

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Meyers, Holly. "Piece together the clues" The Los Angeles Times, February 1, 2008, p.E32. (Victor Man)

AROUND THE GALLERIES



BY ASSOCIATION: *The proximity of images and items creates a resonance of meaning in such Victor Man works as "Untitled (Minded Subsequent Practices)."*

JOSHUA WHITE Blum & Poe

Piece together the clues

By **HOLLY MYERS**
Spectral to The Times

Most of the works in Romanian artist **Victor Man's** haunting U.S. debut are small, dark and virtually illegible from any significant distance — they require an intimate degree of engagement. Moving through the show is a little like stepping up to an assortment of keyholes and peering into dark rooms where something sordid may

or may not have occurred. It's not always clear what you're looking at, what it means or whether it's something you really want to be seeing, but each glimpse is engrossing.

The show's spare and somewhat delicate installation involves paintings, wall drawings, photographs (most printed on clear acetate and pinned directly to the wall), a large sheet of painted black glass and a handful of sculptural elements — everything cast in tones of black, white, gray or silver. The imagery, drawn from a variety of unnamed sources, is obscure but suggestive, often ominous: the silhouette of a woman in historical dress, holding what looks like a rat in a cage (this is one of the wall drawings); a pair of women's legs; smoke curling from the end of a cigarette.

Individual images acquire a narrative, almost cinematic connotation from their proximity to one another, like pieces of evidence gathered in the investigation of a crime. One grouping, for instance, combines a fashion shot of a mostly nude Jessica Alba; a photograph of three jocular young men lounging on a pile of logs; another of three shadows falling across a grave; a painting of something white — perhaps a garment — that looks to have been lost or abandoned; and a commercially manufactured black flag emblazoned with a skull and crossbones.

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The relationship between these disparate objects is loose and impressionistic — suggesting less a particular story than a set of narrative tendencies revolving around themes of the body, sexuality, violence, fear and desire.

Animals figure in several works, emphasizing the primal nature of these themes. The second of the two wall drawings, for instance, depicts a tangled mound of limbs and fur: wolves, it turns out, devouring the body of a creature who is half-woman, half-horse. The image is fierce and intensely erotic but rendered in very faint charcoal outlines, so that it seems to hover on the wall like an apparition, nearly invisible from across the room.

A smaller canvas on an adjacent wall — technically part of the same piece — depicts another pack of wolves gathered in the midground of a barren landscape. Composed in loose, thick strokes and a rich though narrow spectrum of grays, it is one of the most riveting works in the show: a brusque, physical embodiment of its subject, as dense and substantial as the drawing is graphic and ghostly.

Man has a marvelous way with paint: simultaneously focused and agile, quick and sensual, reminiscent of Luc Tuymans, only moodier.

The fact that these paintings make up only about half the show's dozen or so objects would seem a waste of talent — it could easily have included three times as many — but for the consummate cleverness with which Man interweaves the other media.

Take the complex play of contrasts. The paintings are voluptuous and corporeal; the photographs cool, mechanical and voyeuristic. At the same time, many of the paintings were clearly taken from photographs, and many of the photographs, having been printed on acetate, have a thicker, inkier quality than they would on regular paper. The impersonal tone of the commercial imagery — of Alba, for instance, or the many fashion models painted onto the black glass — contrasts with the spontaneity and anonymity of the snapshots. And the glass itself muddles all of these aspects, being

photographic and painterly, reflective and opaque, massive and subtle at the same time — a bold monumental object cloaked in receding imagery.

Between these mediums, Man plays with multiple ways of burying or obscuring the image: in pigment (the paintings), in reflection (the glass), in shadow (some of the photographs) or in whiteness (the wall paintings). One canvas is literally half-draped with black cloth — which is particularly clever given that the portion of the image that remains depicts a woman's knees similarly draped in a black skirt.

In no case does this interplay feel forced or gratuitous, nor does the subject matter seem gothic or sensationalistic. The tone, rather, is quiet, conscientious and meditative, which is ultimately what gives this relatively small and delicate show such presence in the gallery's cavernous space.

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