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Art in Review; Aaron Johnson

By ROBERTA SMITH

Fiend Club Lounge

Priska C. Juschka Fine Art 547 West 27th Street, Chelsea

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Just in time for the Halloween season, the semi-abstract intestinal forms of Aaron Johnson's paintings have tightened into full-fledged rainbow-colored ghouls. They now have skin or at least outlines, faces and often wardrobes as well as profusions of dots, repeating patterns and bits of magazine images. These obsessive details keep their gaudy protoplasm in a state of convulsive turmoil. In "Flower Swallower," for example, two snarling, transparent Kabuki monsters have at each other, their entrails fully visible. Streaming with paint and led by digits that appear to have lives of their own, the hurrying harlequin called "Mr. Fingers" is about to disintegrate all by himself, unopposed.

Mr. Johnson's manic dotting, small-dice collages and shambling mutant figures have numerous precedents; Chris Ofili, Fred Tomaselli, Erik Parker, Bryan Crockett, Stephen Charles and Peter Saul come to mind, along with R. Crumb and Robert Williams. But his work bears up well under the weight of such obligations. A boon is a fittingly crazed technique that involves painting the images on clear plastic and then collaging them together on translucent plastic. One result is an unusually efficient fusion of paint, process and image that, whether you like it or not, teems with decorative malevolence. ROBERTA SMITH
