

# JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Smith, Roberta, "Trenton Doyle Hancock Fear," *The New York Times*, January 2, 2009

## The New York Times

### Trenton Doyle Hancock

Fear

James Cohan Gallery  
533 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
Through Jan. 10

Trenton Doyle Hancock has cut to the chase. For his latest solo show at this gallery he has trimmed his epic, racially charged battles between comical color-loving meat-eating blobs and knobby white vegan villains to a single, topical subject: fear. He has also curtailed the eccentric buildup of materials usual to his collage paintings, although he continues to implicate the gallery walls to eye-popping effect.

The two large walls that greet the viewer are dotted with large, dark drops of liquid that ominously suggest everything from blood, sweat and tears to rain, floods and oil; each contains one of the letters of f-e-a-r.

Black waves lap along the baseboards, like a chorus line of shark fins.

Arrayed on top of this sinister wall covering, nine paintings put a single cartoonish motif through various changes in palette, material, symbolism and emotional gist. It is the upper half of a frightened face indicated by a domed pate and flaring, archlike eyes; the variations rehearse Mr. Hancock's considerable formal arsenal while also driving home one of the least appealing facts of contemporary life: We probably have a lot to fear besides fear itself.

Other works evince Mr. Hancock's signature crowded, seething compositions, especially "Descent and Dissension." But the most powerful work here indicates a new sense of unity, economy and for-the-jugular directness.

"The Bad Promise," a large painting on view in the gallery's second room, depicts a single black hand extended against a background of the raining drops, here pink on black. Obsessively textured, careworn and big as an island, the hand is also drilled, like wood, with many large stigmata. At once tragic and comic, this work makes good on Mr. Hancock's debts to artists like R. Crumb and Philip Guston with a finesse all its own. As much a drawing as a painting, it is an altogether astounding sight.

ROBERTA SMITH