



48 WALKER ST & 291 GRAND ST | SEPT 17 - OCT 17, 2020

*Step and Screw: The Star of Code Switching*, 2020  
Acrylic, graphite, plastic tops, and paper  
collage on canvas  
84 x 84 in.  
213.4 x 213.4 cm

# Trenton Doyle Hancock

## *Something American*

James Cohan is pleased to present *Something American*, an exhibition of new work by Trenton Doyle Hancock, on view from September 17 to October 17 at 48 Walker Street and 291 Grand Street. The exhibition will span both of the gallery's locations, with new paintings in Tribeca and a presentation of the second chapter of Hancock's ongoing graphic novel in the Lower East Side. This is the artist's seventh solo exhibition at James Cohan.

Over a career spanning nearly twenty-five years, Trenton Doyle Hancock has created a singular body of visual art that exuberantly subverts and synthesizes his omnivorous influences to invent a world entirely his own. This exhibition features new paintings that demonstrate the breadth and dexterity of Hancock's practice: explorations of never before seen corners of the Moundverse and densely layered and collaged reexaminations of Hancock's extraordinary iconography. These works contend with American identity and cultural expression, while confronting the ever-evolving, attendant structures of white supremacy. Hancock brings these forces into his fantastical universe in order to grapple with them—this metaphorical space, while it invites parallels to our own, is entirely under the artist's control. In this exhibition, the artist takes us on a deeply personal journey through the multivalent facets of the self. His superhero embodiment Torpedo Boy, an American football gladiator, and the artist's self portraits all echo the contours of his mind, rendering visible a rich interiority. Hancock's artmaking becomes a strategy of radical autobiography and a way of seeing, of looking closely both at the world outside and deep within oneself.

Central to the exhibition are several paintings depicting an imagined meeting between the artist's alter ego Torpedo Boy, a black superhero, and the buffoonish Klansmen that populated Philip Guston's paintings.

Hancock prizes the ambiguity and the mutability of this moment, and has returned to it again and again. As he notes: “*The more you dissect the image, the more it becomes fraught with historic tension and with my own history as a painter. It keeps feeding itself as an image. The item that is exchanged between them changes the narrative each time.*” In *Step and Screw: The Star of Code Switching*, the Klansman hands a lily-white Torpedo Boy a sentient, heterochromiac starfish of Black and white fingers. Text embedded within Hancock’s painting both drives the narrative and acts as a central visual component. Here, the verbal exchange between—as well as the interior thoughts of—the central figures of Torpedo Boy and the Klansman are collaged within the outlines of their respective bodies. The hooded figure implores the “*white as a ghost*” hero to take the proffered object, promising that “*it will help you live longer*” and that “*you’ll be back to your old color in no time flat.*”

In two monumental paintings, an undulating pattern of black and white figures surges against the surface of the canvases within densely-packed landscapes imbued with a visceral, almost overwhelming intensity. Beyond the bodies of these creatures known as Bringbacks, a rich wash of red, and shifting, oceanic tonalities of orange and yellow allude to a depth that invites the viewer into the painting. These works are heavily layered in Hancock’s signature style, incorporating drawing, collaged paper, bottle caps, fur, and paint. Upon closer examination, the paintings’ sculptural elements and daubs of heavy impasto emerge from the landscape to reveal a sea of watchful, bloodshot eyeballs that confronts the viewer, piercing the boundary between two and three dimensions.

A large, iconic portrait of a helmeted head titled *It’s Just a Matter of Trust at this Point (for Chadwick)* intermingles fiction, autobiography, art historical reference, and cultural commentary. Hancock illustrates his doppelganger Torpedo Boy clad in his battle armor: an American football uniform. The face mask of his football helmet is as if crafted from the bones, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to deter his ossiform enemies. There is an Olmec quality to the head, yet the work also recalls Charles White’s heroic portraiture of Black Americans in the 1930s and WPA-era representations of strength. As an adolescent in Texas, Hancock played football, an unequivocally and evocatively American obsession. Football is deeply enmeshed within notions of American masculinity, and has been presented within popular culture as a heroic narrative of masculine grit and character. Hancock often co-opts the trappings of the game in his work, mining his past to weave an exploration of cultural values into his own proxy hero’s journey. As he notes, “*Torpedo Boy is a vehicle to display and deal with artistic power and desire.*”

In a more intimate moment, Hancock’s subliminal self-portraits rearticulate and deconstruct forms and figures from his idiosyncratic personal iconography. These paintings expand on metaphysical interpretations of the artist’s dreams, the invented symbolic language that has long been a hallmark of his work, and the idea of self-portraiture as exploration of the artist-as-archetype. The artist’s body becomes a testing ground, subjecting the self to the externalized effects of interior tensions—in the form of a face vivisected by crosses or a quatrefoil skin that draws upon a memory of the artist’s grandmother’s tile floor, for example. In *Becoming the Toymaker, Phase II of 41: Attack Me With Her Lovely Strange Candy*, disembodied hands pull at a gaping maw, stretching back the artist’s lips in a jack-o-lantern grin to reveal an oral cavity patterned in Hancock’s signature quatrefoil. Here, the artist is literally torn apart by his own creation.

On view concurrently at James Cohan’s Grand Street location is a suite of new ink-on-paper works that comprise the second chapter of the artist’s most visionary drawing project to date: *Trenton Doyle Hancock Presents The Moundverse*. Designed as a traditional graphic novel, the intricate black and white illustrations provide a narrative master class in the characters and mythologies that have ruled Hancock’s work for the past twenty-five years. The overarching narrative of his graphic novel places Hancock’s heroes and villains into a setting where he can speak about Americanism and talk back to the world at large.

Trenton Doyle Hancock was born in 1974 in Oklahoma City, OK. Hancock was featured in the 2000 and 2002 Whitney Biennial exhibitions, at the time becoming one of the youngest artists in history to participate in the prestigious survey. In 2014, his retrospective, *Skin & Bones: 20 Years of Drawing*, at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston traveled to Akron Art Museum, OH; Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; and Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, VA. In 2019, a major exhibition of his work, *Mind of the Mound: Critical Mass*, opened at MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including Locust Projects, Miami, FL; Temple Contemporary, Philadelphia, PA; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, MO; Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL; Weatherspoon Museum, Greensboro, NC; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL; Institute for Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA; Olympic Sculpture Park at the Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh; and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Hancock’s work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Brooklyn Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Dallas Museum of Art; Menil Collection, Houston; Morgan Library & Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Akron Art Museum; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and il Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea, Trento, Italy. The recipient of numerous awards, Trenton Doyle Hancock lives and works in Houston, TX.

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# Trenton Doyle Hancock

## Something American



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

*SKUM: Just Beneath the Skin*, 2018

Acrylic, graphite, plastic tops, and paper collage on canvas

60 x 60 x 4 in.

152.4 x 152.4 x 10.2 cm

(JCG9611)

*SKUM: Just Beneath the Skin*, 2018, is part of Hancock's ongoing body of work that imagines a meeting between his alter-ego Torpedo Boy, a black superhero, and one of the buffoonish Klansmen who populated Philip Guston's paintings.

In this work, the Klansman hands Torpedo Boy a decapitated head, a searing gesture that recalls Titian's depictions of Salome with the severed head of Saint John the Baptist. Many historians have seen the Baptist's head as a self-portrait by the Renaissance artist, which created a subgenre—the decapitated self-portrait—later notably visited by Caravaggio, and now by Hancock in the guise of Torpedo Boy. Here, Torpedo Boy sees himself given back to himself, a moment of disturbing self-reflection.



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

*Step and Screw: The Star of Code Switching*, 2020

Acrylic, graphite, plastic tops, and paper collage on canvas

84 x 84 in.

213.4 x 213.4 cm

(JCG11636)

In *Step and Screw: The Star of Code Switching*, Hancock imagines a meeting between his alter-ego Torpedo Boy, a black superhero, and one of the buffoonish Klansmen who populated Philip Guston's paintings. Hancock prizes the ambiguity and the mutability of this moment, and has returned to it again and again. As he notes: "The more you dissect the image, the more it becomes fraught with historic tension and with my own history as a painter. It keeps feeding itself as an image. The item that is exchanged between them changes the narrative each time."

In this work, the Klansman hands a lily-white Torpedo Boy a sentient, heterochromiac starfish of Black and white fingers. Text embedded within Hancock's painting both drives the narrative and acts as a central visual component. Here, the verbal exchange between—as well as the interior thoughts of—the central figures of Torpedo Boy and the Klansman are collaged within the outlines of their respective bodies. The hooded figure implores the "white as a ghost" hero to take the proffered object, promising that "it will help you live longer" and that "you'll be back to your old color in no time flat."

# Trenton Doyle Hancock

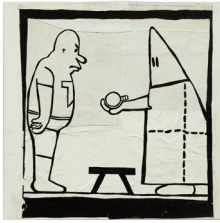
## *Something American*



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK  
*Schlep and Screw, Knowledge Rental Pawn Exchange Service, 2017*  
Acrylic and mixed media on canvas  
60 x 60 x 6 in.  
152.4 x 152.4 x 15.2 cm  
(JCG9454)

*Schlep and Screw, Knowledge Rental Pawn Exchange Service, 2017*, is part of Hancock's ongoing body of work that imagines a meeting between his alter-ego Torpedo Boy, a black superhero, and one of the buffoonish Klansmen who populated Philip Guston's paintings.

In this work, the Klansman hands Torpedo Boy an apple as a tail-eating serpent coils around the edges of the tableau. This gesture, set against a verdant, blooming backdrop, recalls the primordial moment of exchange in Western Christian culture: the Original Sin, in which Adam and Eve are enticed to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge and expelled from Paradise.



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK  
*The Exchange, 2020*  
Acrylic, ink, and paper collage on canvas  
30 x 30 in.  
76.2 x 76.2 cm  
(JCG11637)



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK  
*Come On In. It's Safe, 2020*  
Acrylic, ink, and paper collage on canvas  
30 x 30 in.  
76.2 x 76.2 cm  
(JCG11638)

In these paintings, Hancock revisits an earlier work titled *Step and Screw!*, extracting and enlarging graphic images onto ink and paper collaged onto canvas. In *The Exchange*, Torpedo Boy peers through a crack in the door at the lurking Klansman. This moment is laced with dread, suggesting that the Klansman, and the racism he embodies, is still outside the door, and in fact has been there all along. In *Come On In. It's Safe*, the Klansman hands Torpedo Boy a lightbulb, villain and hero facing off in this familiar episode of exchange. Hancock often uses plays in scale to rearticulate and revisit significant narratives vignettes and characters from his ongoing Moundverse saga—each subsequent iteration allowing for formal experimentation and the development of new layers of meaning and symbolism. Hancock's black and white palette strips the formal and narrative elements in these works down to their studs to create paintings of pure graphic intensity. This binary palette is also suggestive of the oppositional, universal forces embodied within the characters of Torpedo Boy and the Klansman—good and evil, Black and white, light and dark—yet leaves space for all the grey in between.

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## *Something American*

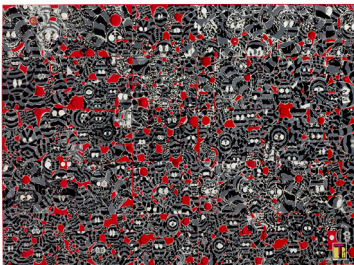


TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK  
*CFR, Completely Fugging Rabid, 2020*  
Acrylic on canvas  
12 x 9 in.  
30.5 x 22.9 cm  
(JCG11643)

In *CFR, Completely Fugging Rapid*, the bespectacled artist sweats pink Moundmeat as it simultaneously streams from his nose and eyes. Moundmeat is the lifesource for Hancock's Mounds, a pink substance that once ingested allows all to experience a life of color. His sweating face is wreathed in a corona of light, suggesting at once the saintly icons of Hancock's religious childhood and the lightbulb-on moment of artistic inspiration.



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK  
*Bringback Condiments: Mustard, Mayo, and Special Sauce, 2020*  
Acrylic, graphite, plastic tops, faux fur, paper collage on canvas  
90 x 132 in.  
228.6 x 335.3 cm  
(JCG11781)



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK  
*Bringback Condiments: Ketchup, 2020*  
Acrylic, graphite, plastic tops, faux fur, paper collage on canvas  
90 x 132 in.  
228.6 x 335.3 cm  
(JCG11634)

In two monumental paintings, an undulating pattern of black and white figures surges against the surface of the canvases within densely-packed landscapes imbued with a visceral, almost overwhelming intensity. Beyond the bodies of these creatures known as Bringbacks, a rich wash of red, and shifting, oceanic tonalities of orange and yellow allude to a depth that invites the viewer into the painting. These works are heavily layered in Hancock's signature style, incorporating drawing, collaged paper, bottle caps, fur, and paint. Upon closer examination, the paintings' sculptural elements and daubs of heavy impasto emerge from the landscape to reveal a sea of watchful, bloodshot eyeballs that confronts the viewer, piercing the boundary between two and three dimensions.

Bringbacks are mouthless, fur-striped humanoids that serve as minions for a Mound named Junior. Their primary function is nostalgia: they "bring back" things from our youth in order to transform us. For Hancock, the Bringbacks allow him to revisit the toys that populated his childhood and parse their influence on his visual language and the physical construction of the Moundverse. They become a vehicle for reflecting on how our past adolescence—and our memories of that past adolescence—shapes our present.

# Trenton Doyle Hancock

## *Something American*



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

*It's Just a Matter of Trust at this Point (for Chadwick)*, 2020

Acrylic, graphite, plastic tops, and paper collage on canvas

60 x 60 in

152.4 x 152.4 cm

(JCG11635)

*It's Just a Matter of Trust at this Point (for Chadwick)* is a large, iconic portrait of a helmeted head that intermingles fiction, autobiography, art historical reference, and cultural commentary. Hancock illustrates his doppelganger Torpedo Boy clad in his battle armor: an American football uniform. The face mask of his football helmet is as if crafted from the bones, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to deter his ossiform enemies. There is an Olmec quality to the head, yet the work also recalls Charles White's heroic portraiture of Black Americans in the 1930s and WPA-era representations of strength. As an adolescent in Texas, Hancock played football, an unequivocally and evocatively American obsession. Football is deeply enmeshed within notions of American masculinity, and has been presented within popular culture as a heroic narrative of masculine grit and character. Hancock often co-opts the trappings of the game in his work, mining his past to weave an exploration of cultural values into his own proxy hero's journey. As he notes, "Torpedo Boy is a vehicle to display and deal with artistic power and desire."



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

*Becoming the Toymaker, Phase II of 41: Attack Me With Her Lovely Strange Candy*, 2020

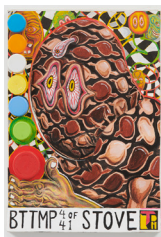
Acrylic and mixed media on canvas

24 x 24 in.

61 x 61 cm

(JCG11642)

Hancock's subliminal self-portraits rearticulate and deconstruct forms and figures from his idiosyncratic personal iconography. These paintings expand on metaphysical interpretations of the artist's dreams, the invented symbolic language that has long been a hallmark of his work, and the idea of self-portraiture as exploration of the artist-as-archetype. The artist's body becomes a testing ground, subjecting the self to the externalized effects of interior tensions—in the form of a face vivisected by crosses or a quatrefoil skin that draws upon a memory of the artist's grandmother's tile floor, for example.



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

*Becoming the Toymaker, Phase 4 of 41: Stove*, 2020

Acrylic and mixed media on canvas

14 x 10 in.

35.6 x 25.4 cm

(JCG11644)

# Trenton Doyle Hancock

## *Something American*



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

*The Skint Alterpiece: Vegans Make Deposits at the Tofu Bank, 2020*

Acrylic, ink, and collaged paper on canvas

72 x 108 in.

182.9 x 274.3 cm

(JCG11640)

Since 2017, Hancock has been at work on his epic graphic novel, and in *The Skint Alterpiece: Vegans Make Deposits at the Tofu Bank* he marries that process to his painting practice to create one of his most detailed works to date. Intricately rendered in a stark black and white palette, the canvas depicts a slice of Vegan life—a teeming landscape of interlocking and overlapping ossiform structures—that illuminates the underbelly of Hancock’s imagined universe.

In a continuation of his ever-evolving narrative, the painting details the aftermath of the second chapter of his graphic novel. Once the villainous Vegans have made their escape through the bowels of the police and the bowels of the septic system, they return to their underworld. A beacon within this bone-strewn, primordial landscape is the Tofu Bank. This imaginary institution is designed to take the excess out of Vegan society and amend resource inequality, a pointed reversal of the role played by banks in the artist’s world above ground.

Pure Vegans are ossiforms—creatures made from bone—that can’t see color. Red, the only color in the painting, is present in the bloodshot eyes of the Vegans, representing the tenseness in that world and suggesting a world of color beyond their colorblind existence.



TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

*Let Thy Wilford Be Done, 2020*

Acrylic on canvas

12 x 9 in.

30.5 x 22.9 cm

(JCG11546)

Hancock’s subliminal self-portraits rearticulate and deconstruct forms and figures from his idiosyncratic personal iconography. These paintings expand on metaphysical interpretations of the artist’s dreams, the invented symbolic language that has long been a hallmark of his work, and the idea of self-portraiture as exploration of the artist-as-archetype. The artist’s body becomes a testing ground, subjecting the self to the externalized effects of interior tensions—in the form of a face vivisected by crosses or a quatrefoil skin that draws upon a memory of the artist’s grandmother’s tile floor, for example.