

JAMES COHAN GALLERY

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Trenton Doyle Hancock

By Grace Glueck

James Cohan Gallery
533 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through April 15



Trenton Doyle Hancock, *Vegan Arm*, 2005, urethane, steel, string, 84 x 108 x 9 inches

A long, knobby white arm comes out of a wall at the entrance to the gallery, dangling a pail filled with yucky pink stuff that's really Pepto-Bismol. It's a fitting accompaniment to a funky but somewhat indigestible extravaganza by Trenton Doyle Hancock, a Texas-based artist whose work, in its wackiness, approaches that of unbuttoned cartooniacs like R. Crumb, Peter Saul, Carroll Dunham and Harvey Kurtzman, the father of Mad magazine.

Mr. Hancock, the son of a Baptist minister, has been preoccupied for some time with an outsize epic, the vegans vs. the meat-eating "mounds," whose characters are of animal, vegetal and mineral persuasion. They participate in cosmic struggles that rage on like the Thirty Years' War. Using pigment, collage and fragments of street junk, Mr. Hancock depicts them in energetically obsessive paintings that often incorporate writing as part of their graphic appeal.

His magnum opus here is a series called "In the Blestian Room," which fills an enormous wall of the gallery's front space with written intonations that make satirical biblical references and fills other walls with paintings whose influences range from Bosch to Guston. They seem to salute the discovery by a vegan named Sesom (Moses spelled backward) of the power of color.

The most ambitious is a mural-size canvas, "The Third to the Last Big Hurrah," whose black ground is covered by an eccentric white grid made up of bones, hands, biomorphic blobs, visceral clusters, buckets and such, animated by dabs and thrusts of bright hues. Clever but laid-back, it helps steel you for the rest of this mad tour de force.