

Weissman, Benjamin. Review. *Artforum* (Summer 1990), p. 173.

LOS ANGELES

NEWPORT BEACH

R
E
V
I
E
W
S

Alexis Smith, *Moonlight Serenade*, 1989, mixed media,
32 1/4 x 38 1/2 x 2 1/4".

goony dated ashtray and the swizzle stick, to the blown tire, and the forlorn last-place ribbon. Entitled "Eldorado (On the Road Part II)," this is the second installment of a Kerouac-fueled visual saga, but the existential optimism that animated *On the Road*, 1957, has wandered down an unanticipated byway. The result is an abbreviated, critical romanticism, that funnels Kerouac's macho talk into something ironic, punchy, and somehow androgynous.

In a two-panel piece entitled *Analgesic* (all works 1989–90) Smith takes the novel's lust and peculiar grammar and turns it into an anatomical/geological knee slapper. The first panel juxtaposes two medical ads—one for a decongestant, another for a pain reliever—along with a page torn from a biology text entitled "The Common Carotid Arteries," illustrating the course of blood traveling away from the brain. Where the heart should appear in the ad diagram, one finds a red bicycle reflector. At the bottom of the picture the phrase "THE PAIN STABBED MY HEART" is printed in alarming spikey caps. In the second panel the rest of the phrase is printed over a map of New Mexico. It reads: "AS IT DID EVERY TIME I SAW A GIRL I LOVED WHO WAS GOING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION IN THIS TOO BIG WORLD." An image of a surly woman holding a suitcase and looking over her shoulder is silk-screened over the map. The wrapper from a pair of chopsticks that crosses the length of her body is printed with instructions as well as a boast about "three beautiful large dining rooms," "the moon gate piano bar," and "facilities for private parties, or club meetings." The motifs on Smith's custom frames are derived from the elements in the pictures. The frame of the first panel, decorated with ribbons of pink and blue muscle, takes its cue from the internal body parts depicted in the work. The

white frame around the second panel is covered with thin red and blue veinlike lines suggesting a road map. Another frame looks like a giant peach, complete with a green leaf, cut open in the center to reveal the satin interior of a small powder-blue overnight case. In the picture *Old Glory* a red and white striped porthole frame surrounds a defaced portrait of a rugged man. In a makeup job with a sly feminist edge the artist adds a dog tag earring, a blackened toothbrush mustache, and an old razor blade above the right eye. For twenty years Smith has patrolled the American beat, gathering evidence for a thesis on our rusty climate. Her report is full of wit, wisdom and a dose of the plainly freaky.

—Benjamin Weissman

LOS ANGELES

ALEXIS SMITH

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

American mythology is her targeted victim, and Alexis Smith is out to kick butt. From the clunky romantic language in which American hopes and dreams are characteristically writ, to the stereotypes citizens passively adopt as if they were a somnambulant army specializing in misguided love, the entire middle American vernacular is fair game. Smith gives voice to an array of the babbling, perennially cheerful found objects, from the

SUMMER 1990 173