



Anthony Lam

TOM BLAU

This is not an ambiguous exhibition. Anthony Lam spent a year photographing Bangladeshi youths in Shadwell, E1, and the monochromatic results are memorably direct. This East End is a sour whirlpool of racism and poverty; although some of Lam's subjects are trying to swim, most are going under, and he seems determined to bridge the empathy gap. In his prints brick walls are constantly used both as dead-end metaphors and as stylistic unifiers – by the end, you will never want to see another one – and the captions, taken from interviews with the subjects, develop into a litany of stymied expectations. 'You get sucked up... hanging about on the streets... you get promised so many things, and nothing ever happens.' Success is measured in mobile phones and designer T-shirts.

This torpor battles with the exhilaration of Lam's visual style. He is a thief, but his poaching always has a purpose. Robert Frank's habit of photographing through car windshields turns up to produce off-centre and deceptively weighted compositions; and William Klein's swooping, inky blurs are used for a vertiginous, abyssal view of a figure descending a staircase. Rather than simply aestheticising injustice, Lam uses the tricks to make social points; having worked with the Shadwell youth community for ten years, and used these photos in an East End public art project, he's no exploitation merchant. The one dubious aspect is the viewpoint, which is as unbalanced as one of Lam's compositions. Where are the perspectives of adults or females (all the subjects are male)? A contextual analysis might intensify or dilute the sociological thrust but, as it stands, tight focusing mars an otherwise captivating and thought-provoking show.

Martin Herbert