

Gassy Bull's Head

Looking for the world of the absurd, try Bridgehampton. This 309-year-old Long Island town was big in the Revolution. It is now big on gas stations. It has six, at or near its main intersection. The gas companies build them by pulling down or defacing the town's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century heritage. A Shell station has replaced the Revolutionary Wick's Tavern, Esso pumps stand on the front lawn of a landmark eighteenth-century house and now Sunoco plans to complete the damage by demolishing for still another gas station the fine Federal-tradition Bull's Head Tavern dating back to the 1840's. All the gas stations will sit and look at each other with narcissistic pleasure, and that will take care of history and architecture at the Bridgehampton intersection.

Of course, the Hamptons are a notably arty area these days, and there are those who view Pop Art proposals in recent exhibitions such as giant baked potatoes or pickles as more interesting monuments than landmark houses or Revolutionary eagles.

Even gas stations have their avant-garde devotees. But Bridgehampton reality now surpasses the most creatively grotesque imaginings. It is achieving an extra dimension in absurdity as it replaces these gracious mansions and shading trees with the totems of a superhighway society in redundant concentration, monuments to the more aggressive inanities of the competitive spirit.

A lot of money is being spent today on national advertising campaigns to bolster corporate images that seem to be getting peculiarly unhinged as people wake up to what is happening to the environment. Considerably more public relations mileage at considerably less expense could be gotten from a small sign in front of a restored Bull's Head Tavern saying: "This landmark has been preserved, rather than destroyed, by Sunoco." It would be a fine and profitable alternative to "fill 'er up."