

mentary photography at its best: insightful, eloquent, poignant, compassionate and disturbing.

Western Project, 3830 Main St., Culver City, (310) 838-0609, through July 9. Closed Sunday and Monday.

The everyday car show

Meg Madison began "Surface Streets" — an absorbing series of photographs at Kristi Engle Gallery — in the wake of a minor car accident. It's the sort of experience that tends to shake up one's view of the world, if only temporarily, and Madison has taken advantage of that, producing a poetic visual essay, which explores that most common of daily activities — driving — with fresh eyes.

Working through a stockpile of outdated Polaroid film, Madison took one picture every time she got into or out of a car for a period of two weeks, labeling each with the date, time and, in some cases, purpose of the trip ("for dog food," "for more hair dye"). For the exhibition, she digitally enlarged the images — nearly 150 in all — and presents them as midsized prints, hung in an even row around the perimeter of the gallery.

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Kristi Engle Gallery

ON THE ROAD: A digitally enlarged Polaroid from Meg Madison's "Surface Streets."

details of the cars: a taillight, a fender, a reflection in a window. Others look beyond, to the sidewalk or street. Some are clear and easily identifiable; others are blurred or taken from extremely close up, and virtually abstract.

Thanks to the quality of the outdated film (and probably some degree of digital manipulation), the colors are rich and strange, with the palette dominated by yellows, oranges and greens suggestive of some sort of chemical spill. The individual images are invariably striking and often quite beautiful. The effect is stirringly poetic: an impressionistic exploration of an experience we take for granted.

Kristi Engle Gallery, 453 S. Spring St., Suite 451, Los Angeles, (213) 629-2358, through Aug. 13. Closed Sunday through Wednesday.