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ADAM MCEWEN

'Switch and Bait'

Nicole Klagsbrun
520 West 20th Street, Chelsea

BY KAREN ROSENBERG

Through April 18

Revisionist histories simmer beneath the surface of Adam McEwen's art. Too often, though, his bold ideas get lost in familiar post-conceptual forms. The latest in his series of chewing-gum paintings, abstractions made by pressing flattened chewing gum to canvas, typify the problem. Their titles invoke the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden, but they look like glib Damien Hirsts.

Somewhat better are the two new sculptures installed at a temporary location on West 20th Street, a few blocks from the Klagsbrun gallery. Both works are made of machined graphite (a type of carbon used to manufacture steel and missiles as well as pencils), and impose an appropriate gravitas.

In "Switch" the graphite stands in for the fluorescent bulbs in a series of light fixtures suspended from the ceiling. The industrial materials and theme of the sculpture are enhanced by the setting, a raw space with rusting pipes and cinderblock walls. It's an inverted minimalism, or a kind of alchemy: light becomes leaden.

The second sculpture, "Self-portrait as a credit card," is a copy of Mr. McEwen's American Express Platinum card (also made of machined graphite). At the front desk is a model for a Black card, to be produced on special order with the collector's name and account number.

You can picture the cards at a booth at Art Basel Miami Beach, or some other marketplace in which anti-market statements were, until recently, a perverse form of validation. Here and now, in the middle of an empty room, they're a crude reminder that the art world operates on credit.