

The Fruitmarket Gallery

Exhibition Archive

Trenton Doyle Hancock

The Wayward Thinker

Exhibition 10 February – 8 April 2007

Trenton Doyle Hancock grew up the son of a Baptist minister in the semi-rural town of Paris, Texas. At art school, immersed in and influenced by a huge range of visual material from historical and contemporary painting to graphic novels, comic books, *Raw* magazine and the *Garbage Pail Kids*, he formulated, in his words, a mission statement:

'The idea was to have a painting project in which I could freely jump between modes of production and maintain a set of characters that inhabit the work'.

All Hancock's mature work has been driven by this mission. His project takes the form of stories spun around a group of characters which he developed right at the beginning of his career. He uses them as a kind of personal vocabulary, building stories with them, treating them as signifiers in their own right, each one carrying the power to drive a story in a different direction.

The characters include the benign Mounds (seen in the painting *Painter Helps Milk a Mound* in the ground floor gallery). Mounds are part plant. They represent stability and the power of nature, and live in flower meadows above ground. Vegans (who populate the majority of the paintings in the exhibition) hate Mounds. They are mutant

former humans who live in underground caverns with no light or colour. This exhibition takes place mostly underground, as St Sesom, the 'wayward thinker' of the exhibition's title, gathers fellow Vegans together in an attempt to rediscover their humanity by befriending Mounds and learning to appreciate colour. Mounds and Vegans are watched over by the twin deities Painter and Loid. Painter is a maternal spirit, who represents colour, abundance and growth. Loid is paternal, judgemental but ultimately good. He rules the realm of text, seeing things strictly in black and white.

Hancock's characters come together in a series of stories told from exhibition to exhibition, in large-scale collaged paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture and incantations writ large on the Gallery walls. His work is a submersive experience, his theatrical installations banishing pre-conceived ideas about art while thrusting the viewer literally and figuratively into his mythic drama. Hancock seeks to absorb everything – including the space in which he exhibits and the audience he exhibits it to – into his created environment, assaulting the senses in order to drive the viewer into a state of heightened awareness.

His practice is a very particular combination of text and image. On the one hand, it is clearly driven by and

infused with language. Hancock has written and rewritten his tale, on gallery walls and in artist's publications. His words are carefully chosen and immediately lucid. In the persistent retelling, phrases and expressions are repeated so that the exact form of words attaches itself to a particular image or idea, summoning the entire apparatus of Hancock's vision. Text is often presented almost as image, operating somehow formally, so that its visual connection with the paintings needs no complex interpretation.

Rather than the paintings illustrating the textual story, however, text is rather used to drive the painting forwards, Hancock talking of narrative as a kind of glue or grid into which he can set his characters and the forms and colours from which they are made. His work is firmly rooted in drawing and, rather than illustrative, is often surprisingly formalist. Hancock's pictures respond visually to one another, a shape in one giving rise to an episode in another. Several of his seemingly most tightly controlled narrative paintings in fact start from the recognition of story-telling potential in a suggestive shape made by chance. Visual forms are mobile between paintings, influencing and inspiring each other so that there is a coherence to the visual narrative that is completely independent of the written word.

Hancock's work is, in some ways, painting about the process of painting. He loves painting, and wants to find a way to add to its history. He talks of trying to slow the viewer down so that they might look properly, and employs strategies to draw the viewer into the process of the work and the story it tells. His is a very generous process, which leaves clues for the viewer to follow layer by layer into the surface of each painting. His use of collage is highly individual; not only does he introduce found elements into his paintings (principally plastic bottle tops, which he collects on the street), but he also collages his own work, cutting into canvasses and overlaying them with fragments drawn and painted on other supports at other times.

Hancock's approach to materials – 'trash is treasure' – chimes with that of the artists of Italian Arte Povera. In terms of visual aesthetic, however, he is closer to Germanic and Northern European painting, finding inspiration in the work of Max Ernst, Pieter Breughel and

Hieronymous Bosch. Though individualistic, his work is not without precedent: artists both visual and literary have created worlds throughout the centuries, and Hancock's owes as much to Dante and Milton as it does to Marvel comics or the 'outsider' art of a figure such as Henry Darger.

Hancock describes himself as a storyteller, one who is comfortable telling a number of truths. He grew up within Christianity, and though he has moved away from it as a strict creed by which to live, he celebrates it as a fantastic repository of myths, stories and allegories, tales which speak across races and religions. His is a spiritual universe, which mistrusts that which is reductive, dogmatic or judgemental and celebrates that which is individual, outgoing and enjoyable. Better to see in colour than black and white, better to embrace a Mound than back off from it. His art is exuberant, subversive and curiously beguiling, a candy-coloured world in which we share, for a few moments, in the teeming visual imagination of its creator.

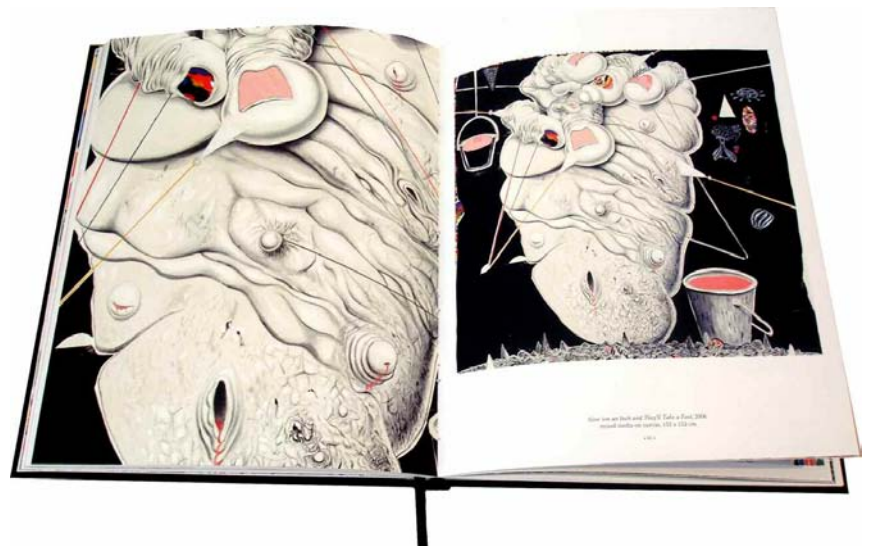
This exhibition is accompanied by a substantial publication.

With a new essay by Eleanor Heartney, an interview with the artist by Thelma Golden and writing by Trenton Doyle Hancock, it offers a rare insight into Hancock's art and imagination.

Available from the bookshop at the exhibition price £14.95 (£19.95 rrp)

Trenton Doyle Hancock has produced a signed, limited-edition artwork in celebration of the exhibition.

Available from the bookshop, £100 unframed, £150 framed.



For full details and a list of all events which accompany this exhibition refer to **an Events Calendar**

Artist's Talk: Trenton Doyle Hancock

Saturday 10 February, 3pm. Free. Booking essential.

Children's Comic Book Workshop

Saturday 24 February, 12.30–4.30pm.

£7/£5 concession. 10 places available.

Suitable for 8–11 year olds. Booking essential.

Malcy Duff runs a workshop in which children can create and publish their own small comic-book.

Talk: Language and Art

Wednesday 21 February, 6.30–7.30pm. Free.

Booking essential.

Professor John Corbett considers the interaction between language, literature and the visual arts. John Corbett is Professor of Applied Language Studies at the University of Glasgow and principal investigator of the Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech (a multimedia text archive of language in Scotland).

Adult Comic Book Workshop

Saturday 17 and Saturday 24 March, 11am–5pm.

Tickets £30/£20 concession. 10 places available.

Booking essential.

Malcy Duff and a local writer lead this two-day workshop enabling participants to produce a comic-book. Using personal experience to identify a narrative, participants can create and illustrate comic characters and produce a finished comic book together.

Talk: Tania Kovats on Developments in Contemporary Drawing

Wednesday 4 April, 6.30–7.30pm.

Tickets £4/£3 concession. Booking essential.

Kovats, artist and editor of *The Drawing Book* discusses the resurgence of drawing with reference to a range of contemporary artists.

Ways of Seeing Gallery Tour

Thursday 5 April, 11.30am–1.30pm. Free. Booking essential.

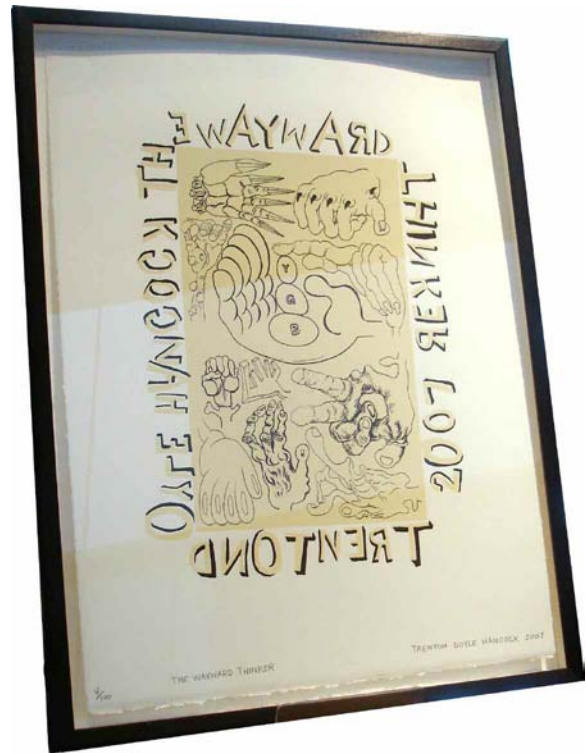
A guided tour of the exhibition for over 60s led by The Fruitmarket Gallery's Education Manager Tracy Morgan and freelance educator Mary Keegan.

Secondary School Group Visits

The Gallery encourages teachers attending the Secondary School Art Teachers' Workshop to book a free class visit to the Callum Innes exhibition. Assistance with transport costs, a guided tour of the exhibition and a resource pack are provided.

Reading Room

Resource material and an exhibition interpretation film presentation of Curator David Hopkins discussing the work in the exhibition is available in the Gallery reading room. The exhibition film is available on DVD from the bookshop priced £15.



The Fruitmarket Gallery 2007. All rights reserved.
©The Fruitmarket Gallery, the artist and authors.
All information provided is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of publication.

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the publisher.

No responsibility is accepted for information which is out of date or inaccurate.

