

THE MENIL COLLECTION PRESENTS  
*CONTEMPORARY FOCUS: TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK*

Exhibition Features Hancock's *Epidemic! Presents: Step and Screw!*  
Acquired by the Menil in 2015



**HOUSTON, TEXAS, January 10, 2018** – The Menil Collection is proud to present *Contemporary Focus: Trenton Doyle Hancock*, the second installment of the Menil's *Contemporary Focus* exhibition series highlighting the museum's recent acquisitions of works by living artists. The presentation is curated by Associate Curator of Contemporary Art Irene Shum and opens to the public with a reception on Friday, January 25, 2019 at 7 p.m.

Acquired by the Menil in 2015, Houston-based artist Trenton Doyle Hancock's *Epidemic Presents: Step and Screw!* consists of a series of 30 works on paper that combine illustrations and text in a comic strip-like format. Black-and-white drawings mounted on the top half of each panel depict Torpedoboy, one of Hancock's alter egos.

Answering a call for help, Torpedoboy finds himself inside a dark shed. A hooded figure asks him to step on a stool and screw in a lightbulb, thus revealing to Torpedoboy that he is dangerously surrounded by Ku Klux Klansmen. On the bottom half of each panel, Hancock includes anecdotal text related to his own upbringing in North Texas; in many instances these dates and details are associated with the history of racism in the American South. Visually, Hancock's Klansmen directly reference the hooded and masked figures in the work of the American artist Philip Guston, who

Hancock calls “his artistic father figure.” Similar to Guston, who was aware of KKK activity as a Jewish youth in Los Angeles in the 1930s, Hancock, who is black, grapples with the legacy of the Klan in Paris, Texas, where he was raised.

For this presentation of *Epidemic! Presents: Step and Screw!*, viewers physically experience the narrative of the story. The drawings are installed in a shed constructed in the center of the gallery and illuminated by a single light bulb. The artist has created a new tableau of site-specific drawings on the exterior walls of the shed and surrounding gallery walls, extending the artwork well beyond the thirty framed drawings.

Said Trenton Doyle Hancock, “I am interested in a culture of people who think progressively and want to move forward, and oftentimes there are growing pains involved with the questioning and the waging of mini-revolutions with yourself. I hope that viewers will challenge themselves in this way by going inside the shed and experiencing Torpedoboy’s journey.”

Said Curator Irene Shum, “*Epidemic! Presents: Step and Screw!* is an important recent addition to the Menil’s growing collection of contemporary art. It is a thought-provoking work that challenges viewers. The Menil’s founders were thoroughly committed to civil rights and believed in the transcendent nature of art to elevate awareness. With this presentation, the museum both honors the founders’ legacy and remains committed to exploring pressing issues of our day.”

Overall, Hancock’s work draws from an elaborate self-created mythology that he has been developing since childhood. At age 10, Hancock created Torpedoboy, a central figure in his Moundverse, an imaginary world where an epic struggle unfolds between good and evil. Inhabiting Moundverse are mythical creatures – the half-animal, half-plant Mounds and their aggressors, the humanoid Vegans. Torpedoboy serves as protector of the Mounds. This ongoing semi-autobiographical saga allows the artist to explore complex social issues and engage in critical thinking.

### **About the Artist**

Houston-based artist Trenton Doyle Hancock has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, most recently at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis in early 2018 and with an upcoming show at MASS MoCA opening in March 2019. Featured in the 2000 and 2002 Whitney Biennials, Hancock became one of the youngest artists in history to participate. In addition to the Menil, Hancock’s work is in the permanent collections of

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Studio Museum of Harlem, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas among others. He received his BFA from Texas A&M University (1997) and his MFA from Temple University (2000). In 2019, he was awarded the Texas Medal of Arts from the Texas Cultural Trust.

Major Funding for the *Contemporary Focus* series is provided by Cecily E. Horton. This exhibition is generously supported by the City of Houston.

### **Public Programs**

#### **Public Opening**

**Friday, January 25, 2019, 7 p.m.**

The public is invited to a reception celebrating the opening of *Contemporary Focus: Trenton Doyle Hancock*.

#### **Artist Talk: Trenton Doyle Hancock in conversation with Senior Curator Michelle White**

**Wednesday, February 6, 2019, 7 p.m.**

Hancock and White discuss the artist's unique approach to storytelling through drawing on the occasion of the Menil's presentation of the recently acquired group of the artist's drawings, *Epidemic! Presents: Step and Screw!* on view in the exhibition. This program is free and open to everyone.

### **About the Menil Collection**

Houston philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to foster greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection's main building opened to the public. Today, some thirty years later, the Menil Collection consists of a group of five art buildings and green spaces located within a residential neighborhood. The Menil embodies the ideals and values of its founders, in particular, that art is vital to human life and should be readily accessible to all persons.

Following a seven-month renovation, the Menil Collection's main building, the first United States museum designed by Renzo Piano, reopened to the public in September

2018. This year, the building will host rotating displays drawn entirely from the museum's growing permanent collection.

**On view at the Menil**

*The Condition of Being Here: Drawings by Jasper Johns* – On view through January 27, 2019

*Collection Close-Up: John Cage* – Opening February 1, 2019

*Roni Horn: When I Breathe, I Draw* – Opening February 15, 2019

*Collection Close-Up: Dorothea Tanning* – Opening June 28, 2019

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**Image:** Trenton Doyle Hancock, *Epidemic! Presents: Step and Screw!* (detail), 2014. The Menil Collection, Houston. © Trenton Doyle Hancock

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