

MATERIAL

Chakaia Booker | Leonardo Drew | Trenton Doyle Hancock

Curated by Seph Rodney

April 27 - June 22, 2024

Curator's Statement

The title “Material” does that typical art-scene thing of using a term that lends itself to being read in multiple ways, perhaps to convey the impression that the curator is interested in scholarly complexity. “Material,” as a noun refers to matter, stuff, the elemental parts of a thing. But as an adjective connotes that a thing is significant, consequential, weighty. My use of the homonym is for more than intellectual showmanship. Both of the ways in which the term operates are particularly germane to the artists I’ve placed in this exhibition — Chakaia Booker, Leonardo Drew, and Trenton Doyle Hancock — artists who utilize particular materials to make objects that are of substance, that is to say, meaningful.

Booker, who is likely better known for her work that uses recycled rubber tires, here works with prints made via lithography, woodcuts, and hand-painted chine collé. In many she exploits the skin-like surface of the paper, embossing it so that it begins to take on the look of a more lyrical version of ritual scarification. These textures augment and amplify the imagery of the print. The prints are abstract maelstroms that nevertheless have an underlying structure that manages to contain all their profligate energy.

The underlying structure is a salient feature of Leonardo Drew’s wood sculpture. He is well known for his large, engulfing installations that threaten to overwhelm the viewer with a sense of what infinity might feel like. But when he works smaller, as he does here, I get a potent distillation of the feeling of being introduced to the remnants of an old growth forest that might have covered the entire earth.

Trenton Doyle Hancock has in the last several years made and elaborated a whole world of his own making: the Moundverse. I’ve been watching and savoring the works of this series, intrigued by how genuinely mischievous Hancock is, how the characters exist on the verge of being unpalatable, even odious. But the style of painting and the use of everyday plastic bottlecaps that serve as structural and decorative elements within the paintings make his characters denizens of a funky, lighthearted, and comic universe.

The throughline of this work is that all three take their materials so seriously they become meaningful in their studious manipulations — that and they are extremely attentive to the magic that can pour out of the quotidian. Their deep exploration of a material’s possibilities and their crafty sophistication feels substantive, yes. It also feels like something worth celebrating.

BIOS

Chakaia Booker (born 1953 in Newark, NY) is an American sculptor that creates monumental abstract works for both gallery and outdoor public spaces. Booker is best known for her innovative and signature use of recycled rubber tires, her primary sculptural material. In 2009, Booker began an in depth exploration of printmaking creating a significant body of graphic works, largely focused on the process of chine collé. Booker's approach to printmaking processes is reminiscent of her modular working methods in sculpture. Printmaking has become a regular part of Booker's artistic output, and as with her use of rubber, Booker has invented unique ways of manipulating materials and process. Booker's works are contained in more than 40 public collection and have been exhibited across the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Booker was included in the 2000 Whitney Biennial, received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2005, and an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in 2001. Booker has lived and worked in New York City's East Village since the early 1980's and maintains a production studio in Allentown, PA.

Leonardo Drew (born 1961 in Tallahassee, Florida) grew up in Bridgeport, CT and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. For over three decades, Drew has become known for creating contemplative abstract sculptural works that play upon a tension between order and chaos. At once monumental and intimate in scale, his work recalls post-Minimalist sculpture that alludes to America's industrial past. Drew transforms accumulations of raw materials such as wood, scrap metal, & cotton to articulate various overlapping themes with emotional gravitas: from the cyclical nature of life & decay to the erosion of time. His surfaces often approach a language of their own, embodying the labored process of writing oneself into history. Drew's works have been shown internationally & are included in numerous public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Guggenheim Museum; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; & Tate, London. His works have recently been acquired by The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; North Carolina Museum of Art; Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art, Bloomington, Indiana; & New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana among others.

Trenton Doyle Hancock (born 1974 in Oklahoma City, OK) earned his BFA from Texas A&M University, Commerce, and his MFA from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University. For almost two decades, Trenton Doyle Hancock has been constructing his own fantastical narrative that continues to develop and inform his prolific artistic output. Part fictional, part autobiographical, Hancock's work pulls from his own personal experience, art historical canon, comics and superheroes, pulp fiction, and myriad pop culture references, resulting in a complex amalgamation of characters and plots possessing universal concepts of light and dark, good and evil, and all the grey in between. Hancock's work is in the permanent collections of the Akron Art Museum; Brooklyn Museum; Dallas Museum of Art; Detroit Institute of Art; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art; Menil Collection; Metropolitan Museum of Art; il Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea, Trento, Italy; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Morgan Library & Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; and Whitney Museum of American Art.

Seph Rodney, PhD is a former senior critic and opinions editor for Hyperallergic and is now a regular contributor to *The New York Times*. In 2020 he won the Rabkin Arts Journalism prize and in 2022 won the Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. He is a co-curator of *Get in the Game*, the largest exhibition that San Francisco MoMA has undertaken, which opens October 2024.