

Robert Mars at the Mark Gallery

March 26th - May 15th, 2009



Eight large-scale (some measure three by five feet) collages by Robert Mars constitute one half of the aptly-named "*America: Lost and Found*" exhibition at the Mark Gallery in Englewood, NJ. These bold and impressive works reveal Mr. Mars to be an archeologist as well as an artist. With obvious affection and care the artist has sought out iconic relics of the golden age of the American highway and captured them on film. He then converts his photographs to black and white image transfers and applies them over collaged backgrounds made of paint, painted paper, and fragments from mid-20th Century magazines and newspapers.

The backgrounds of these new collages are brighter and more complex than those of some of the artist's earlier works. Mars chooses his fragments carefully and one can find, in this exhibition, textual references to Route 66, the Beatles, native Americans, and assorted fifties and sixties memorabilia. Mars often appropriates phrases which are themselves commercially-inspired appropriations of earlier concepts. The inclusion of the magazine and newspaper clippings adds to the archeological texture of these collages.

The images which are applied as transfers are often automobiles, service stations, or archetypal advertising signage from motels, diners, and billboards. Mars usually tends to allow the transferred images to dominate his works but in some of the pieces in this exhibition the transfers share center-stage with the collaged elements, exponentially increasing Mars' visual vocabulary.

Mars' energy is evidenced by his impressive CV which includes exhibitions in Los Angeles, Aspen, Boston, Atlanta, New York, Tokyo, Munich, London, Melbourne, and Vancouver. He is clearly a collagist to watch.

Robert Mars shares the walls of the Mark Gallery with painter Jeff Schaller. It is a thoughtful pairing which prompts examination of both artists' styles since Mr. Schaller also mines the 20th Century for his subject matter.