

July/August, 2005

not just on motor transportation but on the religion of the motorcar." He spoke, also, of seeing fragments of the city through a 60 mile per hour blur. Meg Madison's photographs bring into focus that trenchant reality.

While recovering from a minor accident, Madison began to take pictures each time she entered an automobile. Taken with an outdated SX70 Polaroid camera, the outdated film and malfunction of the camera contribute to the blurred, abstract effects of the resultant photographs.

Each photograph is marked with the date, time and destination. The originals have been digitally enlarged and printed with UltraChrome pigment to reproduce the original vibrant colors. A distinctive painterly quality is achieved when elements of the original Polaroid are visible on the surface.

In her series "Surface Streets," Madison allows viewers to experience the repetition of scenes... fragmentary views usually missed when concentrating on the hypnotic act of driving. Familiar images, drawn from a lower level of awareness, include blurs of light fragments reflected from speeding tires, tree tops, windshields, headlights and speeding passengers. A split second glimpse of a broken antenna or a hand accentuates the immediacy of the experience.

The edgy anxiety of night driving is caught in "Home." Enveloped in darkness, a driver is faced with the glare of approaching headlights.

Revealing, also, are reflections on car surfaces. Madison states, "they are points to deeper layers underneath the disconnected state engendered by our repetitive driving."

Madison's evocations of the speed and frenzy we are almost pathologically inflicted with are a result of her consciousness of the ever present threat of collisions. Consider, for example, our feelings of utter helplessness and frustration in the face of gridlock. Photographs of traffic moving behind or alongside emphasize the density of vehicles that surrounds the driver.

It is predicted that by the year 2030 our planet will have one billion automobiles. Although firmly entrenched in our cultural and collective spirit, the dominance of a car culture is not



5/21 2:40 pm to another beauty supply store

Meg Madison, "Driving #76," 2005, digitally enlarged 2001 photograph.

totally benign. Automobiles corrupt our physical and mental landscapes by promoting isolation and dependence. Consider, also, that they can kill people, create pollution and make us slaves to a serious oil addiction. Yet, city planning continues to foster our dependence.

Madison's photographs extract both the protection and the perils of city driving. Yet, still photographs belie the resounding reality of the traffic experience. One has to imagine, for instance, the cacophony, the road rage, the crashes... all the inherent ills of our car culture.

Barring necessity, automobiles retain a firm hold over our collective psyches. They are metaphors for the freedom and mobility that Americans prize. While enclosed in our metal capsules, they become our temporary offices and restaurants. We do our banking, eat meals, talk on the phone, don makeup, and listen to music and books in them.

Madison unveils snatches of the boredom and the hazards city drivers are exposed to. But, while cars transcend geographical constraints, they also contribute to our anonymity. The photos do not disclose how our car culture is both a divider and leveler of ethnic hierarchies.

Elenore Welles

MEG MADISON

"The car has become the carapace, a protective and aggressive shell, without which we feel uncertain, unclad and incomplete."
- Marshal McLuhan, 1964

(Kristi Engle Gallery, Downtown)
Owning and driving an automobile has become a prerequisite to surviving Los Angeles. In fact, Los Angeles presently has more registered cars than people. In his book, "Highway & The City" (1964), Lewis Mumford, a leading 20th-century authority on cities, wrote, "The current American way of life is founded