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ACCIDENTAL MODERNISM

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Artworks + Projects

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As its title suggests, "Accidental Modernism" meditates on the use of chance in art — a basic strategy employed at least since the first collage. The show was assembled by Christopher Eamon, a curator and director for the New Art Trust, a nonprofit foundation for media art in San Francisco, and the works here are of recent or not-quite-recent vintage. Most of their accidents are painterly, which gives the show a lush and surprising visual coherence.

One of Rudolf Stingel's sgraffited aluminum-Celotex paintings, incised by the public, serves as a kind of pivot for several works, including Adam McEwen's gum painting; Devon Costello's bare canvas, lying on the floor and accumulating visitors' footprints; Keith Tyson's gritty tabletop (installed as a painting, legs and all) that the artist has lavishly marked up; and a silkscreen of a banged-up door, signed, burned and drawn on by a group of mostly hip young artists when they shared a residency in Mexico City. (It echoes the group effort of Francis Picabia's "Cacodylic Eye" painting from 1921.)

But randomness doesn't necessarily take more than one person. The Ab-Exy brushwork of Josh Smith's little canvas accrued while Mr. Smith used it as a palette. The brushwork finds an apparently accidental, nearly identical, echo in Ann Craven's latest paintings of moonlit clouds and, more loosely, in Agathe Snow's messy gold-flecked assemblage made from materials found on the street.

A precedent for the Snow piece is Dieter Roth's "Lauf der Welt (That's Life)," from 1969, with its flattened, much-decayed foil-wrapped chocolate figures. And decomposition figures prominently in Bill Morrison's "Light Is Calling," an eight-minute video loop of a heavily oxidized piece of a silent movie; the celluloid itself appears to be writhing in flames, intensifying the stagecoach drama in the movie.

More-controlled homages to chance are provided by Wayne Atkins, and by Robert Watts and Richard Pettibone. The last two offer works that reach back to the prime mover of chance, [Marcel Duchamp](#). **ROBERTA SMITH**