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2 San Francisco galleries with new tomorrows

By Kenneth Baker
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About two years ago Ampersand International Arts, a Dogpatch mainstay of the San Francisco not-for-very-much-profit exhibition scene, closed after the death of its founder and proprietor, Bruno Mauro.

Defying the recent contraction of the local gallery landscape, Ampersand has now reopened on the initiative of Mauro's eldest daughter, Theodora.

The inaugural exhibition of the gallery's second life honors Bruno Mauro's memory in an obvious sense but also in an oblique one.



"Pair" (2014) found auto tail light pieces on monofilament by Jeff Morris at Ampersand International Arts.

Displeased some time ago at seeing the name Ampersand popping up everywhere, Mauro contemplated changing the gallery's name to something wildly individual, such as "Shoebbox Orchestra." Hence the title of the reopening show, representing seven artists Mauro championed.

The objects on view produce the sort of slow-burn surprise, often tinged with humor, that regular visitors to Ampersand learned to anticipate.

Jeff Morris' "Pair" (2014) offers sculptural equivalents of the dust devil symbols that indicate fuming frustration when they appear above the heads of comic strip characters.

The two dangling components of the piece, one predominantly red, the other orange, consist of found bits of smashed auto taillights, ordered by size and strung on monofilament that hangs from the ceiling. Even repurposed, these materials exude a whiff of road rage.

"Pair" evokes the scavenging spirit of the so-called Mission School and the redemptive impulse felt in the work of found-materials master Tony Feher.

Morris' piece connects popular addiction to speed and a distant echo of Old Testament caution about reaping the whirlwind.

The ingenious simplicity of Morris' piece makes it keep good company with Andy Vogt's work, especially "Shadeshape 5" (2014). A leaning sculpture in salvaged wood, the work's completely lucid geometry seems to defy analysis, at least for a moment or two.

Lauren Davies' small sculptures made of plaster, paint, pulverized glass and flocking masquerade as mineral specimens, igniting the desire to heft them.

Davies' idea of faking bits of the earth smilingly satirizes the traditional notion of "nature" — that is, the visible world — as art's proper subject, linking it with current anxieties about human artifice as a menace to life on its home planet.

Those anxieties find a very different sort of expression in Arngunnur Ýr's landscape paintings of her native Iceland. We who have never visited Iceland do not know how literally to take the stylization of her portrayals, an uncertainty charged with realistic fear only in our lifetimes.