

Critics' Picks: Victor Man

by Javier Hontoria

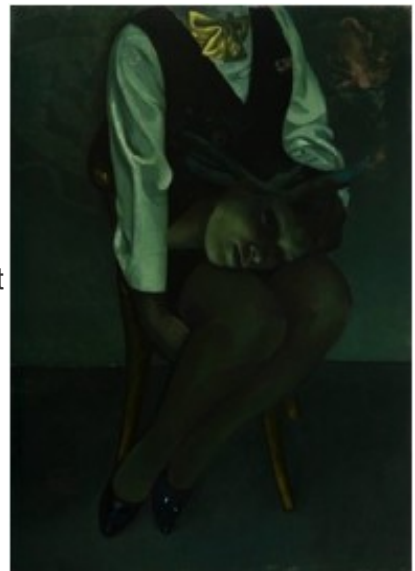
September 2013

Victor Man

GALERIE NEU | MEHRINGDAMM Mehringdamm 72
September 20, 2013–October 27, 2013

Romanian artist Victor Man's first solo exhibition with this gallery succeeds in restoring the bourgeois interior of the space's previous incarnation as a nineteenth-century opulent dwelling while simultaneously depicting a dark and somewhat melancholic world. Man's small canvases are juxtaposed with photographs by Pierre Molinier, a solitary figure of postwar Surrealism known for his proclivity to transvestism. Together, the works by these two artists create a tense narrative thread that haunts in its provocations.

Three of Man's paintings create a strange thematic line, effectively linking the three rooms of the gallery by steering the viewer's gaze. These canvases belong to *The Chandler*, 2013, which depicts images of a woman whose head has been deliberately cropped out of the upper part of the painting. In what is visible, she holds a head—presumably her own—in her lap, subtly changing its position in enigmatic variations in the other paintings installed throughout the room. Man extends this Surrealist tradition of the acephalous to equally sinister heights that unfold in similar works like *Untitled*, 2012, where the head of a young man is largely covered by the fist it leans on, a fist that also serves as a plinth for a black skull that partially prevents the youngster from seeing beyond it.



Victor Man, *The Chandler*, 2013
oil on board, 39 3/4 x 28 1/3".

The issue of visibility is well at stake throughout Man's ghostly iconographies, which are in a murky palette that has no room for stridency. His tendency to depict oneiric scenes is here echoed by the photographs belonging to Molinier, who employed troubling self-transformations in his work that vaguely point to Man's inveterate interest in identity. To complete the picture, the show's back room features André Masson's foremost print *Être et le néant* (Being and Nothingness), 1941—a solid take on a bizarre metamorphosis and disembodied corpus.