

PRESS RELEASE
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AARON JOHNSON *Pisockophilia*



Pisocko



The Piano

Opening Reception

Wednesday, February 18th 5:30 – 8 PM

February 18 – March 21, 2015

Artist Talk and Reception during Armory Week

Tuesday, March 3rd 3 – 5 PM

STUX + HALLER is pleased to announce *Pisockophilia*, new paintings by New York artist **Aaron Johnson**. The exhibition features his two distinctive and wildly innovative approaches to painting. The newest developments in Johnson's oeuvre are his "sock paintings" which display a rugged counterpoint to the "reverse painted acrylic polymer peel paintings" for which Johnson has been well known. These two processes in their divergent physicality have brewed in symbiosis from opposite sides of the picture plane, working in tandem to illuminate Aaron Johnson's phantasmagorical vision.

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These are lush, debauchorous paintings, full of appetites and desires. They are generous in return, giving a rich viewing experience. Bleeding hearts throb in lusty couples sharing coffee and toast, or pizza and wine, as lovers endure dismemberments of their flesh-rotting bodies. In this theater of dark comedy, the scepter of death always lurks close.

A central figure in this exhibition is *Pisocko*, a monster Picasso, along with his demoiselle-esque muse, both made of old socks. They exist in seething carnal tension. *Pisocko* lampoons Picasso's machismo in a composition that refuses to be contained by its own rectangle. Other works feature reveling monsters, some playing musical instruments, some gathering for a cannibalistic feast. Eros vs. Thanatos, menace vs. lust, horror vs. comedy; all of this tension is echoed in this show through the relationship between the two disparate and even at-odds approaches to painting.

The dichotomy is played out in counterpoints: meticulously reverse-painted Indian-miniaturesque details vs. expressive swashbuckling brushstrokes in a clunky impasto of flung socks. The painter clearly takes equal delight in these opposing objecthoods, as much in the slick optical minutia of the reverse paintings as in the shallow relief sock surfaces and sculpted socky fangs. Johnson employs the sock as a smart painterly device. He has taken the joke of the sock as readymade impasto and has pushed it to the point of absurd beauty.

In *Pisockophilia*, orifices, torn holes, and wooly textures give a bodily language to the surfaces. Holey sock, crusty sock, sock once soaked in sweat, becomes an elegaic lyrical brush stroke. All of this seems to revel in its deliberate counterpoint to the reverse paintings, where the artist is behind the picture plane, always on the other side of the image from the viewer, building up layer upon layer in reverse and into the depth of the surface.

Uniting these two distinct physicalities is Johnson's inimitable style, a painterly madness flowing forward from his influences of Goya, Peter Saul, Picasso, Ensor, Llyn Foulkes, and the Hairy Who. Johnson's vision is singular, and his paintings are a delight of garish yet harmonious color and a lyrical flow of flesh that project a sinister beauty.

Aaron Johnson holds an MFA from Hunter College, 2005, and has lived and worked in Brooklyn since 1998. His work is in permanent collections at such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art, the Fundacion Mehr, and the Weisman Foundation. His work has been included in museum exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, NY; The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, The Knoxville Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Katzen Center at American University. He is the recipient of many awards, including The MacDowell Colony Fellowship, The Corporation of Yaddo residency, The Marie Walsh Sharpe Space Program, and the VCCA Fellowship. Johnson's work has been reviewed in numerous publications, including The New York Times, The Huffington Post, The Village Voice, Art News, and ArtForum.