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VISUAL ARTS

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tom wood: *photieman*

Castlefield Gallery, to 20 July



Sweaty, bevvied up and on the pull, Tom Wood's clubbers tongue and jostle each other in a 'this is what we live for' kind of a way. But there's no judgment here. Wood has dwelled amongst the people and places he photographs for 25 years and the empathy that informs his work distinguishes it from the faint derision of much documentary photography. Elsewhere in this dazzling retrospective, abstracted bus passengers, cocky youths, pals, lovers and mothers let a little of themselves out to the camera in a way that few lensmen can plan for.

Wood's uncanny ability to combine characteristic posture

and compositional clarity whilst dispersing incident across and into the picture space recalls the tradition of figure painting as well as photography. He is no more confined to one manner, though, than he is to one mood and throughout this selection the bleakness of some parts of Merseyside is transcended by a sense of release into reverie, tenderness or defiance. Wood is a supremely literate artist and plays to the strengths of his medium. Largely indefinable in other terms, his images show us that it's humanity rather than circumstances that define us all.

DAVID GLEDHILL