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ART IN REVIEW; Aaron Johnson

By ROBERTA SMITH

AARON JOHNSON

Star-Crossed

Stefan Stux Gallery

530 West 25th Street, Chelsea

Through Oct. 18

Aaron Johnson seems to have found a new use for his love of searingly grotesque figures and carefully controlled painterly excess: lampooning what he depicts as our latest long national nightmare. The characters of his new paintings are often quite specific, although some of the details have been changed to expose the guilty. They include George W. Bush with enormous pink horns, about to devour a plate of steaming human heads using a Statue of Liberty and a Jesus as utensils; a jesterlike Uncle Sam atop a camel; and Lady Liberty again, this time big, as a Cyclops being assaulted.

In paintings like "Juggler," "Thumbs Up America," "Hell-Beast Rushmore" and "We Get Results (Las Resultas e Goya)," the personalities are less specific, but the bite doesn't soften. In some works, coiling, fire-breathing beasts indicate close attention to the often violent demons of Himalayan art; in others Peter Saul seems to serve as inspiration. These works are as vehement visually and decoratively as they are politically. Colors are livid; techniques range from glittery Lyrical Abstraction splashes to micro-checking and dotting.

Mr. Johnson gives a hint of the intricacies of his technique in the show's lengthy subtitle: "New Reversed-Painted Acrylic Polymer Peel Paintings on Polyester American Flags." This is a mouthful, but if you look carefully it is all there in works that are visceral, beautiful and flamboyantly timely, which is saying a lot.

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