

Art and Cake
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Trenton Doyle Hancock
An Ingénue's Hues and How to Use Cutty Black Shoes
Shulamit Nazarian
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by Jody Zellen



For over twenty-years, Trenton Doyle Hancock has been developing a set of characters to inhabit a fictional world that he presents in his paintings and sculptures, immersive installations, as well as in comic book-style graphics and drawings. In his first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, Hancock introduces audiences to this evolving and ongoing narrative through a suite of black-ink drawings that are the opening pages of a soon to be published graphic novel/comic book. It is well worth taking the time to read through the twelve spreads entitled, *Trenton Doyle Hancock Presents The Moundverse, Chapter 1: What is a Mound?* (2018) in order to begin to understand the complexities of the story and therefore the content of his works. In Chapter 1, Hancock describes the history and structure of the Mounds and the world of the Moundverse, whose hybrid characters are part plant, part animal and immersed in an ongoing battle between good and evil. Drawing from his own past (his alter ego is a football player called TorpedoBoy) as well as from art history (there are obvious references to Philip Guston and outsider art), Hancock imbues his works with visual and cultural signifiers through which he narrates an otherworld personal as well as more universal story, despite its strangeness.

The leap from the framed comic book style illustrations that introduce the exhibition to the full-fledged installation, is like jumping from a stripped down black and white world into over saturated technicolor. Though often outlined in black, Hancock's mixed media works are colorful amalgamations of bright paint, handwritten text, plastic bottle caps and collage, intermingled to create dense surfaces with overlapping narrative threads. It is not uncommon for Hancock to write on the gallery walls or cover them with props as well as paintings. As an installation, *An Ingenue's Hues and How to Use Cutty Black Shoes* juxtaposes small and large canvases, a life-sized sculpture and a freeze of scrawled text along the bottom of the gallery walls.

The largest painting, *Step and Screw Part Too Soon Underneath the Bloody Red Moon*, (2018) features Hancock's football player alter ego, TorpedoBoy— who has exaggerated features: big arm muscles yet a perplexed expression— being chased by a representation of the KKK, a white hooded figure filled with a red noose and myriad figures from Hancock's Moundverse. Beneath these characters is a comics-like narrative comprised of numerous black and white square panels in which a figure (Hancock) is instructed by a hooded Klansman to step on a stool to screw in a lightbulb over and over again. This background narrative reinforces TorpedoBoy's fear and plight.

The "Step and Screw" imagery is further explored in *SKUM: Just Beneath the Skin* (2018) where a Guston-esque hooded figure hands TorpedoBoy a disembodied head. While the implied narrative and action is based on the relationships between good and evil, black and white, provoker and provoked, Hancock fills in all the negative spaces with colorful heads atop black and white striped, snake-like bodies. Hancock's bright color palette is encapsulated in *An Ingenue's Hues and How to Use Cutty Black Shoes*, (2019) a life-size sculpture of "Udom Endgle" Hancock's shiny epoxy and silicone helmeted goddess who is encircled by different sized balls in primary colors. This heroic protector is positioned in front of white fabric panels push-pinned to the wall that ooze with irregular shaped circles of colored paint and plastic jar-tops.

Perhaps rereading Chapter 1 helps confused viewers to piece together the story as at first viewing, *An Ingenue's Hues and How to Use Cutty Black Shoes* seems overwhelming and impenetrable. However, the longer one spends in Hancock's world, the clearer the relationships become. By developing a fantasy, Hancock can take liberties and exaggerate societies evils. But because he cloaks what he depicts as fiction, that does not mean it is not based on fact.

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