

September 8, 2006



Adam McEwen  
*LeFrak City No.9*  
2006  
Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery



Adam McEwen  
*Self-portrait as Bomber Harris*  
2006  
Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery



Adam McEwen  
*Kassel*  
2006

## DEATH ON THE INSTALLMENT PLAN

by Ilka Scobie

**Adam McEwen, "8.00 for 8.30," Sept. 7-Oct. 14, 2006, at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, 526 West 26th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001**

"I've been obsessed by these buildings," Adam McEwen explained of his photographs of New York's historic LeFrak City housing complex, as his current show, "8.00 for 8.30," was being installed in Nicole Klagsbrun's Chelsea gallery. "I went up to the Queens Tower and took these shots. The green lights are like Kafka's 'The Castle'. After the war Sam LeFrak built these cities to house thousands and make the world 'a better place'." Shot in bright daylight and meticulously printed as C-prints, McEwen's photographs give the buildings a desolate majesty.

A dozen monochrome paintings dotted with wads of chewing gum are also on view in the exhibition, along with a black-and-white self portrait of the artist posing as Arthur "Bomber" Harris. The controversial RAF commander was responsible for the massive World War II air campaign that devastated 130 German cities and other targets "to kill thousands and make the world a 'better place.'"

With the help of a makeup artist and a military costume rented on 42nd Street, McEwen transformed himself into an eerie doppelganger of the mustachioed "Millennium Raider," architect of saturation bombing, who "regrettably did what had to be done." In 1992, a statue of Harris was unveiled in Central London's Trafalgar Square and within 24 hours was covered in red paint by an anonymous protester.

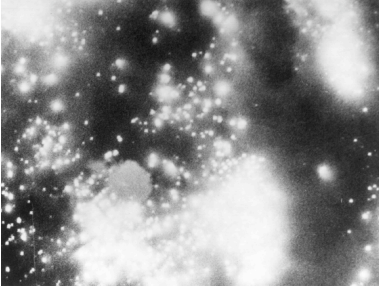
McEwen's paintings, named after German cities destroyed by England during WWII, present an aerial view of the devastated landscape. The chewed and glued gum blobs suggest the random patterns of falling munitions, and can resemble macabre stretched-out death's heads or hairy splatters. The pictures also have a staccato elegance that is reminiscent of Larry Poons' Op Art abstractions from the late 1960s. McEwen enlisted art students and friends of friends to help chew the gum, which was sugar-free.

Especially intriguing is one canvas made with a kind of paint that illuminates in darkness. Like a giant computer screen, the painting flattens out to an otherworldly nightscape. "It's a nonradioactive new paint that [fellow artist] Urs Fischer turned me onto. It took a long time to find, and it's expensive but good."

Why did this British artist turn to WWII imagery?

"Because for somebody of my generation -- the late '60s and early '70s

Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery



Adam McEwen  
Untitled (Dresden)  
2006  
Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery

-- World War II was what boys knew about. There were these little war comics as well as military pornography floating around the school. We were taught war history.

"Britain's identity as victors is very deep -- you grow up with it, as well as funny, ridiculous and racist images of Nazi Germany. Vietnam meant nothing to us. It's a practical thing. The effects of WWII are still here today." As is the relevance of exploring war and victory during these turbulent times.

McEwen creates an allusive historical connection in his presentation of relentless bombing in the context of the post-war building boom exemplified by Lefrak City. "The gap between these two things is striking," the artist said. "A morally stable ground is imbued with a strange sense of shifting uncertainty. I want there to be an element that's both troubling and dumb and slightly confusing. It's stupid and classical and not to be taken too seriously."

Known for his large blowups of fake obits of figures like Bill Clinton and Nicole Kidman, which were exhibited at Klagsbrun and included in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, McEwen is a former London obituary writer who writes some fiction." A New Yorker for the past six years, he considers himself "not an American artist, and not a British artist. I love American art. It frees me up to be here. It's easier to work here."



Adam McEwen  
Dresden  
2006  
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"Live A Little Better" is the motto of Lefrak City and the title of McEwen's brilliant accompanying chapbook. Portraits of Sam Lefrak and Bomber Harris are page-to-page with paintings of air conditioners (a McEwen fetish), Kafka quotes, vintage war comic covers and a cosmic black-and-white photo of the Dresden bombings. Included is a news clipping about the 12-year-old Detroit Art Institute visitor who stuck his gum on a Helen Frankenthaler painting, plus a soliloquy by writer Neville Wakefield on the culture of war. Be sure to get a copy.

In October, Adam McEwen's work is also on view in the P.S.1 group show "Defamation of Character."

**ILKA SCOBIE** is a poet.



Adam McEwen  
Photo by Ilka Scobie