

## TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

Spotlight, *Trenton Doyle Hancock (Edition #42)*, The Texas artist talks Mounds, narrative, and being the son of a preacher man, New American Paintings, West, 90, The Open Studios Press

“...the idea of these things that you can’t see that can attack you— these were spoken of in a real, tangible way when I was growing up.”

By its very nature, painting doesn’t lend itself very easily to recitation. It’s a difficult task for an artist to reveal a narrative in their work, and while many painters might describe its use in their artist statements, less often is it seen well executed on a canvas. For more than a decade, Texas native Trenton Doyle Hancock has captivated galleries, museums, and viewers the world over with his work—a perpetually evolving (and often dark) mythology of painted characters, each cast in an environment where formal decisions seek to further the story.

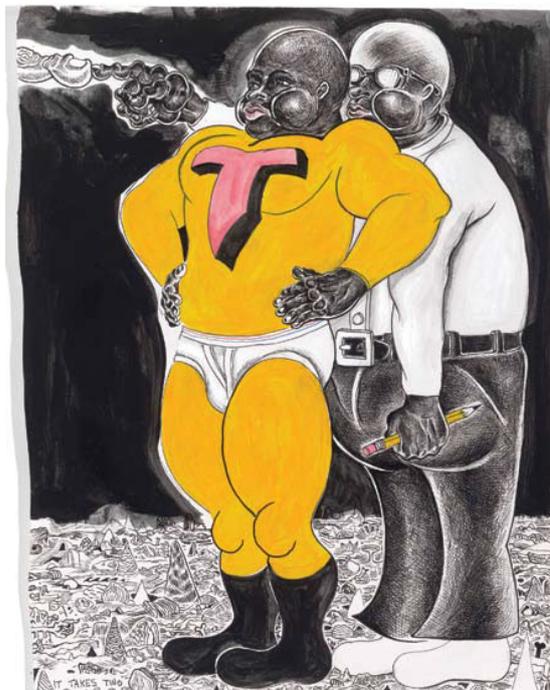
Hancock was featured in the 2000 Whitney Biennial right out of grad school, after earning his MFA from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia the same year, a period he admits, in a phone interview, when he wasn’t entirely confident in his practice. Two years later, after a two-term residency in the prestigious Core Program at Glassell School of Art in Houston, he discovered the narrative growing in his work, and was featured in the subsequent Whitney Biennial in 2002—an impressive feat by any estimation.

While in the Core Program, Hancock admits he had more ideas than his hands were capable of producing. Those eruptions of creative energy are evident in each room his work is featured—on paper, on canvas, in wall drawings—and with each medium, a different opportunity to reveal something unfamiliar, maybe even macabre, in a way that seems unflinchingly imaginative. His exhibition spaces are often activated by the artist in some way, including elaborate drawings (often featuring colorful, cascading drops) down gallery walls where his paintings are hung—effectively inviting viewers to walk directly into the story. The protagonists of Hancock’s narrative are the Mounds, which are depicted just as they sound—heaping, semi-circular, land-based blobs—perpetually ganged up on by the Vegans, a cast of creepy, boney figures (not to be confused with people on an animal-free diet). A painting can feature anywhere from one to one hundred of them at any time, and the artist often builds representational figures from a heaping mob. “The vegans represent kind of the misguided nature of humanity,” Hancock tells me.

“Like when you believe in something so much that you’re kind of skewed away from a path of righteousness, if you



*You Are What You Meet*, 2010, acrylic and mixed media on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches, © Trenton Doyle Hancock. Courtesy of Dunn and Brown Contemporary



*It Takes Two*, 2010, acrylic and mixed media on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches, © Trenton Doyle Hancock. Courtesy of Dunn and Brown Contemporary

will... they just represent the kind of horrors that can come out of tunnel vision, seeing only one thing... They represent dogmatic speech."

Hancock's father was a minister, and the artist admits that much of the dynamic between his feuding characters is spawned in some way by his upbringing in the church.

"I had several different kinds of education growing up," he says, "the stuff you learn in academia, the stuff you learn in church, there's also the stuff you learn from pop culture. And then you conflate all that information and you get something really odd and somewhat interesting... Things outside of the church context that would be thought of as completely fantastical and ridiculous are thought of as truths in the church and in many religious settings. The idea of demons, the idea of angels, the idea of these things that you can't see that can attack you—these were spoken of in a real, tangible way when I was growing up."

Like the Bible itself, Hancock's entire narrative can't be understood all at once. Each work is an individual fragment of a larger story, and a single event between characters can take place across several several works, allowing himself the freedom to navigate between several different modes of expression. In the last two years, he has begun altering some of those methods for a transitional, never-before-seen body of work he refers to as Elastic Self-Portraiture, which conjures any number of distorted physical representations of himself.

"Before my father passed away suddenly earlier this year," Hancock tells me, "I had made a lot of [this] work already. A lot of it was about death, about examining the limitations of your own body, and how far can you stretch it before it won't stretch anymore. These kind of cosmic occurrences happen in and around my life and my studio all the time, where art and life sort of line up.

"I'm examining these extremes of where the body can go before it vanishes," he says. "That's become really interesting to me because in the past I've felt [the] characters were me in a very indirect way, dealing with these emotions and issues. But I'm more dealing with it from a directorial standpoint, outside of it all, and right now I'm more in it. There's not as much distance between me and the art. It feels very new and very strange."

He will exhibit the Elastic Self-Portraiture works in a solo exhibition this fall at Dunn & Brown Contemporary in Dallas, where he'll also be incorporating six pieces made during a print-making program for undergrads at Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston. His work is also featured through November in Collecting Biennials at the

Whitney, an exhibition of works collected from decades of Biennials and featuring the work of some of the most important American artists in history—appropriate company for Hancock, whose own captivating story continues to unfold with each new work.