

Pincus, Robert L. Review. *Art in America* (December 1988), p. 161.

In *The Holy Road*, a quote from Kerouac's novel—"What's your road, man?—holyboy road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road," etc.—invokes the lure of travel in a mystical, trancelike fashion. Yet the same automobiles and highways that were an integral part of the Beat pilgrimage, Smith reminds us, were being promoted to the "unhip" masses as well; the travel section from a 1956 Los Angeles newspaper included in *The Holy Road* encourages everyone to take to the highway: RIDGE ROAD TRIP UNROLLS HISTORY, a headline declares.

We also find in this collage traditional images of beatitude (a small reproduction of Mary and the infant Jesus) and paradise lost (rubber snakes). Surrounding these items is the perfect—fabricated—kitsch prop: a dilapidated wood frame with simulated tire tracks on it. Smith, the ironist, scrutinizing the sensibility of Kerouac, the latter-day Romantic, pinpoints the old archetypes, religious and secular, that are found in Beat prose (the name of Kerouac's chief protagonist in *On the Road* is, fittingly, Sal Paradise).

As Sal Paradise traveled down the road, he mused about the appeal of the highway to the masses: "Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night? I mean, man, whither goest thou?" This passage appears in one of Smith's collages, along with an assortment of auto advertisements, including a Buick Century sandwiched between two halves of a Chevrolet promo. Both cars were photographed on open roads; America apparently was going Kerouac's way. His vision of the road as a place for spiritual salvation

LOS ANGELES

Alexis Smith at Margo Leavin

Over the past 15 or so years, Alexis Smith has developed a substantial body of work, setting bits of literary texts, movie dialogue and the like from decades gone by within pictorial fields of found or fabricated imagery, along with objects which evoke the same era as the selected texts. Even newly made elements, like most of the frames for her recent pictures, have an appropriate period look. "On the Road," the title of Smith's show late last season, alludes to Jack Kerouac's novel of the same title; here Smith plays the role of artist-as-semiotician, juxtaposing snippets of Kerouac's fiction with newspapers and kitsch imagery in her mixed-medium collages.



Alexis Smith: *Route 66*, 1988, mixed-medium collage, 31¼ by 21 by 2¼ inches; at Margo Leavin.

seems as much a part of the past as the calendars, song sheets, advertisements, etc., in Smith's provocative and evocative pictures.

—Robert L. Pincus