

TRENTON  
DOYLE  
HANCOCK  
MIND  
OF  
THE  
MOUND:  
CRITICAL  
MASS

# THE COSMIC UNCONSCIOUS, OR A PLATE OF SHRIMP

By Denise Markonish

**Welcome to Mind of the Mound: Critical Mass. This is your guide, glossary, and map. Step inside and enjoy the ride!**

## WHAT IS A MOUND?

Mounds are gentle plant/human hybrids born in beautiful fields of flowers and now residing in forests around the world. Mounds are peaceful creatures, and they help us see the world in a more colorful way. They clean the environment, leeching toxins from the earth with their deep root systems. All is good until their enemies, the Vegans—mutants who consume tofu and spill Mound blood every chance they get—try to kill them. Luckily—or maybe not—the Mounds have Torpedoboy on their side; a yellow spandexed, tighty-whities-wearing superhero, or, more accurately, antihero. Torpedoboy tries to save the day but doesn't always have luck on his side. This story of the Mounds and Vegans forms the core of the Moundverse—a vast creation myth containing these and other characters, all of whom spring from the mind and hands of artist Trenton Doyle Hancock.

## WHO IS TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK?

Hancock grew up in Paris, Texas, to a family of evangelical Baptist ministers and missionaries, supplementing his religious upbringing with comic books, horror films, and Greek mythology. In the fifth grade, he invented Torpedoboy, who has evolved into the character we see today. At this young age, Hancock already began to develop a singular and systematic mythology, which has progressed over the years. Ultimately birthing his own creation myth—envisioned through paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, videos, and installation—this body of work has coalesced at MASS MoCA, reaching a critical mass decades in the making.

Hancock's narratives explore universal themes from the battle between good and evil, to questions of authority and moral relativism, to stories about race and religion. All the while, he creates a truly unique body of visual art referencing artists such as painters Philip Guston and Henry Darger; artist and set designer

for *Pee-wee's Playhouse* Gary Panter, alongside unapologetic nods to Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*; Marvel superheroes; illustrations by Art Spiegelman and R. Crumb; films and television shows such as *Halloween III*, *Repo Man*, *Clash of the Titans*, and *The Muppet Show*; and toys, all the toys you can imagine from approximately 1972 to 1992. These references (and more) share equal footing in Hancock's world, co-mingling to form the foundation of Moundverse.

## WHAT IS THE MOUNDVERSE?

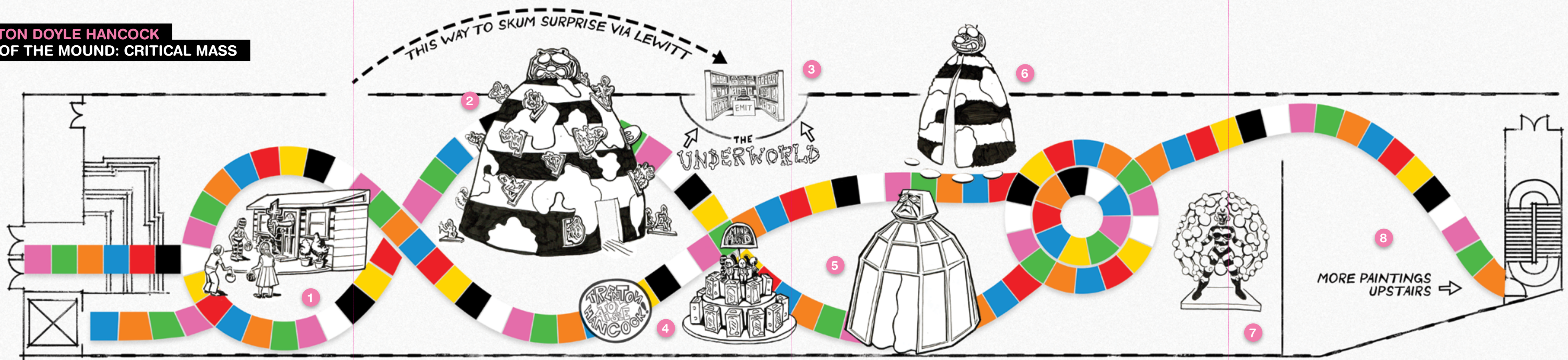
For Hancock, Mounds are more than just characters; they symbolize a way of life. In his words, they “are not only natural depositories for memories and other bits of discarded humanity, but they are a way for us to build a collective psycho-emotional hierarchy, as well as a way to describe an individual's intuitive profile.” In this sense, the Mound is a site where the accumulation and classification of artworks exist alongside his toy collecting, comic books, superheroes, Garbage Pail Kids, and childhood drawings. Mounds proliferate through culture, functioning as a rhizomatic network—living structures connected via an underground root system—turning them into one being, like in the 1984 film *Repo Man* when the character Miller explains the connectivity of the universe, saying: “suppose you're thinkin' about a plate o' shrimp. Suddenly someone'll say, like, plate, or shrimp, or plate o' shrimp out of the blue, no explanation. No point in lookin' for one, either. It's all part of a cosmic

unconsciousness.” This connectivity runs deep as we begin to recognize Mounds in the Tower of Babel, a beehive, and even the mashed potato tower from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). Hancock seamlessly conflates culture and memory, in order to share his mythology with the world.

## WHAT IS CRITICAL MASS?

On July 5, 2011, Hancock wrote a letter to the James Cohan Gallery outlining a project for which he was preparing to go “full geek” and turn all of his various passions (comic books, toys, movies, etc.) into a single physical manifestation, culminating in a critical mass of the Moundverse. Eight years later at MASS MoCA, he invites us to step into this prophetic vision. Leaving no surface untouched, inside these galleries you will find paintings in which Hancock explores self-portraits as a toy-maker, alongside others in which his characters run completely amok; banners depicting the first set of drawings from his forthcoming 400-page graphic novel illustrating the Moundverse; dolls manufactured of four characters (Bringbacks, Souls, Undom Endgle, and Torpedoboy); and a collection of found dolls, Halloween costumes, and more. With this ambitious environment, Hancock comes full circle, merging his own backstory with his created mythology, while reminding us that Mounds are museums... but also basements, living rooms, memories, and, most importantly, our collective understanding (and even a plate of shrimp). As he states: “Inside the Mind of the Mound, anything is possible!”

TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK  
MIND OF THE MOUND: CRITICAL MASS



WHAT'S INSIDE

- 1

**HALLOWEEN HOUSE**  
A replica of Hancock's grandmother's house, complete with a demon-expelling cross, extending from the front door to ward off potential trick-or-treaters dressed in costumes of Hancock's characters: the Bringback, Torpedoboy, and Painter.
- 2

**MOUND MUSEUM**  
An homage to Claes Oldenburg's Mouse Museum (1965-77), a Mickey Mouse-shaped structure full of the artist's renditions of iconic pop culture objects. Hancock's version contains selections of his vast toy collection.
- 3

**SKUM SURPRISE/ THE UNDERWORLD**  
A diorama visible in the Sol LeWitt light well through the second-floor windows in adjacent Building 7. Inside, a scene from *What the Bringback Brought* shows the mutated toy-maker frozen in time. Outside, vegans climb the surface.
- 4

**TOY AISLE/TRENTON'S TOY ISLE**
- 5

**JUNIOR MOUND**  
Junior's exterior is covered in puzzles of Hancock's paintings, and inside is the video *What the Bringback Brought*, in which Hancock is kidnapped by Bringbacks. The artist himself becomes a Bringback, who then produces toys related to the Moundverse.

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF THE MOUNDVERSE

- ALMACROYN**  
Mother of a prehistoric ape family, and wife of Homerbutas. She is killed by her husband during a dispute over his "infidelity" in the creation of the Mounds. Mother to Brouthescam and Cromalyna.

**BRINGBACKS**  
Humanoid creatures with alternating black and white fur bands, no mouth, and abnormally large eyes. They have no awareness of their own existence and are minions of a Mound named Junior, who eats the humans that these creatures bring to him.
- BROUTHESCAM**  
Son of a prehistoric ape family and child of Homerbutas and Almacroyn. Brother of Cromalyna and Father of Veganism.

**CROMALYNA**  
Daughter of a prehistoric ape family and child of Homerbutas and Almacroyn. Sister of Brouthescam. Mother of Veganism, also known as Queen Lyna.

**GREAT MOUND MASSACRE**  
The violent slaughter of the first crop of baby Mounds by Brouthescam and Cromalyna. During the massacre, the wobbling of the Mounds caused the Earth to split, sending the siblings into the Lower Realm to become the first Vegans.
- HOMERBUCTAS**  
Father of a prehistoric ape family and creator of the Mounds. Husband of Almacroyn and father to Brouthescam and Cromalyna.

**THE LEGEND**  
Name given to the oldest living Mound; also, known as Mound #1.

**LOID**  
A stark, stern, paternal, god-like energy who acts to balance the spirit energy named Painter. Loid is worshipped by the Vegans and is symbolized by written text.
- MOUND**  
The name given to a species of human-plant hybrid that resides in the forest. Mounds were born when Homerbutas ejaculated into a field of flowers.

**PAINTER**  
A colorful, lenient, maternal, god-like energy who acts to balance the spirit energy named Loid, she is symbolized as color.

**VEGANS**  
A species of mutant, inbred humans created after the Great Mound Massacre, when siblings Brouthescam and Cromalyna were relegated to the Lower Realm. Vegans are skeletal creatures who love tofu and cannot see color.



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Trenton Doyle Hancock (b. 1974 in Oklahoma City, OK) earned his BFA from Texas A&M University, Commerce (formerly East Texas State University) and his MFA from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. He was featured in the 2000 and 2002 Whitney Biennial exhibitions. His 2014 exhibition, *Skin and Bones, 20 Years of Drawing* at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, traveled to Akron Art Museum, OH; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; and Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach. Solo exhibitions include: The Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah and Atlanta, GA; the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC; the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX; The Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL; Olympic Sculpture Park at the Seattle Art Museum, WA; and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Hancock's work is in the permanent collections of the Dallas Museum of Art, TX; The Menil Collection, Houston, TX; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, NY; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In 2017, Hancock was named Art League Houston's Texas artist of the year. He is represented by James Cohan Gallery, NY; Hales Gallery, London; and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles. He lives and works in Houston, TX.



## TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK MIND OF THE MOUND: CRITICAL MASS

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**MASS MoCA**

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