

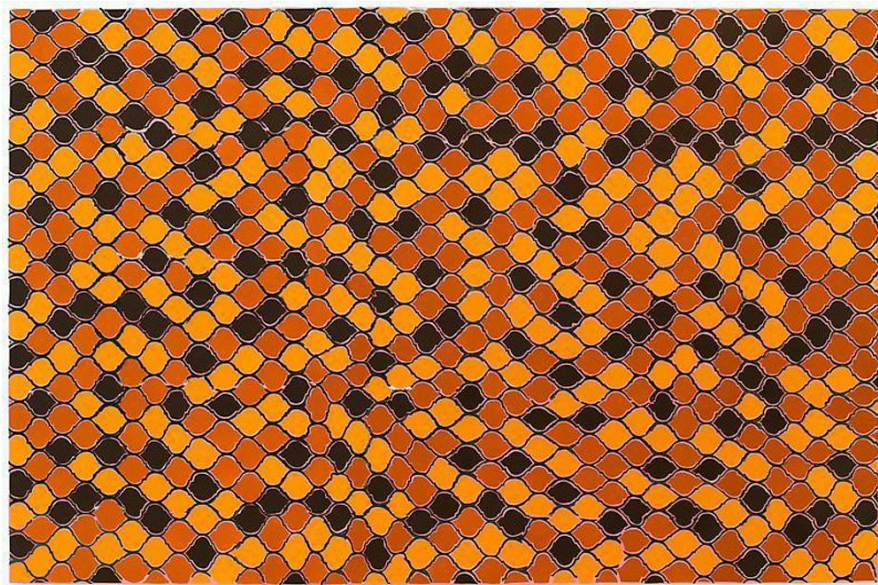
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TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK MOVES TO MYTHOS AT SARASOTA'S RINGLING MUSEUM

BY DANNY OLDA • REVIEWS • MAY 20, 2015

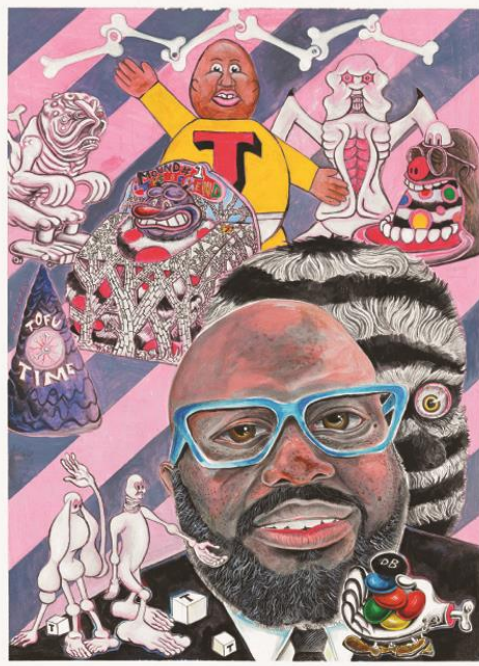


Trenton Doyle Hancock, "The Former and the Ladder or Ascension and a Cinchin'," 2012. Photo: Jason Mandella.



Trenton Doyle Hancock, "The Den," 2012. Photo: Jason Mandella.

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Trenton Doyle Hancock, "Bringback Cabbage," and "EMIT: What the Bringback Brought: Trenton Doyle Hancock, the Toymaker."



Trenton Doyle Hancock, "Bringback Figure Costume #1 and Costume #2," 2014. Photo: Daniel Veintimilla.



Trenton Doyle Hancock, "What the Bringback Brought, Letter to the Greenfield Prize Selection Committee at the Hermitage Artist Retreat," 2014. Photo: Daniel Veintimilla.

The context of Trenton Doyle Hancock's past exhibitions weighs heavily on his present. With Hancock's epic fiction circling the creatures known as Mounds, each successive exhibition often builds upon the narrative of the preceding one, becoming a segment of a larger story. This is true to the extent that the progression of his practice is largely conflated with the progression of the narrative. It can account for the reason Hancock's 2012 solo exhibition at James Cohan Gallery, *...And Then It All Came Back To Me*, was particularly conspicuous at the time, and feels, regrettably, anomalous now.

Sarasota's Ringling Museum is primarily known for its collection of art from the Renaissance through the Baroque (and specifically its holdings of enormous paintings by Peter Paul Rubens), however the museum has, in recent years, been increasingly focused on contemporary programming, an effort that arguably culminates in *EMIT: What the Bringback Brought*.

Since his inclusion as the youngest artist in the 2000 Whitney Biennial, Hancock has garnered attention for his use of color, drawing, and the autobiographical drama that evolves through his paintings. However, the Cohan Gallery exhibition (2012) was marked by a departure, with Hancock moving away from the sophisticated story that had principally defined his approach. He made use of the rich visual language he had crafted while setting aside the narrative one, making for a collection of work that was more self-examining, unmediated by the complex symbolism of the Mounds and, in a way, liberated from it. Yet, what I anticipated could be a significant change in his practice going forward seems, now, like a respite from his typical mode of working. This

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new exhibition sees Hancock shift away from the forthright introspection of *...And Then It All Came Back To Me* and back to his personal mythos in stronger force.

This was facilitated in part by The Greenfield Prize, a \$30,000 award and residency which Hancock won in 2013. The prize is awarded to artists working in a variety of disciplines based on proposals to be completed during a two-year period. Previously awarded to Sanford Biggers in 2010, Hancock is the second visual artist to win the prize since its inception in 2009.

The award and residency, coupled with support from the University of South Florida-based workshop, Graphicstudio, allowed Hancock to further expound on his well-known saga in media that is new to his body of work. Indeed, *EMIT* can feel like a fully-formed marketing push toward the inevitable feature film, exhibiting costumes, plush dolls, action figures, drawings resembling concept and storyboard sketches, as well as a video piece that serves like a movie trailer. Some of the artworks' information labels even resemble price tags.

Visually, *EMIT* is a very different exhibition than *...And Then It All Came Back To Me*. At its core the 2012 exhibition was a painting survey, exclusively two-dimensional. Now, the most fully-realized works are decidedly sculptural. For example, the furry black-and-white striped creatures that made unnamed cameos in 2012, are this current show's namesake: the Bringback. Two of them, standing six feet tall, occupy a corner near the entrance. They stare at the gallery with bloodshot eyes like those of tired sentinels. The sculptural shift clearly corresponds with Hancock's renewed efforts to reify the world of the Mounds.

Nonetheless, as disparate as the two exhibitions may seem, they are connected by theme, and draw from the same autobiographical source. The eight-page handwritten proposal Hancock initially sent to the Greenfield Prize Committee is framed and mounted on the gallery's rear wall. In it, Hancock notably explains: "These works show evidence that the painted surface can become a mirror, revealers of mystic truths, exposers of hidden existential binders." This may be true. However, in the context of his previous work, *EMIT: What the Bringback Brought* feels more like a revelation replete with obligatorily cryptic typology.

Recurringly, I experience this veering from recollection to revelation between the two solo exhibitions, particularly in Hancock's use of a specific motif. For instance, the straightforward depiction of a childhood memory of his grandmother's linoleum-floor patterning formed the centerpiece of *...And Then It All Came Back To Me*, in a large painting titled *The Den* (2012). The pattern reemerges in the central work of this new exhibition, the video *What the Bringback Brought* (2015). Like a vinyl skin, the autumn-hued honeycomb arrangement wraps the skull of a

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creature Hancock calls a Bringling. A pair of latex-gloved hands massage the creature's temples, the fingers squeaking gratingly against the Bringling's head.

In the same video during a later scene, a Bringback sits behind a white desk, its front panel emblazoned with the word *EMIT* in black paint. The same panel hangs high on the opposite wall over the Bringback models, making plain the exhibition's title as literally *TIME* reversed. It reveals this Ringling Museum exhibition as a vehicle of personal retrospection for Hancock, working in the medium of his childhood: sci-fi and horror films, comics, toys, and magazines. These popular mechanisms for storytelling and Hancock's saga are a logical pairing, and perhaps it was always an inevitability. Yet this coupling seems to only enshroud the saga's most compelling character, its artist.

Again, it's difficult to walk through *EMIT* and not pine for the directness of *...And Then It All Came Back To Me*. For that previous exhibition, Hancock made deft use of visual tools he had been honing over the course of the previous decade, finally unhindered by the strictures of a coherent fictional narrative. *EMIT: What the Bringback Brought* reverses that: it finds Hancock's storytelling at its strongest, but at the potential cost of poaching attention from his painting, and leaving behind a rarer sort of earnestness.