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## Art in Review

### Adam McEwen

Nicole Klagsbrun  
526 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
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Most of the more interesting artists these days work in several mediums, tend to approach ideas at a slant and are difficult to talk about. The British-born Adam McEwen qualifies on all three counts.

At first his show seems to be made up chiefly of abstract paintings of random dots on open fields, sort of Larry Poons minus symmetry and optical buzz. But a photograph near the gallery entrance gives a source for the dot patterns in one of the works. It's an aerial view of the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden, Germany, in World War II. The attack devastated the city, but in the photo it looks softly festive, like a distant fireworks display or a stellar nebula.

The other paintings, it turns out, are also named for German cities — Hamburg, Darmstadt, Berlin — bombed in the war, with the strike patterns of each attack plotted as dots. The dots are not painted. They're all made from flattened wads of chewing gum, the kind you find spit out and stuck on city sidewalks, here stuck to canvas.

Along with the paintings there are photographs of another sort of city, the Queens housing complex called Lefrak City. Architecturally lackluster, designed as a self-contained embodiment of the middle-class "good life," it was built in the early 1960's at a time when old working-class immigrant neighborhoods were being leveled. Mr. McEwen took the nine Lefrak pictures himself, from the same spot and just seconds apart so that, while passing traffic patterns change, nothing else does. A modernist monument sustains an illusion of constancy.

The illusion of constancy is what this show seems to be about. Cities come and go, are built up and taken out. Ideologies are mutable; values adaptable and reversible. A bomb is beautiful. High art is low, very low, underfoot. In the end, Mr. McEwen sidesteps sweeping conclusions, moral or otherwise. Closure isn't where he's at. This is what makes his art hard to describe but rewarding to think about.

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