

Richard Heeps

Americana

Light House Gallery, Wolverhampton, 16/04/07 – 11/05/07

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Making original photographs of America is no mean feat, not least because it would seem that every nook and cranny of this enormous country has already been explored by other photographers, but also because it has been immortalized in cinema so comprehensively that almost any photographs from a 'road-trip' style project could read as film stills from an endless back catalogue. To the tourist, America is truly picturesque, in that everything within it looks like a picture they have already seen.

Nevertheless, there have been some original and successful bodies of work produced over the last few years. However, Richard Heeps' exhibition *Americana*, which is a compilation of three different visits to America over three years, is not one of these projects. As the title suggests, he has concentrated on the most familiar and clichéd American icons, such as petrol pumps, classic motor vehicles, trailers, grotty motels, and advertising and branded signs of all descriptions, with a few more traditional landscapes thrown in. Mostly shot towards the end of the day, Heeps draws out the most possible colour from the subjects, which also over-dramatises innocuous scenes and exaggerates the automatic filmic effect. (His close-up of a payphone bathed in golden lights comes to mind.)

At a casual glance, one might hope that these saturated colour images are an attempt to re-examine or review the classic 1970s colour works by William Eggleston. Unfortunately however, they are more like an attempt to mimic that period: I don't think there are any pictorial references or clues to suggest these were made within the last decade or two. That is, of course, with the exception of signs of rust and general decay, which without more explicit reference serve little more than to promote this sense of nostalgia. Perhaps this unusually affectionate position is an attempt to redress the balance of current Amerophobia.

There is a little too much repetition within the collection, and it would benefit from a much stricter edit and a more considered installation, with the inclusion of larger works in place of the numerous smaller ones. That said, they are visually stunning, (perhaps too) reasonably priced, and will certainly appeal to anyone (like myself) with a sense of American romanticism.