

Lee Friedlander

Timothy Taylor

London

Lee Friedlander delved deep into American car culture, in all its strangeness and tawdriness, in this large and uneven show, titled "America By Car & The New Cars 1964." With 135 photographs from two distinct bodies of work made approximately four decades apart, the show documented both Friedlander's vision of the roadside as an expression of the American psyche and a certain evolution in his approach to this well-trod subject.

The earlier group, all taken in 1963, suggests a glossy advertising campaign gone horribly wrong. Instead of dramatic or sexy settings, Friedlander photographed cars in humdrum places—an empty drive-in, deserted sidewalks, a motel parking lot—or caught them as spectral window reflections. Though they're utterly cheerless, there's poetry in these works and a sense of loneliness that hints at Friedlander's contemporaries Diane Arbus and Robert Frank. The 33 works in this series were commissioned by *Harper's Bazaar* for a feature on new car models of 1964, but the magazine considered the images too unsettling and never published them. They have lost none of their haunting power.

The other works in this show date from the last decade or so, and almost all were taken from inside rental cars. The effect of seeing dozens of wide-open landscapes from a driver's seat was claus-

trophobic in the extreme, but Friedlander's flair for composition gives the best images a tension and precision that makes you want to stay for the ride. We saw trucks, odometers, cows, bumper stickers, and curving dashboards that echo the curves of the road. Or we glimpsed the face of the artist himself in a rearview mirror, in best Old Master style. With so many images, some are bound to be better than others. But taken together, they gave a powerful sense of motion and oddness in the ordinary, with an understated sense of humor. There's little of the anomie that breathes through the artist's earlier work. Friedlander seems to have made his peace with cars.



Wolfgang Laib, *Bei Magwe, Burma (Myanmar)*, 2000, gelatin silver print on baryta paper, 12" x 16". Buchmann Galerie.

—Roger Atwood



Lee Friedlander, *Detroit (Chrysler 300)*, 1963/printed later, gelatin silver print, 11" x 14". Timothy Taylor.