

The Moundverse is a world that sprang from Trenton Doyle Hancock's imagination when he was kid. It's a fantastic reality that has been expanding for more than 25 years, its characters and creatures doing what mythological figures have done for centuries: behaving in ways that mortal souls study so that we might learn how to live justly and know what life's all about.

That happens — frequently and furiously — in the Houston-based artist's first solo show in Los Angeles, “An Ingénue's Hues and How to Use Cutty Black Shoes” at the gallery [Shulamit Nazarian](#). Hancock's 12 ink drawings, eight collaged canvases and a single tableau are linked by an incantatory poem he has painted, at ankle height, on the walls. Its rhythms build incrementally, releasing energy and generating insights at different points on each reading. It's punchy and funny. Also sad, tragic and telling.

That's how Hancock's art rolls: Its visual rhythms pulse with energy as cartoon-style characters run amok. These include Mounds (benevolent animal-plant hybrids), Vegans (dogmatic sowers of discord) and Bringbacks (mutant offshoots of various groups), as well as two superheroes: Udom Endgle (a color-wielding goddess) and Torpedo Boy (Hancock's stand-in).



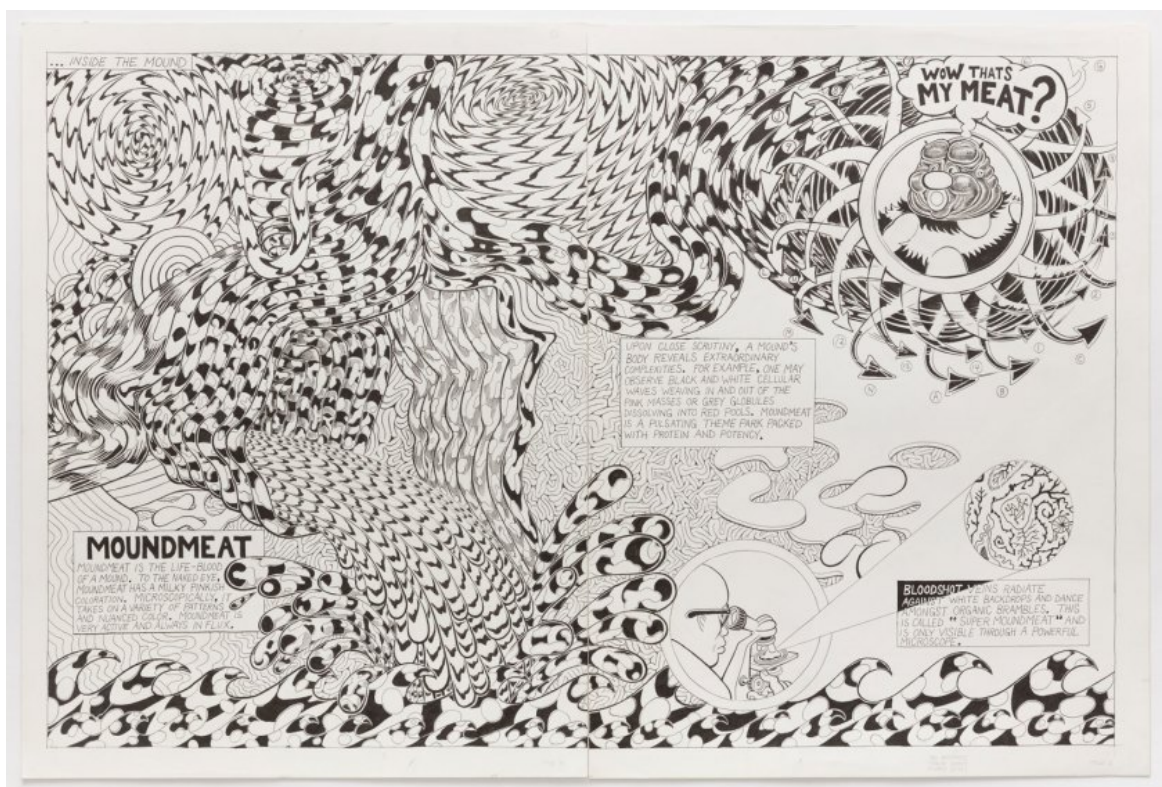
Trenton Doyle Hancock, “The Legend Generates a Spit Storm Just for You,” 2018, acrylic, graphite, fake fur, plastic tops, and paper collage on canvas, 60 x 60 x 4 inches, (Trenton Doyle Hancock / Shulamit Nazarian)

Hooded Klansmen, from Philip Guston's famous paintings, as well as from Hancock's childhood in Paris, Texas (where the Klan was active), also appear, as do pink infants, confused hillbillies, vindictive bullies and wild wolves.

It all started when Hancock was 7. At a family dinner one evening, he was composing the mashed potatoes, peas and beef on his plate into tidy mounds as he watched his parents deftly scoop all three foods onto single forkfuls and eat them. Hancock lacked the dexterity to do that with his spoon. But the image stuck with him. As did the idea that being a grownup meant putting different things together.

Mixing things up — just to see what might come of it — is what his art is all about.

That's what happened when he enrolled at Texas A&M University and began giving form to the world of his hyperactive imagination. It continued at Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia, where he mixed materials, metaphors and story lines, drawing all into a discussion of violence and suffering, love and redemption, race and class, art and life — in ways insightful and inspiring, playful and potent.



Trenton Doyle Hancock's "Trenton Doyle Hancock Presents the Moundverse, Chapter 1: What Is a Mound? Page 10 & 11," 2018. Ink on paper, 24 inches by 36 inches, (Trenton Doyle Hancock / Shulamit Nazarian)

In the Moundverse, nobody's perfect. Nobody is entirely bad either. Mishaps and misunderstandings pile up as creatures of all shapes and stripes strive to make sense of a world spiraling out of control. It's not all that different — nor any more absurd, strange or surreal — than reality.

Hancock's unpretentious memoir is a morality tale with far more shades of gray than black-or-white certainty. That ambiguity — and soul-gripping ambivalence — might leave you feeling queasy. But that's the point: to encourage us to figure out what we think and what might be done.

“An Ingénue's Hues and How to Use Cutty Black Shoes” is not to be missed. Nor visited only once.

Shulamit Nazarian, 616 N. La Brea Ave., L.A. Through Feb. 17; closed Sundays and Mondays.

(310) 281-0961, www.shulamitnazarian.com



Trenton Doyle Hancock's "Udom Endgle and the Souls' Journey," 2018. Styrofoam, epoxy, see, automotive paint, silicone, wood base, 82.5 inches by 70 inches by 31.5 inches. (Michael Underwood / Trenton Doyle Hancock and Shulamit Nazarian)