

HYPERALLERGIC

Trenton Doyle Hancock's World-Building Power

The works, and worlds, on display in Hancock's exhibition seem saturated with a desire for narrative redemption through self-observation and aspects of his Christian upbringing.

Jennifer Remenchik | October 3, 2022



"Good Grief Bad Grief" (2022), acrylic on canvas, 12 x 9 inches

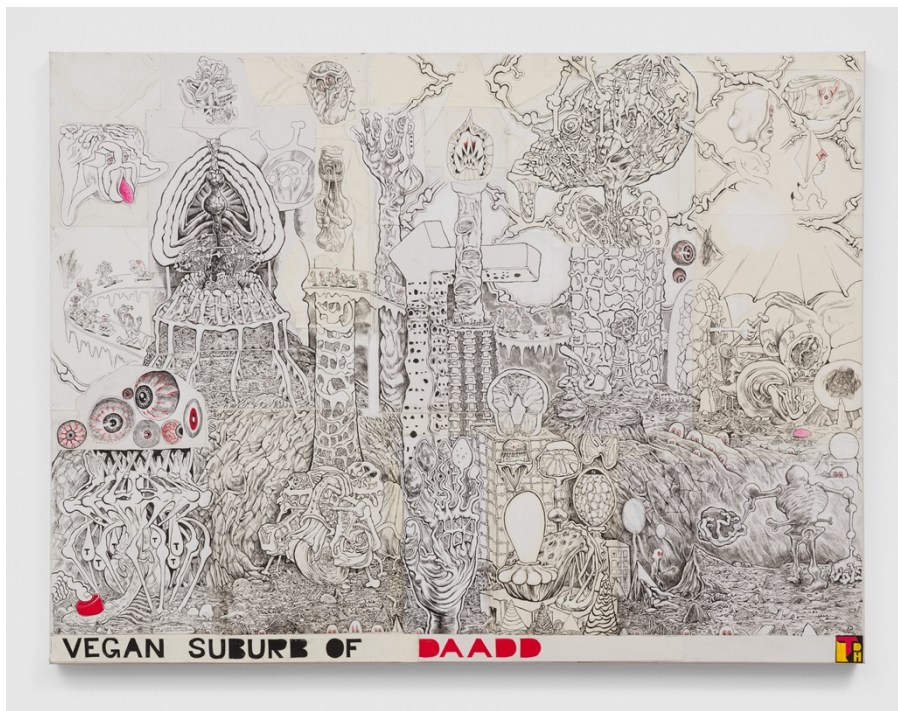
LOS ANGELES — For the uninitiated, Trenton Doyle Hancock's Good Grief Bad Grief at Shulamit Nazarian may overwhelm with its visual and narrative threads. Through his longstanding character Torpedo Boy, an alternate version of himself, and a species dubbed "The Vegans," Hancock continues to articulate a kind of ongoing war with himself and his environment. The works, and worlds, on display seem saturated with a desire for narrative redemption that betrays not only a highly keen sense of self-observation, but also aspects of the artist's own Christian upbringing, with its moral stories of right versus wrong.

Hancock is nothing if not a world builder. One of the exhibition's highlights, displayed as a series of 19 framed drawings, is Trenton Doyle Hancock Presents The Moundverse: Chapter 2 Veganism — a preview of a graphic

novel that will eventually become a four-volume book. In Hancock's universe "veganism" is a stand-in for extremism, yet the stories reflect a sense of moral ambiguity; in any given scenario it can be hard to tell the good guys from the bad guys. This ambiguity extends into a comic strip running along the floor of the gallery in which Hancock himself repeatedly transforms into the Klansman — another character in his universe that embodies racism and hate, based loosely on Philip Guston's similar figures, but raising more self-reflexive questions of complicity in Hancock's work.



Trenton Doyle Hancock Presents the Moundverse: Chapter 2 Veganism (2020), ink on paper. Suite of 19 framed drawings, each page: 24 x 36 inches

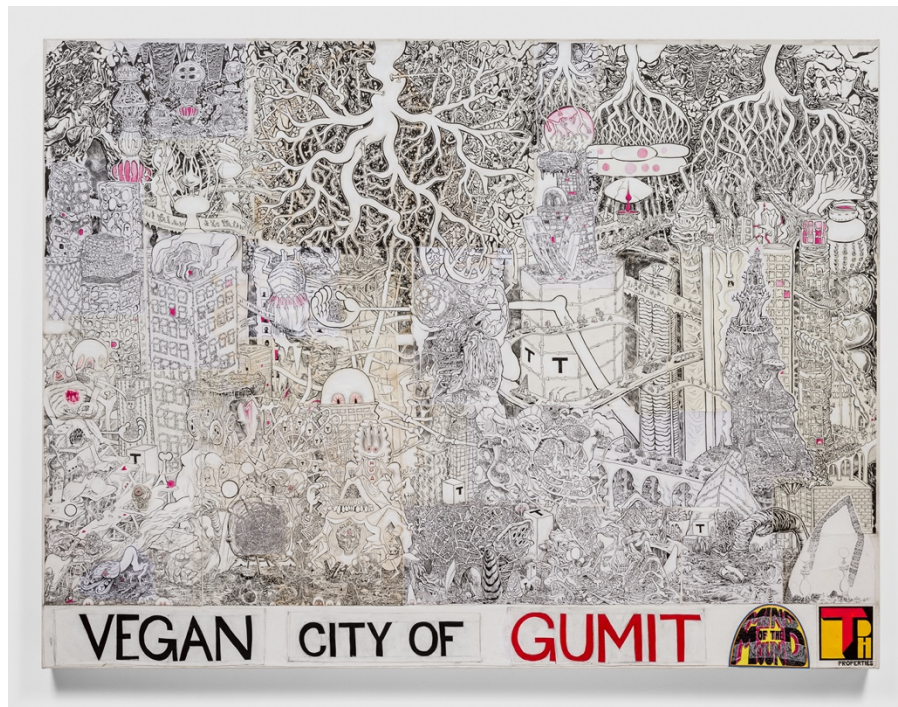


"Vegan Suburb of Dada" (2022), acrylic, graphite, ink, paper and canvas collage on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

Formally, the black and white drawings of the vegan universe — especially "Vegan Suburb of Wrong," "Vegan Suburb of Bonehead," and "Vegan Suburb of Daadd" (all 2022) — are some of the exhibition's most successful works. They display a sophisticated combination of mark-making, pattern, text, and composition that stuns pictorially. In "Vegan Suburb of Daadd," Hancock uses classic drawing techniques such as cross-hatching and line variation to keep the viewer's eye engaged in an intricately connected vegan living complex that comes complete with a series of city towers seemingly constructed of bones. Yet for viewers who are not well

acquainted with Hancock's work, the storyline remains somewhat convoluted. The overarching theme seems to be a fairly straightforward one along the lines of "every cop is a criminal," but the use of tofu-eating zombie vegans to illustrate fanaticism and even perhaps moral decay delves fairly problematically into the realm of stereotype, and I am left wondering why this was chosen as a representation of extremism.

Along with his characters, Hancock includes self-portraits in the exhibition. As is often the case with personal narrative, the artist is at his best when the work is most nuanced. In the show's eponymous painting, "Good Grief Bad Grief" (2022), Hancock achieves this. A small painting, at 12 by 9 inches, it is the show's most touching and personal work. Depicting the artist curled up with his own sense of loss, it was painted in the wake of family deaths from COVID-19. At once heartfelt and uniquely painterly, the piece transmits a universally relatable human experience, that of grief.



"Vegan City of Gum" (2022), acrylic, graphite, ink, paper and canvas collage on canvas, 54 x 72 inches



Installation view of Trenton Doyle Hancock: Good Grief, Bad Grief at Shulamit Nazarian gallery, Los Angeles.
Left: "Torpedo Boy and the Little Light" (2022), acrylic, graphite, paper collage, and ink on canvas, 30 x 20 inches;
right: "It Takes Three or Four to Even the Score" (2022), acrylic, graphite, ink, paper and canvas collage, plastic bottle caps on canvas, 60 x 48 inches