



Shields' images of *True Blood*'s Emma Greenwell, on display at Mouthful this month

Photography by: Tyler Shields



'I just like the idea that there's always another side to people...'

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Shot to fame

Hollywood's hottest photographer Tyler Shields is famous for his evocative images of celebrities, available to buy through Wimbledon's A Gallery this month – but what's his link with SW19? Mary-Jane Wiltsher investigates

Inspired by wealth, excess and the underbelly of fame, Tyler Shields' work is the subject of adulation and controversy in equal measure. Hailed as the young Hollywood photographer of the moment, his images are simultaneously glamorous and sordid. From the media frenzy surrounding his photographs of a blood-soaked Lindsay Lohan, to his latest work with *True Blood*'s Emma Greenwell, Shields has divided critics: are his images shallow and narcissistic, or a profound examination of celebrity

culture? Whatever your opinion, it's this dark undercurrent that's key to Shields' success; everyone wants a taste of what lies beyond Hollywood's glossy veneer, and his Stateside exhibition, Mouthful, promises to cater accordingly. "It'll be unlike any art show you've ever seen before, I can promise you that," he says enigmatically.

But how does Shields' latest project relate to the Wimbledon-based A Gallery and its director, Fraser Kee Scott? It seems a lengthy transatlantic friendship

has resulted in an artistic collaboration: "I've known and worked with Tyler for seven years now," explains Scott. "And I've helped him to set up, promote and direct Mouthful in the Ace Gallery in LA, which we hired." A lot of mutual respect is evident here – Scott, who has been praised for pre-empting the mainstream, was determined to seek out Shields early on. Shields tells me: "Fraser is an interesting guy, he found me years ago and wanted to work with me. He has an eye for up and coming people."

Shields on Emma Greenwell

Shields' most recent subject to feature in the exhibition is Emma Greenwell, who recently starred in the US version of *Shameless*, and will be hitting UK television screens in *True Blood* season 5 in June, a series based on *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* by Charlaine Harris. "She's a great girl and a fantastic person," Shields says. "We met through her manager and hit it off. Thirty minutes later she was throwing my friend into a dumpster." Shields' photos of Greenwell have a vampiric, erotic feel, Greenwell resembling a character from a graphic novel with her blonde fringe, letterbox red dress and heavy eyelashes.

Given Shield's evasiveness, it's hard to predict

what Mouthful has in store, but you can get an idea of his vision on the A Gallery website, where it's also possible to buy some of his museum quality photographs, including those of Greenwell.

Rich reds and lily-whites are offset by darker colours, while provocative silhouettes are accessorised with 21st century amour: diamonds, food, domestic appliances, smeared make-up, guns and dollar bills. Mischa Barton reaches a languid tongue towards a raw steak; Heather Morris is tied up with an iron. The settings are desolate and seedy – soulless motel rooms and side streets. Shields' summary of his indulgent aesthetic is unerringly simple: "I just like the idea that there's always another side to people; even celebrities have to go to the bathroom."

When I ask Shields what's next on his 2012 calendar, he reveals he's keen to exhibit again soon: "Hopefully at least one more gallery before the end of the year." Perhaps Mouthful will arrive on British soil in the not too distant future. It would certainly give the critics something to chew over.]

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tylershields.com