

From Tuva with Love

Tuva is one of those extraordinary crossroads where cultures of different continents mix. Located in southern Siberia (it is part of the Russian Republic), bordering Mongolia, and formerly part of China, it is a center of Tibetan Buddhism. Its people blend languages, religion and traditions from central, east, and south Asia and Eastern Europe. From a European or American perspective it is a remote place, mysterious and exoticized, best known through recordings of Tuvan throat singing.

The Swiss photographer Yann Mingard has traveled to Tuva, with spectacular results. Quiet, poetic, and insistent, his pictures capture the mood of the place – or maybe it is the photographer's mood. Yann's work is more than just a series of National Geographic-style records of an unfamiliar land (though those have their own special charm), and it's interesting to think about how this sort of 'expressive' documentary photography differs from the material most often published in magazines.

There is a lot to admire in Yann's work, but I am particularly drawn to his landscapes. Yann spent several years working as a horticulturalist before taking up photography formally, and his horizonless color photographs of bare trees, twigs, and grasses, usually shown looking down at the forest floor, are beautiful. The artist has published a number of these in web portfolios – the series 'Sans Titre' and 'Repaire' include photographs taken closer to home. They reflect a sensibility the artist seems to take with him wherever he goes.

Text by Phillip Prodger