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## VICTOR BRAUNER (1903 – 1966)

Thursday, October 16, 2003 – Saturday, January 17, 2004

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Reception: Wednesday, October 15, 2003

To celebrate the centenary of the artist's birth, **Ubu Gallery** announces an exhibition of more than 40 works, mostly paintings, by the Romanian/French avant-gardist, **Victor Brauner**. An early adherent of the Surrealist movement, Brauner actively explored the mystical and the occult. Both in content and style, his art represents a remarkably fertile fusion of wide-ranging world mythologies and religious beliefs, from Egyptian to Aztec, Native American to Oceanic, Jewish to Hindu, among others.

The works of Brauner and their position in the history of art comprise a story replete with paradox. He was a respected and integral member of both the 1920s Romanian avant-garde movement and, beginning in the 1930s, the Paris Surrealist circle. Yet his centrality to these two movements – particularly to Surrealism where his importance was asserted by its founder, André Breton, and others such as Yves Tanguy, Man Ray and Matta – is often minimized or neglected, especially outside of France. An erudite man of high intellect, Brauner's works often have a naïve, folk quality. While primarily focusing on figuration – whether human, animal or mythological beings – and appearing thematically simple or straightforward as if invoking images from a child's storybook, they are in fact underpinned by a lexicon of symbolism and archetypes that weaves an intricate tapestry of meaning. While occasionally poised to veer into the realm of kitsch, they are profound explorations of complex themes, particularly oppositional forces represented by a physical duality or "doppelgänger." These contradictions are complicated by Brauner's extremely eclectic progression of styles. An undeterred experimenter, his diverse output speaks in a distinctive and coherent voice. He was an ardent improviser, often employing inventive application, incising and coloring of wax, paraffin, encaustic and walnut stain, and his working methods were spontaneous and unencumbered.

Born in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania where folklore was permeated with bizarre legends of vampires and werewolves, Brauner's father was an assimilated Jew, a practicing spiritualist and a Kabbalist who experimented with séances. The influence of Brauner's childhood on the themes he explored and the manner in which he did so is apparent, as is the influence of the burgeoning 20th Century development of psychoanalysis. Jungian theories of how archetypes appear from the collective unconscious are especially relevant to Brauner's idiosyncratic visual language, as are the psychoanalytic interpretations of the preoccupation with eroticism on the development of the individual. In August 1938, Brauner lost his left eye while trying to break up a fight between Oscar Dominguez and Esteban Francès in Dominguez's studio. The "Cyclopean" theme, which had foreshadowed this event in his prior work, became an obsessive motif in his subsequent work.

Brauner has been the subject of over 80 solo exhibitions, including his first one-person exhibition in Paris at Galerie Pierre, 1934 (catalogue preface by Breton); his first one-person exhibition in America at Julien Levy Gallery, New York, 1947 (suggested by Breton and facilitated by Marcel Duchamp); two exhibitions at Hugo Gallery (owned by Alexander Iolas), New York, 1949 (catalogue preface by poet and critic Parker Tyler) and 1951; many subsequent exhibitions at Iolas's galleries in New York, Paris and Geneva; Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago, 1955; Richard L. Feigen & Co., Chicago, 1959; Galleria Schwarz, Milan, 1962 and 1966; The Art Institute, Chicago, 1968; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1972; and The Menil Collection, Houston, 2001. He represented France at the XXXIII Venice Biennale in 1966.

This exhibition, which may be the first solo exhibition in New York in over 30 years, is presented in collaboration with Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts.