

Eleven Rivington 11 Rivington St New York NY 10002 USA
212-982-1930 gallery@elevenrivington.com

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ART IN REVIEW
VOLKER HUELLER

By Roberta Smith

*Eleven Rivington
11 Rivington Street, near Chrystie Street
Lower East Side
Salon 94
12 East 94th Street
Manhattan
through January 8th*

German artists do nostalgia better than anyone. Perhaps World War II still inspires a sense of remorse and loss. Maybe their connection to history is more confident. Or maybe they simply understand that sincerity and irony are not mutually exclusive. You can be nostalgic without meaning it completely.

The latest evidence is the double-gallery debut of the young Berliner Volker Hueller: a study in style-mongering that consists of large, abstract paintings and smaller, stylized portraits at Salon 94, and semi-abstract etchings at Eleven Rivington. Both shows are punctuated with painted porcelain vases and busts.

Mr. Hueller has a delicate hand with etching and an amiable roughness with painting. But he seldom manages to be ironic and sincere at once. The ceramic objects function as props that whisper, "I don't really mean this."

In contrast, the prints at Eleven Rivington might almost be by some forgotten artist of the interwar period. Their lithe, sketchy figures suggest Christian Schad's neurasthenic bohemians rendered in George Grosz's

scratchy line. The Cubist fragments that wreath and veil these figurative motifs evoke Paul Klee.

At Salon 94, Mr. Hueller reaches the postwar period and comes closer to making the twain meet by revisiting the Modernist monochrome. Large canvases are covered completely by patchworks that include sizable scraps of more canvas and other textiles, fake fur, reptile skin and even straw, and then painted shades of metallic silver or occasionally gray. The textured surfaces are highly reactive, changing as the light shifts, or as you move about. These works pile on the references — Yves Klein, Manzoni, Marca-Relli, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and even Julian Schnabel — but carry the weight. If the etchings are mostly deft guilty pleasures, retrograde but beautiful, the paintings could be contenders.