

Two Days in the Life: The Beatles Exhibition



Beatles 'Coming Apart' © Tom Murray 1968

They called it the 'Mad Day'. In July 1968, the day before The Beatles recorded Hey Jude, Tom Murray criss-crossed Swinging London with them on a photo-shoot. They had to keep moving because if they stopped anywhere too long, fans appeared from nowhere, ready to lynch them with love.

The last time they had been able to walk the streets uninterrupted was in March 1963, in their native Liverpool, on a shoot with *Sunday Times* photographer Michael Ward. The following day, they scored their first No1 and Beatlemania engulfed the country. The best of both of these shoots is on display at the *Idea Generation Gallery*, and every single shot is fab. Their music speaks for itself, but the *Beatles'* imagery was almost as powerful.

There are other great *Beatles* photo-shoots that capture their physical chemistry, dress and evolving personalities, such as Robert Whittaker's 1966 record of their trip to Japan or Peter Blake's *Sgt Pepper* shoot the

following year. But what's significant and arresting about **the images on show here is how they mark the start and the peak of the Beatles' complete re-invention of popular culture.**



The Beatles at Liverpool Pierhead. Photo © Michael Ward 1963

The 1963 shots are black-and-white, the perfect palette for the grey, austere, war-knackered England The *Beatles* were about to transform into the epicentre of popstastic cool. George wears a leather jacket with a hint of rebellion, yet like the others remains neat and dapper. They stand surrealistically on the stone steps of Pierhead holding cups of tea, John perverting the arrangement by sipping from his. Ward was a master of great thespian portraits, but here he had a bunch of cheeky, lovable lads on his hands.

Yet he not only captures their happy-go-lucky energy but also finds depth beneath the zaniness. A portrait of Ringo could be a snap from a moody, gritty new British play of the times. You can feel the sweaty claustrophobia of their last Cavern gig that evening, packed with mod girls, the night before they abandoned the grimy Northern town. By 1968, the Fab Four were far-out from their roots and outtasight from mere mortals. They'd surfaced from their magical mystery tour of psychedelia, and were now exploring new headspaces in the cosmic aftermath. The world was at their command. *The White Album* is a spectrum of styles and competing personalities. Murray's shots, in colour, reflect this perfectly. And the band's clothes are in bright hues, precise yet casually cool, the sort of groovy wardrobe a sharp eye in Camden's markets could still sniff out- this was like a fashion shoot.

The locations are not the Swinging London haunts of clubs or *Carnaby Street*, but instead off the beaten track- the riverside at Wapping, an International Style office-block on Old Street, the overgrown churchyard at *St Pancras*, even a suburban street. Paul plays to the camera, spouting water and looking as dismissively sensual as Jagger ever did. The *Beatles* still lark about- in one photo, Paul is grabbing John to save him from falling off a roof. In another, John feigns sudden death. But there is a seriousness in them, especially in serene garden shots amongst hollyhocks. These are like scenes of cosmic gods who have had their play conjuring up new worlds, and now stand a little awed by what they have made. A portrait of George is the most serious- he is there, and yet his mind is elsewhere, transcended beyond this plane of reality.

If the shoots were just the *Beatles* themselves, that would be mind-blowing enough. But Ward and Murray have varying composition styles, and each captures a different *zeitgeist*. Ward's Liverpool is a window into a historical world, as distant as Victorian times. Murray's *Mad Day*, by contrast, is like listening to the colour of 1968 dreams, but it could just as easily be an indie band in 2008 scoping locations for a video-shoot. Here are contemporary characters in a recognisable, modern world. And that's the most amazing thing of all- by placing the two shoots in the same show, we actually see the *Beatles* standing there in the world, before and after they had totally transformed it. And through that most incredible creative trip of the last century, they were just four very real people. **These snaps show the *Beatles* had been everywhere, and brings them back for tea.**

Relax, turn off your mind and float downstream through this show, that you may see the meaning within... *it is shining, it is shining.*

Herbert Wright

Two Days In the Life: The Beatles, featuring photography by Tom Murray and Michael Ward at Idea Generation Gallery, 11 Chance Street, London E2 7BG., until 4th July 2008, Admission free.