

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Friday, March 27, 2015

Victor Man

GLADSTONE GALLERY | WEST 24TH ST
515 West 24th Street
March 6–April 18

Light them as you will; Victor Man's nocturnal paintings insist on their place in the long, dark corridor of art history. Their subjects emerge from the gloaming, buoyed by a bright tunic or foulard—or a gloss of Picasso, Balthus, or Mantegna—that hovers, almost protectively, over his tenderly rendered models. Yet Man is no timeless painter. His citations follow a historical dialogue between painting and photography, with precedents from Manet to Richter, here extended discerningly into our century. In *Grafting/or Lermontov Dansant Come [sic] Saint Sebastien*, 2014, the “double exposure” of a boy's head as it lists to the side results in an extra, misregistered eye. The Photoshop mouse as Sebastian's arrows? Perhaps, but the point is largely irrelevant before the boy's frank, tricloptic gaze. The painted portrait wins out over the ghost of a photograph, even as it cribs photography's latest tendencies; painting has time, after all, on its side.



Victor Man, *Grafting/or Lermontov Dansant Come Saint Sebastien*, 2014, oil on wood, 8 1/2 x 6 3/8".

In the back gallery, Man presents paintings from his series “The Chandler,” 2013–14, variations on a modern-day Saint Denis in secretarial dress. Though the press release implicates Georges Bataille's anarchic and antirational *Acéphale*, the paintings themselves gesture elsewhere: to a chastened Judith, to Medusa, or to beheaded martyrs. Their palettes' obscurity makes mysterious what might be irritatingly plain in a photograph: A cropped image of a woman has become the image of a cropped woman. The gesture recalls chandlers, medieval servants charged with the upkeep of household candles, who lopped off long wicks to keep their flames burning. The objectification accomplished by cropping out a nude's face, not incidentally, has done similar work for viewers' burning desire. In the most recent painting, the sitter's hand recoils as the head looks up at its old roost, suddenly aware of its violent reorganization—a shock of self-recognition of the model no less than the motif.

— Joanna Fiduccia