

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

AARON JOHNSON

JOSHUA LINER GALLERY

540 West 28th Street, Ground floor

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Aaron Johnson's grotesquely distorted figures revel in working-class American pastimes—indeed, comparing them to Trump's "deplorables" is inevitable. Johnson's paintings are created with several different techniques: One uses a sheet of stretched plastic where images are painted backward with layers of acrylic polymer then peeled off and adhered to polyester knit mesh; another utilizes donated socks and acrylic paint to build up a three-dimensional surface. In *Gone Fishin'*, 2017, a man and woman ride a ramshackle canoe, dining on hamburgers, pizza, and red wine as hungry birds overhead grab both their food and the fish swimming below. The textural detail achieved with the painted and molded socks creates horrific-looking human skin and a swirling, tumultuous blue-green sea, turning this normally tranquil hobby into an all-out war for junk-food nourishment. One of the reverse paintings, *Gone Truckin'*, 2017, features a heterosexual couple embraced in a kiss as they are violently thrown through the windshield of their pickup truck, which has hit a deer, while two individuals in the cargo bed play music on a violin and guitar, seemingly oblivious to the bloodshed. The works share a sense of bawdy chaos, their characters trapped in a myopic, me-first philosophy.

In a related body of works on paper, Johnson blots paint, à la Max Ernst, to create various forms and textures. A gruesome scene develops in *Law and Order*, 2016, where a cast of miscreants around a dinner table seems ready to cannibalize a splayed nude body. No one seems to notice a policeman shooting a fowl-headed figure in the heart, as they are too busy with their immoral appetites.



Aaron Johnson, *Gone Truckin'*, 2017, acrylic on polyester knit mesh, 56 x 60"

— Chris Bors