

Mulholland, Katie, "Trenton Doyle Hancock: Skin & Bones at CAMH," *Glasstire*, July 21, 2014.  
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## Trenton Doyle Hancock: Skin & Bones at CAMH

Trenton Doyle Hancock's *Skin & Bones* at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston has been up for a while. Why write about it now? Because it's frightening.

I first encountered Hancock when he gave a lecture at the University of Houston, where he came off as an honest, awkward, and articulate comic book nerd. He was confident, and determined to hammer his ideas into ink or canvas, no matter how large or absurd. He said something then that struck me like a 2x4 to the kneecap: "If you make a piece of art and are immediately frightened by it, you are getting somewhere." This idea resonated through *Skin & Bones*.

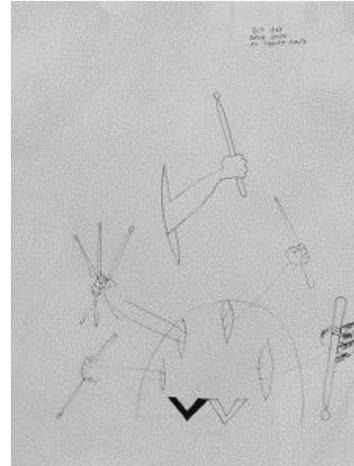


Walking into the show is like getting slapped in the face with a hive of bees: so much visual information it might cause an allergic reaction. The gallery is so dense with video, painting, and works on paper that you can't really approach it; the exhibition approaches you. The CAMH's press release said it "features more than two hundred works of art as well as a collection of the artist's notebooks, sketchbooks, and

studies." which gave me the idea that there would be tons of careful planning in evidence, mock-ups for large manicured drawings, like what could be found in my own studio or those of my friends. What I found was way more chaotic, a straight up Charlie Foxtrot. The whole exhibition looked as if whatever was not tied up elsewhere was dumped on the floor of the CAM and put under museum glass. I felt duped, but in a good way.

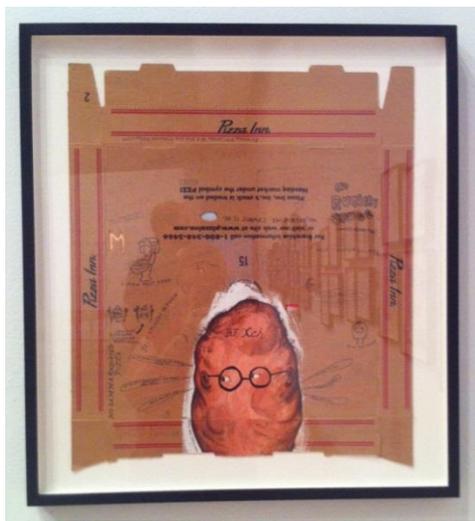
# JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Nestled amongst a cluster of thirty or so other drawings, Drum Man is a small, primitive pencil scribble on printer paper that includes five floating human limbs holding drum sticks with “buy any drum stuff at thrift shops” written hastily in the upper right corner. It’s not particularly well executed and it is easily the dumbest drawing in the entire show, but its inclusion is important: it informs the humor and aesthetic of other very dumb, yet very funny drawings like *Pizza Inn: Only Mean Animals Die for Our Meat, We Promise* and *Torpedo Boy Peeing*.



*Drum Boy*

*Pizza Inn: Only Mean Animals Die for Our Meat, We Promise* is a beautifully framed, grease-stained pizza box, decorated with



*Pizza Inn: Only Mean Animals Die for Our Meat, We Promise*

several toilet doodles, characters, and complaints, which form a halo around a spud-like, bespectacled face. This drawing was made on a gross pizza box and saved for 16 years. This absurdity is, for me, what makes this piece breathtaking.

Placing *Torpedo Boy Peeing* at the front and center of the exhibition is brilliant. A box labeled “Art Boards” stand on a plinth, open to display a primitive drawing of *Torpedo Boy* (and his mythically large baloney pony) showering a rainbow of radioactive piss onto a pile of glued-on studio garbage. It is crude enough to make blue-hairs cringe and mesmerize middle school boys.

I gravitate towards thoughtful, detailed, and larger artwork, and I found these three pieces unnerving. They go against everything I typically find to be beautiful and intelligent, but, in the context of this exhibition, they are playful and extremely smart. They look like they were dug out of the darkest depths of Hancock’s studio to reveal a more raw and condensed version of the humor that fuels Hancock’s monumental works of layered paper and lore, like *Friends Indeed*.



*Torpedo Boy Peeing*

## JAMES COHAN GALLERY

These dumb and seemingly insignificant drawings are the glue that holds the worlds of his greatest works together. *Skin and Bones* is an opportunity to see a complete goofball and romantic fall brutally in love with something as fickle as drawing, over and over and over again. No two drawings are the same. No total mastery of skill is ever obtained. Like Wile E. Coyote after *The Road Runner*, the chase is what keeps Hancock in the running as one of America's most prolific artists.



*Friends Indeed*