

Victor Man
The Absence That We Are

September 18–October 31, 2025
24 Grafton Street, London



*The future: time's excuse
to frighten us; too vast
a project, too large a morsel
for the heart's mouth.*

*Future, who won't wait for you?
Everyone is going there.
It suffices you to deepen
the absence that we are.¹*
—Rainer Maria Rilke, 'The Future' (translated by A. Poulin, Jr.)

David Zwirner is pleased to announce an exhibition of work by Victor Man at the gallery's London location. This will be the artist's first show with David Zwirner since the announcement of his representation in 2024.

Man's paintings resist categorisation, revealing varied, nonlinear references to literature, art, and poetry that transform essential elements of the human experience into visionary manifestations of colour and form. *The Absence That We Are* is titled after the final line of Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875–1926) poem

'The Future', one of a group of verses that the Austrian writer composed in French during the last four years of his life. Centred on the cycle of birth and death, the paintings on view in London depict enigmatic subjects imbued with a kind of *sotto voce* tonality. Taking a cue from the elegiac examination of selfhood and time put forward by Rilke's poetry, these cryptic figures offer complex, layered readings of the fundamental paths of existence. As curator Alessandro Rabottini writes, Man's work resides 'in a regime of mutual simultaneity.... What coexists in Victor Man's practice is not only the different dimensions of time and forms of feeling but also, and above all, the dimensions of human existence ... eroticism alongside spirituality, affection alongside its renunciation, and resemblance alongside mystery and estrangement.'²

On view are self-portraits that wield the artist's own likeness as an anchoring force and interrogative witness against the chaos of the world. Deeply intimate yet also divorced from all self-infatuation, these paintings serve as autoreflective testimonies of the individual's journey through time. Also featured are various portraits of lone female figures in scenes of absorption and estrangement, including *Peripatetic Maiden with Bat* (2024), which depicts a woman with a black-winged bat in her hand and a vibrant red ribbon bound in her long hair, and *Untitled (From Wounds and Starry Dreams)* (2022), in which a figure in a green dress gazes into the distance with masklike, half-lidded eyes.

Symbols and motifs resurface across Man's oeuvre, collapsing established meanings and placing his works outside traditional notions of time. In one self-portrait, the artist's visage appears as if through a mirror inside a spectral rendition of a human skull; the same skeletal image reappears in *Maternity (Curve Delle Anime)* (2025), a portrait of a woman who nurses an infant at her breast. Two paintings on view from 2024, both titled *Self Portrait with Ancestors*, portray the artist holding the hand of a skeleton – in one work, the ghostly, tender face of a child also appears before him.

In these paintings, Man positions mortality as an inherent presence within and successor to life – it is a process that connects the human realm to its natural and animalistic counterparts. His work is imbued with a contemporary immediacy and primeval beauty reminiscent of the Romanian tradition of funerary folk songs, which are similarly marked by a nuanced intermingling of mourning and wonder, myth and earthly life.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue published by David Zwirner Books.

Victor Man lives in Europe.

Notes

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, 'The Future', *The Complete French Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. A. Poulin, Jr. (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1979), p. 285.
2. Alessandro Rabottini, quoted in the press release for *Victor Man: Eyelids, Towards Evening*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, 2022–2023.

For all press inquiries, contact:

Sara Chan
sara@davidzwirner.com

Ilaria Bevan
ilaria@davidzwirner.com

Image caption:

Victor Man, *Umbra Vitae*, 2025
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