

Trenton Doyle Hancock : Bye and bye (nine sad etchings)

Author

Hancock, Trenton Doyle, 1974-

Date

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Publisher

The Museum of Modern Art, Department
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Exhibition URL

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Trenton Doyle Hancock

Bye and Bye (Nine Sad Etchings) 2002

Portfolio of nine etchings and aquatints
Each plate: approx. 10 × 7 7/8" (25.4 × 20 cm)

Publisher: Dunn and Brown Contemporary,

Dallas, and James Cohan Gallery, New York

Printer: Flatbed Press, Austin, Texas

Edition: 24

Fund for the Twenty-First Century

Trenton Doyle Hancock (American, born 1974) is a visionary artist whose influences include the bizarre satirical paintings and etchings of James Ensor and the comic book–style caricatures of Philip Guston. Hancock's idiosyncratic imagery also reflects his absorption in such diverse sources as popular comics, creation myths, the Bible, and the work of outsider artists. Although he is best known for his collaged felt paintings, prints and drawings are also an important aspect of his oeuvre. His works in all of these mediums portray a crowded, fecund universe populated with an array of humorous allegorical characters rendered in an obsessively detailed style.

All of these works are part of a strange, ongoing epic that Hancock has been developing since childhood. His stories are complex, but taken together the works are meant to illustrate various episodes in the history of a group of creatures he has invented called "Mounds." Half-plant and half-animal, these Mounds are the tragicomic protagonists in a vast narrative that weaves allegory, word play, humor, and satire into a tale of struggle, survival, and redemption.

The **Bye and Bye** portfolio concerns the death of Mound #1, a peaceful being represented in the first plate as a dead tree with a skeletal head. The other plates in the series show different animals who have put aside their predatory instincts to pay homage to him. Each plate contains handwritten texts of the animals' eulogies, which serve as both a storytelling device and a means of creative wordplay, with Hancock's humor evident throughout. In the elephant's words, for example, the letters appear backward, a result of the reverse imaging that can occur in printmaking, which

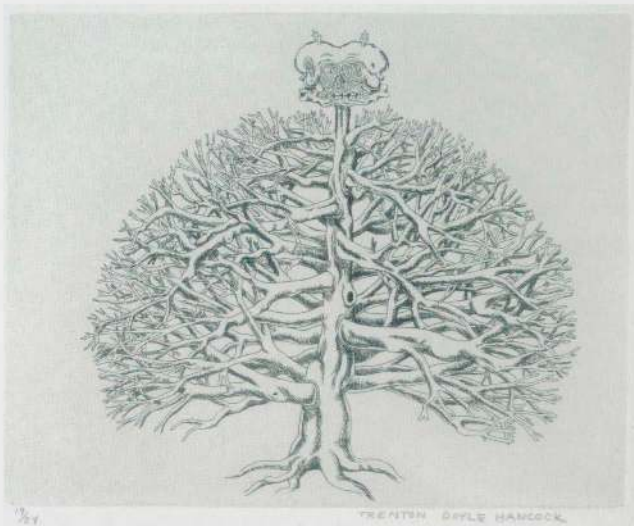
Hancock has purposely used to confound us. More comically, the lion's text concludes, "The presence of the great mound was felt by us all and shall be missed.... Oh, by the way, I suggest you guys scatter, eulogizing makes me hungry."

Bye and Bye is one of many prints and portfolios published in the last ten years that together can be taken as a revival of the "old master" technique of etching. Invented around 1500, the medium has gone in and out of favor over time. The current fascination with etching stands in contrast to the dominance of large-scale woodcuts and lithographs in the 1980s and 1990s. It further departs from the many Conceptual and photo-based print projects of the same period, in which the execution of the work was often somewhat removed from the "hand" of the artist. It also counters more recent expectations for a strong emergence of digital printmaking. Characterized by exceptionally fine, fluid, often meticulous lines, etching is usually executed on a small scale and results in images that inspire close inspection and subtle delight. For many contemporary artists, including Hancock, the delicacy, intimacy, and precision of this medium lend themselves especially well to their very personal, even diaristic subjects.

Starr Figura, Assistant Curator
Department of Prints and Illustrated Books

Produced in conjunction with the exhibition **The Compulsive Line: Etching 1900 to Now**, January 25–April 17, 2006

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