

the village VOICE, October 5, 1972

American yawn, Irish wail

With conceptual artists moving (somewhat erratically) into photography, it is natural that some photographers would begin working the conceptual vein. Stephen Shore is one such; he's been at it for quite a while now, since long before it was evenly marginally fashionable in photographic circles. I'll gladly give him points for initiative and tenacity, but I simply can't get it on with his work—at least not with those small segments of it which I've seen, the latest being his "American Surfaces" in the back room at Light.

"American Surfaces" is a group of 174 Kodacolor drugstore-type prints of assorted meals, motels, cashiers, roadsides, and

other items of contemporary Americana. These are mounted in three horizontal rows, looking for all the world like an endless game of visual solitaire devised to while away the eons in limbo. As I indicated a while back, Shore seems intent on proving that anyone can photograph as well as he can, and I must admit he's building an airtight case.

The specific concept behind this exhibit is not readily apparent to me, which would make me feel old-fogeyish as all get-out if I weren't still young enough to not give a fuck. Bernadette Mayer—to whom Shore is (priority-wise, at the very least) indebted for elements of this work, did the same thing in her "Memory" exhibit this past spring, except that where "Memory" was dense, stirring, and connotative, "American Surfaces" is thin, benumbing and banal. No surprises, as Ed Ruscha might say. Historians of

the future will, of course, turn to this sort of material for the purposes of visual anthropology (though with millions of people out there creating it, Shore is hardly making a distinctive contribution to the genre). Collectors of the future will also get into Kodacolor imagery—if only because there is nothing in a disposable culture which will not eventually be "collectible," as they say in the trade—but I'm sure they won't pay \$500 for a set like this. (In an unlimited edition, no less; no sales of individual prints.) It's not only dull, it isn't even archival. If you're interested, though, I met a former doorman at a famous New York hotel who's got a collection of Stereo Realist color slides of that establishment's more famous patrons which will knock your eyes out—and you can get the whole kit and kaboodle for less than half that, with the camera thrown in on top of it all. Why settle for ersatz naif when you can get the real(ist) thing?

latent image

by A. D. Coleman