

Last Chance: Jason Fox at Canada

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

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Jason Fox's work "Ambassador to England or France," 2016. Credit Jason Fox and Canada

A great American president, a mythic Rastafarian musician, a white dog named Duncan and a demonic being with the date of the day after the recent presidential election carved into its chest in scarlet — these are among the personages that combine and recombine throughout Jason Fox's cycle of 23 raw portrait paintings at Canada. This excellent show is called "Square Cave," which suggests that while we now live in rooms with corners, the Stone Age is not so far behind us, and could come again.

As we move around the gallery, clockwise, Barack Obama and Bob Marley (complete with a giant spliff) merge and separate and the dog appears. A head brings to mind Picasso's "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," next Velázquez is seen in "Las Meninas," at his easel. His canvas has nearly trompe l'oeil textures and tacks, in

contrast to the quiet mayhem of Mr. Fox's paint handling in general. His shingled planes form a compressed Cubism with occasional eruptions of Expressionism. His preference for letting one strong color dominate — red, green, brown or black — ropes in modernism's monochromes.

George Harrison makes appearances, especially in the outstanding "Ambassador to England or France" — all brown with touches of rabid red and a canine visage. The skull-like head and pink shoulders of a figure lying on a slab is titled "Soft Entry," and evokes both President John F. Kennedy in Dallas and the Dead Presidents, a band. The themes Mr. Fox is continually worrying about include recent American history and its

violence; drugs and rock 'n' roll; painting's past, and his own artistic ambition; and the corrupting power of power.

In one painting Mr. Obama is a wise man; in the next he's a suave red devil. We are reminded that 11/9 is 9/11 backward: A circle has closed but nothing has ceased. Yet these shifting presences and thoughts may all be one long drug-induced dream: In the final canvas, Duncan, the artist's dog, is curled up asleep in his bed.

Through April 30. Canada, 333 Broome Street, Manhattan; 212-925-4631,
canadanewyork.com.