the Year Victor Man
One thing was clear from the very outset: organizing a comprehensive presentation of Victor Man’s work in an exhibition and an accompanying publication would require a Herculean effort on the part of everyone involved, but by the same token it would offer a unique opportunity. Man’s oeuvre is one of the most idiosyncratic in recent contemporary art—his dark, generally small format, almost intimate paintings resist quick reception. You have to walk up close to them and linger there for a long time in order to truly grasp them. Man’s painting technique is so multilayered, in the true sense of the word, that it can scarcely be reproduced. His paintings keep their secrets. Together with the artist, we took on the challenge of realizing an exhibition as well as creating a catalog that makes Man’s work accessible, and at the same time does justice to its complexity. After more than a year of intense cooperation, this book has now been completed. The exhibition, entitled *Zephir*, will be on view at the Deutsche Bank KunstHalle and will subsequently travel to other international institutions.

In the end, our high expectations for the project were exceeded. In addition to receiving nearly all of the loans we requested, we were able to present new, never before seen paintings, as well as a glass sculpture created specifically for the show. Victor Man, who was born in Cluj, Romania in 1974, creates his paintings in a very traditional manner, layer for layer, glaze upon glaze. They can scarcely be penetrated by the eye, or the intellect. In them, collective and biographical memories are interwoven with myths and references to philosophy and art history. In his glass work, Man adeptly transfers the complexity of his painting into three dimensions. As an artistic material, glass is just as traditional as oil paint. Physically, it lets light shine through it, is transparent per se. Man’s glass image radiates into the space, is window and projection at once. The interplay of light, color, and space gives rise to an artwork that is both palpable and intangible.

None of these art experiences would be possible without the extraordinary commitment of Victor Man, so first and foremost I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the artist. He was supported by his assistant Nora Kronemeyer. From the very beginning phase of preparations for this exhibition, we received valuable assistance from galleries Blum & Poe in Los Angeles, Gladstone in New York/Brussels, Neu in Berlin, Plan B in Cluj/Berlin, and Zero in Milan. We’re very proud that we have the renowned curators Okwui Enwezor, Hou Hanru, Udo Kittelmann, and Victoria Noorthoorn, who make up the bank’s Global Art Advisory Council, to nominate the “Artist of the Year.”

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We’re very proud that we have the renowned curators Okwui Enwezor, Hou Hanru, Udo Kittelmann, and Victoria Noorthoorn, who make up the bank’s Global Art Advisory Council, to nominate the “Artist of the Year.” Special thanks go to Britta Färber for overseeing communications and also for the enlightening exchange of ideas. I would also like to thank her and Alina Friedrichs, in whose hands the overall coordination of the program and the exhibition lay, for supervising this catalog. They were assisted by Linus Lütcke. Many thanks are also due to Berlin-based colleagues Svenja Griffin von Reichenbach and Sara Bernhaußen, whose many years of experience enabled them to overcome numerous challenges in the realization of the exhibition. They were energetically assisted by Kathrin Conrad, Daniela Mowes, and Steffen Zarutski. Thanks to Katrin Jahneke and Jörg Klamt for supervising the KunstHalle’s ArtStore and the edition. The technical preparation lay in the competent hands of Ulwe Rommel and his team. The artist’s glass work was produced in the world-renowned Derix Glasstudios under the supervision of Wilhelm Derix and Katharina Plattner. The “stucco marmorino” was executed by Alan God. I am also grateful to Roland Bittner, who insured the exhibit against all risks. Friederike Beseler was responsible for the conservatorial care of the show.

Katrin Riedel, the designer of the catalogue, created a fascinating book in collaboration with the artist. Along with editor Angelika Thill, she supervised the production, for which Silvia Pesci and Andrea Albertini from Grafiche Damiani lent their support. The texts by Bogdan Ghiu and Alessandro Rabottini engage knowledgeably with Victor Man’s oeuvre, and we thank the authors for their contributions. The translations were expertly done by Burke Barrett, Alistair Ian Blyth, and Anne Ruzzante.

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Fabienné Alexopoulos and Kerstin Riedel designed the accompanying communications media with texts by Oliver Koerner von Gustorf, Maria Morais, and Achim Drucks. Felix von Boehm and Constantin Lieb from bboxxfilme were in charge of the documentary film about the project.

The encounter with Victor Man’s artistic universe was extremely inspiring for all of us. Being able to now share our experience with the readers of this publication and exhibition visitors gives us great joy.

Friedhelm Hütte
Global Head of Art, Deutsche Bank AG
Untitled
2007
Oil on canvas mounted on wood
Untitled
from II Signed Where All-There Was
2000
Oil on canvas
In a recent work, or opus, by Victor Man from 2013, entitled *The Chandler*—
the words *work* and *opus* are, as we shall see, not at all anodyne in this specific instance—an apparently female human apparition, wracked, seemingly crushed by the surface of the painting, as if beneath the glass pane of a display case, clenches her knees tightly, almost violently together, turning them to one side, as if under constraint, as if forced to modesty. But as is only natural, the violence reaches its culmination higher up, at her head, which is severed by the painting’s frame, by the operating field of the work; it is no longer to be seen in its proper place, but is recouped, reintegrated within the field of vision by the fact that the human apparition, thusly mangled and decomposed, holds it in her arms, in her lap, on her knees: the person holds her head on her knees. Here, however, on the right temple, the head embarks upon a process, a distortion, a metamorphosis, it goes haywire, it is on the verge of turning into something else, of being transformed into the head of some other, a-human creature, which it seemingly emanates, and from which it emerges, like a thought: the severed head with wide-open, dreaming eyes seems to be growing large ears or horns, it is not very clear what exactly. It is on the verge of becoming something else, of falling prey to becoming animal, as Deleuze would put it. The space of the interval, the process, the metamorphosis, is the undepictability itself, that is, the space of pure pictoriality, an adventure and a self-contained work between forms, entities, identities, kingdoms. 

Purely pictorial, as if in an interpretative delirium of Aby Warburg’s history of art, the severed head seems to depart, purely pictorially, in Boticellian ringlets, in a cloud or in a golden mist. A thought-painting, the product of a head severed by the painter. Perhaps this is why the head has been guillotined by the upper part of the frame: so that it might be released, a release that is entrusted, however, to the inde terminacy of pure pictoriality. Consequently, there is a becoming, a release and an adventure, an interval between forms and kingdoms, whose enactment is entrusted to painting, as a mission that only it was and will be able to carry out; to be more precise, it is entrusted with the space of painting, to pictoriality as opening, in which the gaze is subjected to a Nordic-vegetal, chthonic-aquatic coloration, like moss, sea- weed, green, regenerative humus.

What happens to the head in the picture?

Painting.

In *Untitled (Wolf)*, from 2007, an animal pelt is affixed, cladded, and clamped with the same violence of attachment, the same firmness of juxtaposition, of composition, by means of a mechanism like an instrument of torture, in a kind of sacrificial worship; its head is pressed against the mask of a deity with a female human face, with large empty eyes, like a vacant stencil that anybody might come and inhabit. Once again, the head is guillotined, the animal seems to be sacrificed on the altar of man’s eternal self-deification. Anthropomorphic deification needs to suppress its animality in order to absorb its strength. But in order to do so, the animal is held by force, affixed from without, rather than from within, to the voided human, which has been turned into a symbol. Man and beast, the Great Wolf, the Man-Wolf, forcibly held together, a hybridization and metamorphosis in actu, an ontological collage-assembly.

The artist engages in painting as in an operation; he operates pictorially, he operates on the painting.
« Oui, j’ai les yeux fermés à votre lumière. Je suis une bête, un nègre. Mais je puis être sauvé. Vous êtes de faux nègres, vous mensonges, féroces, avares. Marchand, tu es nègre; magistrat, tu es nègre; général, tu es nègre; empereur, vieille demangeaison, tu es nègre: tu as bu d’une liqueur non taxée, de la fabrique de Satan. – Ce peuple est inspiré par la fièvre et le cancer. Infirmes et vieillards sont telle-ment respectables qu’ils demandent à être bouillis. – Le plus malin est de quitter ce continent, où la folie rôde pour pourvoir d’otages ces misérables. J’entre au vrai royaume des enfants de Cham. »

(Arthur Rimbaud, Une Saison en enfer).

“Yes, my eyes are closed to your light. I am an animal, a nigger. But I can be saved. You are fake niggers, maniacs, savages, misers, all of you. Businessman, you’re a nigger; judge, you’re a nigger; general, you’re a nigger: you’ve drunk a liquor no one taxes, from Satan’s still. – This nation is inspired by fever and cancer. Invalids and old men are so respectable that they ask to be boiled. — The best thing is to quit that continent when madness prowls, out to supply hostages for these wretches. I will enter the true kingdom of the sons of Ham.”


Noir and Nègre, Black and Nigger: Blackness and the animal. Fake, artificial, technical animals and genuine animals, sacrificed on the altar of the former. Blackness is the Beast, in respect to Salvation. Nigredo, the black work and black operation. Rimbaud’s “liquor no one taxes,” the “black” or at best “grey” market, corruption and covert trafficking, the illicit, cursed transfusion, whereby we are secretly but eternally fed and which does nothing other than to reveal and repeat art, on the black, in the darkness, under the impunity and alibi of the aesthetic. Painting ventures to show, to divulge, merely by evoking it, this illegal traffic in blood precisely in order to engage in it, to operate on it, to perpetrate it: art itself on the black.

In another work, another operation, also Untitled, from 2006, the picture, the painted, operated upon image of an (apparent) woman dressed diabolically in latex or white cling-film, with empty-black eyes (emanating an inner darkness, rather than empty-white eyes, like those concealed.
in the totemic mask of the Wolf in the aforementioned Untitled, a stencil-woman (a negative highlighting the negative) already operated upon in the painted image, sits on an animal pelt, in the same position as in The Chandler, with knees violently constrained, pressed together and turned aside. The same, already-operated upon painted image, on an animal pelt, also occurs two years later, in Ubiquitous You, from 2008. Ubiquitous indeed!

In another painting entitled Untitled (what other titles could be given, what else could be openly declared, said here?), from 2012, itself existing in two versions, the same placement on, the same affixation, cladding, the same forced superposition, a kind of collage along the vertical, a deep, vertiginous, abyssal grafting, image upon image: a hand, a miniaturized toy skull, like an amulet or key fob.

In Untitled (André Malraux, La Statuaire, Main vouée à Jupiter Héliopolitain IIe – Ier siècle ap. JC Musée du Louvre)—what a subtitle the non-title conceals!—the same placement on (through juxtaposition), an affixation en abyme of the minusculized totem to a human hand, like the imprinting of a line of life, of fate, of luck on a palm.

We see, we witness, we are shown, seemingly, along the depth of the painting, in exfoliated, de-sedimented strata, from an archaeological perspective, the apparition of the totem and the symbol. The perspective goes from being (apparently) physical to being cognitive-cultural, epistemico-historical, gnoseological, spiritual (the interior of the painting’s surface is human trans-psychological interiorty), a meta-representation of macro-schemata of thought and collective-unconscious creation.
Pagan Space
2010
Oil on canvas
mounted on wood

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Atunci a doua maimuță coboră repede, se lăsă în jos, sub prima, care o prinse de