

A few of us may know Tom Wood by now. Through Wood's photographs, we have had the privilege of entering his life at many points during the last 25 to 30 years. He may even be a friend of ours. If we happen to live in the area around Liverpool or New Brighton, Wood's hometown (even though he's originally from Ireland), he may even have mailed us a portrait of ourselves at some point. Wood is known around New Brighton and the Merseyside area as "PhotieMan" because he's the one with the camera who is always there day after day.

In fact, Tom Wood is not only always carrying a camera but a video camera as well. These two apparatuses serve as extensions of himself and Wood is always either instinctively shooting a photo or a video of what is going on around him. What we are privy to is an intimate, Wood family series updated on a continual basis. Wood knows the people he photographs and they know him. He has formed such close and familiar relationships that with every photograph he gets closer and closer to them and himself. His look, his skill, his composition his process is extremely real in terms of the "real" in him. Wood is an integral part of this world of New Brighton and Merseyside but he's also able to step outside of this environment to witness life on the street, in the pub, in the cafe, on the bus and on the doorsteps.

Tom Wood is, in many ways, a public servant. He is the photographer of the village. He is the storyteller, the artist, the viewer, the playwright, the chronicler and the historian. In his images we see a state and progression of existence: a record. And it's our good fortune that Wood serves this important role in society. For him photography is more a necessity, more of an extension of his five senses. And it is these five senses that collectively rise like a lurid truth in the faces of his photographs. We are there too, with him, watching and witnessing. But we are there in a way that has been naturally and realistically realised.

Wood's work is natural because he has taken the time to establish a long-term relationship with his subjects and his environment. He is someone who daily rises in the morning and goes to work and live with the people of his hometown. They are, in all senses of the word, Wood's family. And it is fitting that Wood is now putting together a book with Steidl Germany and the artist Padraig Timoney. The images shown here are from the soon to be released PhotieMan, and are merely an intense taste of the book's contents.

PhotieMan will be a large volume of new and previously seen photographs, edited together with Timoney, to produce a Wood family album; an album of magnificent photographs drawing us into the gazes of so many people. Wood brings us so close that we are captivated while we are peering through his subjects' soul-windows, their eyes. Look at the woman and child in the appropriately named "Sea View Cafe." The woman looks so young. Her hair is a thick mass. Her skin is pink and pale and the baby, also lost in a gaze, is almost awkward, yet balanced in her arms. They both gaze out in the same direction. But in her eyes we can begin to see something

more, a world-weariness, a truth of capability, a strength, an older wisdom inside her. In the busy cafe, she is holding a new life in her hands. This makes Wood aware and Wood makes us aware. The coffee cup on the table is turned towards us.

Wood's photographs on a natural and sensorial level. Any meanings stem from Wood's perspective. One could argue that the emotional power that a photographer can convey in his or her photography comes, in the end, from his or her perspective. That is especially true in Wood. He has earned the trust of his family. He is them and they are him. And we sense the empathy or reflection of Wood's perspective within the photographs. The "Ginger Boy" leaning against the green door is folded up and able to frown with the expression of a son to his father. The couple on the bench along the street could be his aunt and uncle. The girl flanked by her two brothers could be his niece and nephews. They feel totally at ease with Wood taking their photographs, which allows him to breakdown barriers that allows us to move beyond the act of merely searching for the photographer's purpose in their faces and bodies, and begin to look for our own sense of purpose. As viewers, we have become comfortable with the "PhotieMan" as well.

Wood never ceases to look and look again at his subject matter, proving that there are an infinite number of ways to record our eternal truths. For it is with love and with truly great photographic and humanistic skill that Wood looks and works. Tom Wood has remained, as one artist has noted, a good citizen of brilliant impact who reminds us that we too should look more closely with love at the world we live in.

TEXT BY TYLER WHISNAD

Exhibition "Street Life" with the work of:

Tom Wood, Garry Winogrand, William Klein, Lida Moser, John Harding  
and Elliott Erwitt. Through April 23 at:

ROTONDA Galerie

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