This book, the result of four trips undertaken by Marsden and McLaren, illustrates a diverse mix of pre-revolutionary buildings and memorials, manor houses, palaces, churches, statuary and tombs, interspersed with more recent monuments from Soviet times. Each picture tells its own tale. In the newly found freedom and optimism of the post-communist era, some of these estates are being restored by individuals and organizations whose immense dedication to rescuing their past is nothing short of inspiring. Others will simply crumble to dust in the face of indifference from the majority of the population making Russia: A World Apart a beautiful and melancholy testament to the glories and grandeur of the past few centuries.

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