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ARTFORUM

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CRITIC'S PICK: NEW YORK: VOLKER HUELLER

By Ian Bourland



**Volker Hueller, *Sie sind unter uns*, 2009
mixed media on canvas, 20' 6" x 16' 6".**

ELEVEN RIVINGTON
11 Rivington Street
November 18–January 8

This exhibition is also on view at Salon 94, 12 East Ninety-fourth Street, until January 8.

The Berlin-based artist Volker Hueller usually displays his massive collage-based paintings and smaller etchings side by side. But for this pair of shows, curator Anna-Catharina Gebbers has divided examples of each between galleries one hundred blocks apart. This move heightens not only the stylistic gulf between the paintings and the etchings but also the resonance of those works in their respective environments.

What unifies Hueller's practice is a dogged commitment to an antiquated sense of craft. The smaller pieces on display at Eleven Rivington are hung salon-style in

a Deco-era parlor, improvised with Hueller's placement of period furniture. The images are supernatural harlequin self-portraits and snapshots from Huller's muted, vegetal world. While easy associations—from Art Nouveau to early Surrealism and children's books—abound, Hueller's process, of acid etching and hand application of faded watercolor and shellac, imparts the pictures with a sense of timelessness and gravity, as if they came from a fully formed Edwardian nightmare.

Salon 94's comparatively airy volumes amplify the absorbing optical effects of Hueller's monochrome silver paintings, which radiate in the brightly lit room. While Hueller's paintings update the mystic color fields of yore, at root the works are collages of raw material, from snakeskin and velvet to earthy debris. Over time, this careful material application reveals overlaid pictorial effects that are in turn disrupted by the unsettling tactility bursting from beneath the jigsaw surfaces. Hueller's pictures manage to unify these disparate environments; as a result, the journey up the East Side takes on a sense of the uncanny.