

Comic



Release

Tony Briggs

It doesn't take much; it seems, to put the backs up of well-heeled locals in London EC1. Photographer Tony Briggs' show, *Forty*, at the area's Chambers Gallery recently received an unexpected visit from the police following complaints about a photograph in the gallery's window. The picture, *Kes*, is a mock-up of Ken Loach's anorak-clad tearaway sporting a hawk in one hand and a v-sign with attitude in the other. Over-reactions apart, the photographer is happy for people to draw their own conclusions about his work. Mainly focusing on celebrities, particularly comedians in the public eye, his assignments have included the likes of Kate Moss, Oasis, Bill Bailey and Ronaldinho. Beneath their sheen of glamour and worldly success there's a healthy irreverence to his celebrity portraits. Perhaps, I suggested to him, he's poking fun at celebdom? "Not in a big conceptual way. I take people as I find them. I don't buy into the celebrity thing. But it's not patronising; sitters are aware of what I'm doing. I'm not trying to stitch anyone up."

A sequence of pictures, *Pikeys* shows the middle-classes' current bete-noir in a, let's say, less than favourable light. Models strike "chav"-like poses outside a dilapidated caravan. So, what was the thinking behind the pictures? "It's meant to be a bit tongue

in cheek... I do a lot of comedians and a lot of comedy stuff. We lived next door to a 'pikey' and he ruined our little village. Half my wardrobe's Burberry and I can't wear it anymore!"

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Briggs broke into the big-time during the heyday of the lad-mag phenomena before branching off into advertising. "*Loaded* (magazine) was my big break. I'm talking about when it was funny. Before it turned into another 'tits 'n' arse' mag. I did a lot of record company stuff before that: *The Face*, *I-D*. But I got my big advertising break off the back of *Loaded*."

While growing up in Sunderland he was drawn towards photography from an early age. "I've always done it really, ever since being a kid. My brother was doing it as part of his course and I nicked his camera gear. I did an A level then went to college but I never really finished my college course."

Of the pictures in his recent show at the Chambers Gallery he has one or two

personal favourites. "The *Kes* picture's starting to become an iconic image for me. It won London Photographer of the Year last year." And he has a particular fondness for his recording studio shots of Oasis with Paul Weller and Ocean Colour Scene. "... purely for its longevity. I was on a retainer from MCA records...it was an on-going project for five years."

Fittingly for a photographer who focuses so much on comedians, there's a comic touch that runs throughout his work. Ewan MacGregor pulls a face, which belies his status as a Hollywood A-lister. While a young Kate Moss has 'haute coiffure', inscribed in lipstick on her torso.

Does he have any advice for young photographers starting out? "Do something else.. plumbing...anything. To be honest I don't know where I got my enthusiasm from. I think now there must be ten times as many people doing it with about a tenth of the work available. You can technically get a camera now and you don't have to do any training. With digital there's no resemblance to film or photography at all. To me it's two completely different things. So maybe it's a completely different job altogether. It's no easy ride now in photography."

Paul Fitzpatrick

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