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Trenton Doyle Hancock: The Wayward Thinker

By Isla Leaver-Yap



Fifty thousand years ago an ape man ejaculated into a field of flowers. His act culminated in the creation of the Mounds: part-human, part-plant mutants that have taken over one of the many parallel universes in artist Trenton Doyle Hancock's psyche, and which now threaten to spill into physical form within the walls of the Fruitmarket. This young artist's fictive progeny arrive in the form of obsessive drawings, paintings and installations that often sprawl from wall to ceiling, while Hancock has been known to deprive himself of enough sleep to snooze on the gallery floor through the entire opening of his own shows. His sleeping beauty performances reveal the deadened body of the artist left amidst the enticing phantasmagoria of his mind - writhing forests, mammoth penises, meaty flora and voluptuous monsters also known as evil vegans.

Despite the fantastical euphoria of his visions, there is something eerily allegorical about Hancock's warped narratives. These are not simply satirical takes on creationist myths, nor are they some rambling epiphanies of a surrealist fan. Instead, these works, gathered under the ark of Hancock's grand narrative, gesture to a sinister underbelly of a distinctly liberal kind of fear. Characters like 'Coon Boy' pop up in Hancock's stories, as do references to the 'aborted but beautiful', 'oozing mound meats' and a vegan called 'Sesom' (that's Moses backwards). The unrestrained work draws a fine balance between repulsion and sensuousness, and mutates the provocative into the playful, all the while dragging the viewer through a story that appears to have no end.

Hancock articulates the poisonous conflicts of sex, culture and race, with an ornate ugliness and captivating indulgence worthy of Hieronymus Bosch. And, with equally artistic touches of William Blake and Yves Tanguy, the Oklahoma-born, Houston-based artist admits his early aspiration to become a comic book artist. Attracted by the format's good/evil polarities, Hancock has since developed a style encompassing the biblical, ritualistic, sexual and violent. And, in doing so, he has arrived at a world never that far away from our own.