

# ARTFORUM

Trenton Doyle Hancock at Shulamit Nazarian

Daniel Gerwin | October 4, 2022



Trenton Doyle Hancock, *Metes and Bounds*, 2022, acrylic, graphite, paper, canvas collage, and plastic bottle caps on canvas, 36 x 25 1/4 x 3".

What do you get when a consummate graphic talent and profound thinker spends two years in Covid seclusion? “Good Grief, Bad Grief,” Trenton Doyle Hancock’s second exhibition in Los Angeles. A group of roiling, byzantine mixed-media paintings detail the urban development of the Vegans, central characters in Hancock’s fictional universe. Three Vegan suburbs and one city (each the subject of an individual work), as well as the epically cinematic *The Skint Alterpiece: Vegans Make Deposits at the Tofu Bank*, 2020, are rendered in black, white, and touches of red. Hancock’s images are as antic as ever, like *Mad* magazine on steroids. The artist’s protagonists pursue a confounding array of activities—driving bizarre bone-vehicles and, it seems, mining for tofu and finding the occasional brain—with a level of industriousness rivaled only by Hancock’s own hand. A back room holds pages from what will ultimately be a four-part, full-color graphic novel recounting the saga of the Vegans and their opposites, a group of rhizomatic beings called Mounds.

Yet the other paintings on view feel comparatively inward, offering meditations on Blackness, the pressures of artistic success, and the dilemmas of being American. Three of these works feature Torpedo Boy (the artist’s superhero avatar) atop Hancock’s supine body, brutally gripping his creator’s head. In them, Torpedo Boy looks terrified as a struggling Hancock—or rather, a fictionalized version of him—points to the drawings he’s clutching, perhaps reminding his assailant who’s really in charge. In *It Takes Three or Four to Even the Score*, 2022, Torpedo Boy holds a rope (a chilling symbol of American racial violence) that is tied around the wrist of Hancock’s left hand, which grips a large phallic pencil that dangles before his crotch, abjectly pointing downward. An assortment of disfigured ghouls leer at Hancock: a bloodthirsty audience ready to do him in. In this presentation, the artist poignantly explores the brambles of his own psychology and the endless traps of structural racism: As Hancock put it to me when we spoke, “What must a Black American give up to achieve the American Dream, and what are the limits to the possibility of freedom?”