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## Trenton Doyle Hancock at Gerald Peters

By Charles Dee Mitchell



Trenton Doyle Hancock, *The Legend Sweats and Bubbles*, 1998, copper plate line etching and open bite with aquatint and hand application of plastic cut outs, 30 X 22 ¼ inches

In 1997, on the occasion of his first one-person exhibition, Trenton Doyle Hancock deprived himself of sleep for close to three days before the opening. An hour before guests began to arrive, he took a dose of over-the-counter sleeping pills, crawled into a flowing costume patched together from canvases not unlike those he was exhibiting, sat down on an elevated, throne-like chair and slept through the opening. At least two interpretations of this performance/stunt suggest themselves. One is that Hancock was lightheartedly forestalling the "Where do you get your ideas?" questions that his chaotic paintings inevitably prompt, by showing the artist immersed in his unconscious. Or, since this was the qualifying exhibition for his BFA, he could have been presenting himself as a poor overworked artist, so exhausted from cranking out work for his degree that he could not enjoy his own triumph.

For his second exhibition, and his first at a commercial gallery, Hancock once again slept through the opening in similar fashion. Beneath his makeshift throne, you saw a gallery assistant blowing up red balloons. Thirty minutes into the evening, an old-fashioned alarm clock went off beside Hancock's sleeping head, and the gallery director appeared from the back room with a bowl of red Jell-O. After turning

off the alarm, she spooned the groggy artist his Jell-O while the assistant pushed red balloons out the back of his costume. At 30-minute intervals the process was repeated with yellow, blue and green Jell-O followed by appropriately colored balloons. The performance was at once a deliriously Freudian view of the creative process and an incisive comment on the gallery system that Hancock is entering for the first time.

Hancock titled this exhibition "Off Colored," punning both on his status as an African-American artist and the naughty-boy aspect of the toilet humor that runs through his performances and many of his paintings. He works on pasted-together sections of unstretched canvas, pouring and brushing on paint to create both very stylish abstract messes and the suggestions of figures with heads the color of raw meat. He collages the canvases with pink satin and a weird carpetlike material of tight black curls, and decorates them with brightly colored plastic caps from bottles and cans of personal hygiene and cleanser products. Characters with names like Coon Bear and Torpedo Boy make frequent appearances. Hancock's paintings form an engaging if somewhat incoherent counterpoint to the sophisticated thinking that goes into his performances.