

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

BEAUX MENDES

selected texts & press

BEAUX MENDES

“My paintings contain a double negative: the surface works to undo itself and representation is obscured to reveal a subject that is not an image of the past, but an impression directly inscribed in it.”

— Beaux Mendes

Firmly rooted in materials and direct observation, Beaux Mendes’ paintings are also enigmatically animated with overlaid layers of abstraction and latent apparitional figures. Their work treats painting as a transitory medium, while consistently revealing the physical qualities of the used support. Involving rituals of passage and pilgrimage, their practice invites estrangement and altered states of experience resulting from repeated trips to sites for painting, often remote and obscure. These sites conjure a relay of sensory information and embedded imagery that phase between environment and artist, generating a range of phenomena recorded by way of an artwork as conduit. As such, appearances arrive as much as they withdraw, opening spaces of irresolution. The visual effect of their work is to manifest a unique and reflexive threshold of in-betweenness, a shifting sense of positionality always bordering on transgression. Situated within the different configurations proposed by Mendes’ paintings lies the crux of their poetics: an image is a kind of transference, its nature is never wholly perceptible, let alone conceivable—apprehension is a balancing act on changing, uncertain ground.

Beaux Mendes (b. 1987, New York) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. They hold MFAs from University of California, Los Angeles as well as from Bard Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts. Mendes was included in Made in L.A. 2025, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, curated by Essence Harden and Paulina Pobocha and the 15th Gwangju Biennale, Pansori: A Soundscape of the 21st Century, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud. Recent solo presentations include The Manzanita Loop, Miguel Abreu Gallery (2024); Black Forest, Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin (2023), Capitol Reef, Miguel Abreu Gallery (2022), and Willow Staging Area, STARS, Los Angeles (2021). Mendes’ work has been included in group shows at Matthew Brown (2026), Hoffman Donahue, Los Angeles (2025), OCHI, Idaho (2025), ProjectSD, Barcelona (2025), MAMOTH, London (2024), STARS, Los Angeles (2023, 2021), Drei, Cologne (2023), Meredith Rosen Gallery (2022), and Palazzo Tamborino Cezzi, Lecce, Italy (2021), among others. Mendes’ work is in the permanent collection of Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

In December 2026, Mendes’ solo exhibition will open at Secession, Vienna.

10/23/25, 10:40 AM

In L.A., a Loss of Nerve at the Hammer, but Art Hits in the Galleries - The New York Times

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

In L.A., a Loss of Nerve at the Hammer, but Art Hits in the Galleries

While “Made in L.A. 2025” falters, the city’s local art scene is thriving, with an abundance of smart new shows in commercial spaces.



Paintings and sculpture by Beaux Mendes at “Made in L.A. 2025,” Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. The critic found a correlation between trunks — of bodies, of trees — and the erotics of close looking. [via Hammer Museum, Los Angeles](#); Photo by Jeff McLane

By Jonathan Griffin

Reporting from Los Angeles

Oct. 23, 2025, 5:05 a.m. ET

The opening of “Made in L.A.,” the biennial survey of art from Los Angeles, is a red-letter day on the Southern Californian art calendar. On preview night at the Hammer Museum, in Los Angeles, lines regularly form around the block.

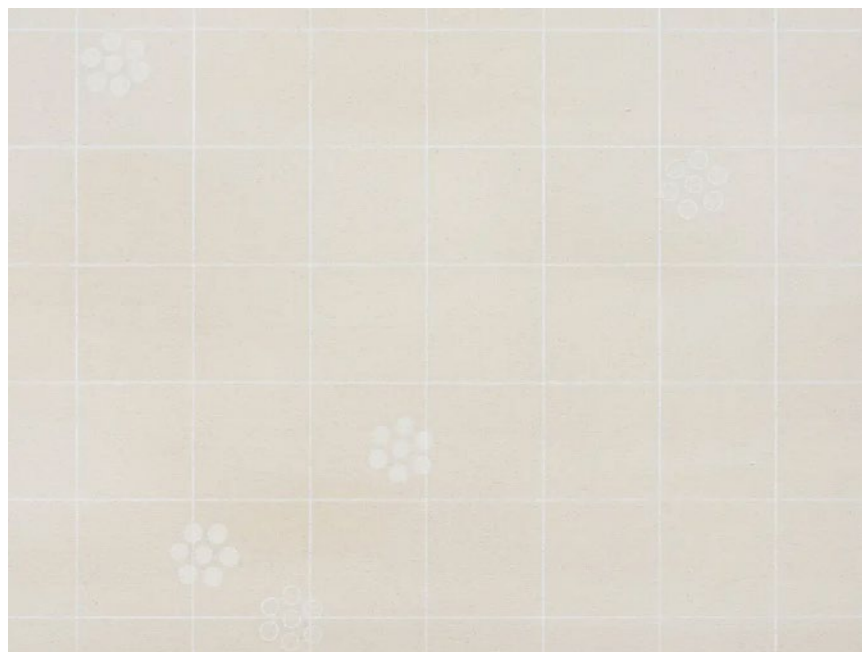
As its title promises, artists must work (or have worked) in Los Angeles, and it has built a reputation for introducing audiences to exciting new names, often young or overlooked, and bracing fresh work. If the winds align, “Made in L.A.” will also offer some form of curatorial argument: a vision of the city, or, say, a proposal for what it is lacking.

This year, I got almost none of that.

“Made in L.A. 2025” is organized by Essence Harden, an independent curator formerly with the California African American Museum, and Paulina Pobocha, until last year the senior curator at the Hammer and now the chair and curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Unusually, the pair chose not to title their edition, and made clear in the biennial’s catalog that their personal viewpoints were secondary to those of their artists. “We have no ideas. And I think that’s good,” Pobocha declared.

I respect their humility. And I share their sense of this city as often maddeningly dissonant. But at this time of uncertainty in the art world (and in the world at large), of a deepening culture war and disagreements over art’s role in resisting an administration bent on cutting funding for projects deemed “woke,” we need something inspiring. Something to rally around.

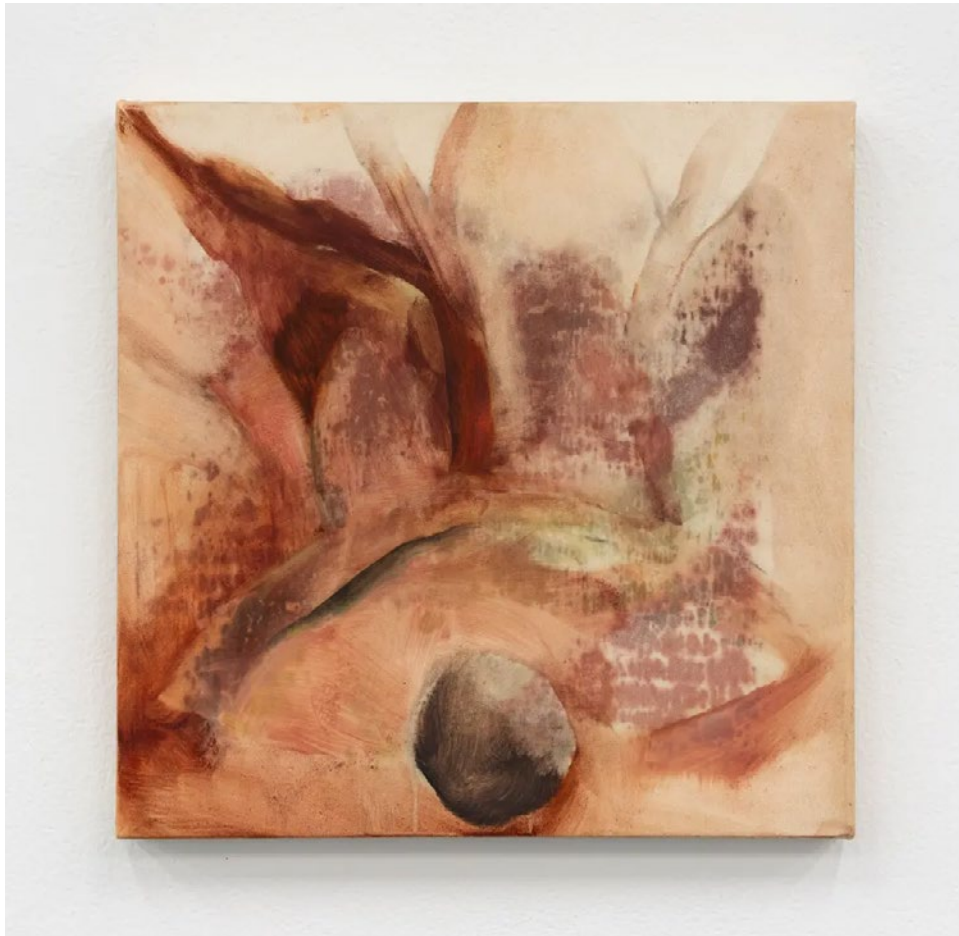


A detail of a painting by Hanna Hur, “Suspension,” 2025. Flower-like motifs painted in pearlescent Flashe on canvas. via Hanna Hur and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles: Photo by Pierre Le Hors

Sure, there are some strong artists represented, and in a few cases strong presentations of those artists' work. A vaulted gallery hosts a five-painting installation by [Hanna Hur](#), a delicate, wry homage to the Rothko Chapel in Houston. In a small gallery on the floor below, an installation by the conceptual artist [John Knight](#) featuring a folded electric blanket (plugged in) and a blurb touting real estate development is as stark and caustic as when it was made, in 1974. It's interesting to consider how much has changed over the past half-century, and how Knight's rancor contrasts with Hur's mildness.

<https://archive.ph/Kxj1b>

Page 4 of 17



Beaux Mendes, "Untitled," 2024. Oil on sheepskin parchment via Beaux Mendes, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Photo by Stephen Fraught

[Beaux Mendes](#), who has shown little in the city, is represented by a suite of tender, near-abstract paintings, some done en plein-air and resembling tree trunks, alongside a tusk-shaped sculpture and a frighteningly weird vitrine encasing models of a shrouded body on an operating table, flanked by partly nude doctors — one male doctor visibly aroused. (Mendes is too subtle an artist for puns about wood; my best guess is that there is, buried here, a correlation between trunks — of bodies, of trees — and the erotics of close looking.)

1/2/25, 10:26 AM

REVIEWS NEW YORK

Dan Adler on Beaux Mendes

Beaux Mendes

Miguel Abreu Gallery | Eldridge Street

By Dan Adler



1/2/25, 10:26 AM



<https://www.artforum.com/>

Beaux Mendes, *Untitled*, 2024, oil and charcoal on half-chalk ground on linen, 32 3/4 × 30".

1/5

“The Manzanita Loop,” the title of Beaux Mendes’s seductive show at Miguel Abreu Gallery, referred to a scenic, high-elevation trail in California’s Angeles National Forest. The artist spent prolonged periods there, camping and setting up studios in hidden thickets, sometimes laboring under adverse conditions. The twenty-five works on view, all from 2024 and most titled *Untitled*, represented the rare manzanita tree, with its bizarre reddish bark and contorted limbs. Mendes’s relationship to the plein air tradition is pleasingly thorny: Developed during the nineteenth century in part as a means of representing the changing details of weather and light, this approach to artmaking further evolved according to advancements in technology, including the invention of portable paint tubes and vivid

1 synthetic pigments. The Impressionist goal of achieving greater creative immediacy operated in tension with other forms of painting practiced by the likes of Frederic Edwin Church—who combined panoramic views with scrupulous renderings of flora, fauna, and minerals—while upholding Enlightenment ideas of expansionism and resource extraction. Mendes's pictures, however, have little to do with colonialist belief systems associated with capturing and controlling untamed terrain. Most of the works featured 1 fragmented depictions of trunks and branches, as though detailing the whole tree or surrounding vista would distract from the artist's purposes, which are more intimate in nature.

<https://www.artforum.com/essay/Ana-Mendieta-Debut-presentation-Museum-of-Modern-Art-2014-10-24>

2/5

One striking piece, executed on linen with oil and charcoal on a half-chalk ground, was exemplary in its portrayal of soiled limbs in subtle, and at times suggestive, ways. This partial tree might have been read quite easily as a figure with its arms raised, its ruddy skin-like bark adumbrated by bloodred streaks. A phallic “member” was delineated, but not fully—a would-be woody, as it were. Passages of forest green became funky when one eyed a crotch-like crevice where moisture (or other fluids) might reasonably collect. Moss might also suggest orifices or patches of pubic hair. Nearby, another linen-backed work was more explicit. It offered a scene of intercourse, with one bark-laden subject holding a leg aloft as another's genital area was modeled to resemble a triangle in layers of burgundy and black.

Once the seeds of erotic and anthropomorphic association are planted, they are difficult to shake. One engaging canvas featured several branches extending from a central base, with an appendage ornamented with lengths of ribbon or cloth. Rendered in shades of pink and red, these textile bits might have referred to rituals of tying, binding, and adorning. Darkened ovoid holes were shown here as well: They could be read as nesting places for forest creatures or sites for sex and, naturally, the expulsion of waste. Another limb in the same work, with leg- and knee-like sections, appeared to be striding off to the side; this bit of body was rendered in bruised shades with a coarseness that suggested the consequences of a rough-and-tumble encounter.

Recalling process-art practitioners who chose to repeatedly engage with landscape in intimate, sometimes arduous ways—take Ana Mendieta's 1973–80 series “*Siluetas*” (Silhouettes)—Mendes stages encounters with bodies

and their traces, while referring to issues arising from our desire for the other. The artist's reduced palette and simplified shapes reflect modernist precedents as well: During their proto-Cubist period, Braque and Picasso spent extended time in Horta de Ebro, Spain, and L'Estaque, France, returning to the same scenes as "neutral" vehicles for formal experimentation while depicting hills, trees, and human bodies with similar contours in ways that were meant to have corporeal implications.

Mendes's project does indeed pay homage to a singular site, reflecting a commitment to dwelling upon and communing with its strange and remote features as a means of examining their own identity—of finding one's place as a desiring being. Rather than upholding a strict fidelity to nature, Mendes's art focuses on the potential of these limbs and trunks—embracing and intertwining, wrestling and coupling—as a fluid environment for self-expansion and sensual fulfillment. Such a painted place serves as a meditative realm in which to explore difference while keeping all the injustices and inequities at bay, before one has to venture down the mountain again.

1/2/25, 10:26 AM

<https://www.artforum>

3/5

PNC

VARIETY

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11/5/24, 10:55 AM

Visual Arts Review: "The Manzanita Loop"—And Its Endless Search - The Arts Fuse

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By Helen Miller
<https://www.artsandculture.google.com/view/600370/visual-arts-review-the-manzanita-loop-a-fairy-tale-for-the-internet-age/>

1/13

Beaux Mendes' work piques the same interest in us as our information-hunger, set loose from any hope of a ground truth, and the endless searching this provokes.



Beaux Mendes, *Untitled*, 2024. Oil and mixed media on half chalk ground on linen. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery. Photo: Stephen Faight

Just when you thought Cezanne's legacy couldn't become anymore interesting, or S&M for that matter, Beaux Mendes wraps tree trunks in ribbons and unfurls twenty-five enchanting paintings 'neo-en-plein-air' in their second solo show, *The Manzanita Loop*, at Miguel Abreu Gallery through November 9.

Mendes studied at UCLA and Bard, as well as the Art Students League of New York, which is known for its atelier style training in traditional techniques. In the latest chapter of their hybrid practice bridging the studio and the woods, Mendes depicts the distinctive trees of the Manzanita Mountains, part of the Angeles Forest, in seasonal extremes — from the depths of winter to the peak heat of summer.



Beaux Mendes, *Untitled*, 2024. CNC routed live edge. Purpleheart wood. Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery. Photo: Stephen Faught

These polarities elegantly undergird other pairings in Mendes' show. In a single row of paintings across two high-ceilinged galleries and an adjacent hallway, moody browns alternate with luminescent grounds. One painting resembles another painting inside out. Bare canvas or linen appears like sun on wood or snow banks in fairy tales, recalling the "unmark" Cezanne is credited with discovering for modern art.

The influence of Cezanne's jewel-like watercolors is apparent in Mendes' translucent layers of oil paint. In compact compositions, they manage to create space. On one large wood panel, a tree-like figure grows in all four cardinal directions. Its gnarled and knotty center harbors faces in a pareidolic fashion. Washes of wood stain lend a yellow glow and darken charcoal marks. Depending on how you look at it, clitoral, vulvar shapes appear to fan into a rather magnificent upside-down cone headdress. A dancer/bather lifts her outstretched arms, and sheds her head – Leonardo da Vinci's rearing

horses. Timelapse.

A single painting on the central wall has the energy of an altarpiece. It is the largest painting in the show at 37 ¼ x 54 ½ inches, in oil and mixed media on half chalk ground on linen. It appears to depict the ribbon-wrapped specimen in the photograph featured on the exhibition postcard. In the top right and left quadrants of the painting, the adorned branches' ligamentous gestures evoke a wrenched chicken bone. Their gaping bark recalls famous anatomical illustrations such as "Muscles of the Back: Partial Dissection of a Seated Woman," a 1746 mezzotint by Jacques-Fabien Gautier d'Agoty, in which the rib cage of a ruddy, very-much-alive young woman springs open like a loosened corset.

Mendes' boxy framing might be a fanciful illustration of stolen pleasures on the brink of climate breakdown. The balanced cropping indicates an innocent view, but the work comes off as subversive. A wolf den or dark womb located at the bottom of several paintings can be identified, after repeated looks, as the head of a fallen, foreshortened figure at the base of a tree. The boundary between the figure's legs and the tree's sprawling branches is indecipherable. They may be in motion. Each tumultuous picture in this series is painted in a dense-wood fall palette. In the smallest, only 12 x 12 inches, an excess of oil or turpentine, or something painted on the backside of the goatskin parchment, creates a beautiful bruised effect

The more you look at these works, the more amorphously suggestive they become. The mandate here is not to see what is, as with traditional representation, or even to represent what is seen, as with impressionism, but to see what *isn't*, or what might be, or what could possibly be obscene. In another sumptuously muddy piece from 2020, someone's thighs (or multiple peoples' thighs) energetically crawl up the painting (or bed, or rock face). In a more graphic, if tidy work from 2024, the view shifts upwards. One prone figure, outlined in the quick contour line that any number of 19th and 20th century male artists used for nudes/dancers, and holding up her mauve-purple leg, is definitely (or probably, or maybe not) having sex with the other, who is possibly a fox.

2024's *David Copperfield: The Disappearing Man*, a distemper painting on linen, is the second largest and only titled work in the show. On first impression, it seems to be the most straightforward and cohesive as well. On closer look, however, we remember that Copperfield was a magician best known for his disappearing act. Here we find a version of him who, across the expanse of the canvas, appears to become less — or more — than human. Each manifestation of him is vaguer than the last, before the anthropomorphic shape disappears entirely into the blue-gray night.

11/5/24, 10:55 AM

Visual Arts Review: "The Manzanita Loop" — And Its Endless Search - The Arts Fuse

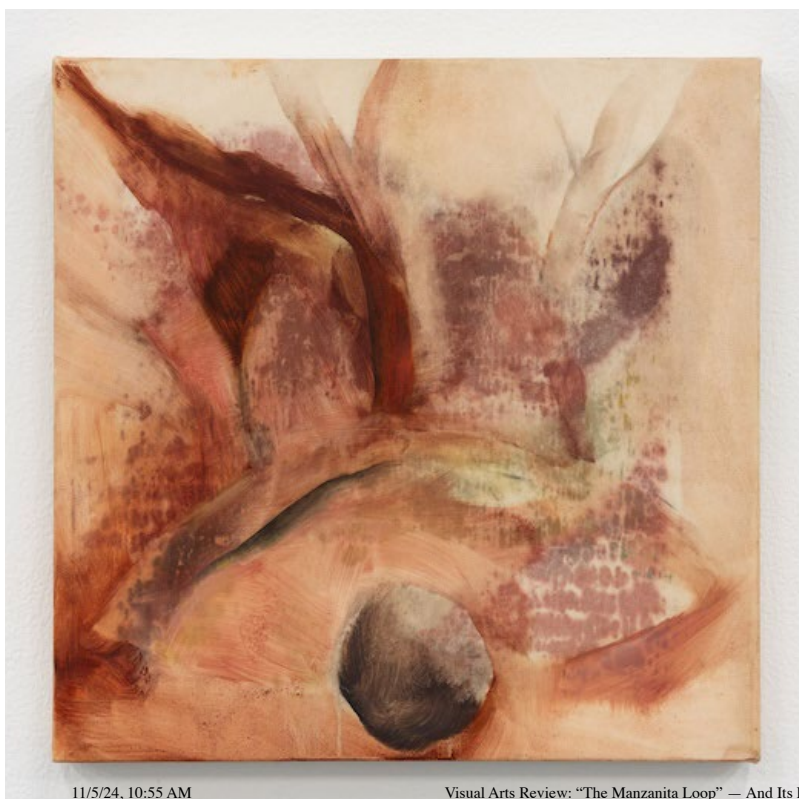


Beaux Mendes, *Untitled*, 2024. Wood stain and charcoal on panel. Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery.

Meanwhile, a gorgeous relief in CNC-routed Purpleheart wood repeats the form of an earlier piece composed of CNC-routed MDF covered in sheepskin parchment. The slick surface of the latter is as arresting as the exposed wood in the former. Both were made from materials associated with the land — from trees and sheep — and resemble that land. Both pieces play with scale — a kind of Bonsai effect — calling to mind snow-covered hills and a contour map. The precise, if unfamiliar shapes remind us that CNC stands for Computer Numerical Control and means that preprogrammed computer software directed these machined cuts.

Sooner or later the profile view of a face appears amidst the tree rings in the Purpleheart relief, rendering them contour lines of a cheek, chin, and forehead, further complicating the tools and techniques at play. Upon reflection, the same profile can be seen in the sheepskin covered MDF, or medium-density fibreboard — even without the benefit of contour lines, and thanks, in part, to shadows and creases where the off-white material has been pulled around the back of the board.

I can't stop thinking about the exhibition's centerpiece, its image of a two-part trunk wrapped in ribbons resembling plastic trail markers. The branches in the painting brace like bent wrists or arched backs (relatively flat, formless, genderless, wonderfully indistinct places on the body, which make a regular appearance in this show). The half chalk ground (part linseed oil, part reconstituted animal hide) glistens; each thing is one thing and another. Brushstrokes, wiped and clotted, of flesh pink, fresh red, and bloody brown have been applied at expert angles. The implication is that of a perpetual wrapping and unwrapping. I'm reminded of the undulating, overlapping torsos of dancers in *Meurtrière* (2019) from "The Bare Life" sequence of films by Philippe Grandrieux (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Grandrieux) — their desirous transformations, which crest over and over again, but never climax.



Beaux Mendes, *Untitled*, 2024. Oil on goatskin parchment.

In his essay on Cezanne's celebrated paintings of outsized bathers, titled "Freud's Cezanne" (1995), T. J. Clark describes "transparent" and "double figures" with buttocks and shoulders that keep turning into one another. He argues that the indeterminacy of what we might call "embodiment" disrupted and propelled Cezanne's determination to capture his empirical impressions once and for all. Yet, each stroke inevitably fell short of exactly conveying the painter's vision, as it remained stubbornly infused with his other senses, thoughts, imagination, empathy, and famous doubt.

While believing that something approaching truth could be arrived at through sensory experience, Cezanne was in fact demonstrating otherwise, unintentionally generating alternatives to a dogmatic positivism. Mendes takes up just such a non-instrumental view in the second to last painting of *The Manzanita Loop* — a screensaver of simple arches endlessly inscribed against an emerald green backdrop. At first, this gem of a painting didn't hold my attention, as it is anything but embodied; but then the time between internet searches that it represented started to feel like the territory of the show I had just traversed. Mendes' work piques the same interest in us as our information-hunger, set loose from any hope of a ground truth, and the endless searching this provokes.

Helen Miller is an artist. She teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design and Harvard Summer School.



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Classical Music Album Review: Klaus Mäkelä's Characterless Shostakovich Symphonies Nos. 4-6 (<https://artsfuse.org/300467/classical-music-album-review-klaus-makelas-characterless-shostakovich-symphonies-nos-4-6/>)

10/4/24, 12:11 PM

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Ben Eastham on 15th Gwangju Biennale - Criticism - e-flux

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Ben Eastham on 15th Gwangju Biennale - Criticism - e-flux

15th Gwangju Biennale, “PANSORI: A Soundscape of the 21st Century”

Ben Eastham



Julian Abraham a.k.a. “Togar,” *That is not still*, 2024. Film installation, 61:56 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and the 15th Gwangju Biennale.

Julian Abraham a.k.a. “Togar,” *That is not still*, 2024. Film installation, 61:56 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and the 15th Gwangju Biennale.

Various locations, Gwangju September 7–December 1, 2024

The main exhibition of the 15th Gwangju Biennale is entered via a gloomy “sound tunnel” filled with dissonant noise and leading into a silent room resembling an abandoned office space. The ceiling tiles of Cinthia Marcelle’s installation *There Is No More Place in This Place* (2019–24) are disarranged as if by some natural disaster, and the scrambling of the senses effected by these two environments marks a promising start to an exhibition that pledges to “reflect our new spatial conditions and the upheavals of the Anthropocene.”¹

Julian Abraham a.k.a. “Togar,” *That is not still*, 2024. Film installation, 61:56 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and the 15th Gwangju Biennale.

The central show at Gwangju Museum of Contemporary Art is spread across five floors that the visitor also enters from ground level. The atmosphere in its lower reaches is apocalyptic, exhausted, and dystopian, an aesthetic of broken wires and fragmentary ruins gathered under a dismal light and typified by an impressive series of monumental sculptures by Peter Buggenhout resembling John Chamberlain’s junked cars. Yet where the American artist conjured both the joy of the open road and the horror of the high-speed crash, Buggenhout’s crumpled architectures set the tone for the opening’s relatively narrow—and notably dour—emotional register.

Their collective title, “The Blind Leading the Blind,” neatly captures the impression that visitors to an exhibition curated by Nicolas Bourriaud with

10/4/24, 12:11 PM

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1/4

Sophia Park, Kuralai Abdukhalikova, and Barbara Lagie will be forced to stumble around in the dark for meaning. This invitation to embrace uncertainty and engage different modes of perception (as the title suggests, there is a strong emphasis on sound) feels apt to the historical moment, and put me in mind of Marianne Moore's proposal in "Poetry" that readers losing their faith in literature might move through texts like a "bat, / holding on upside down or in quest of something to / eat."³ On the flipside, it also hints that the biennale as a whole might not have any clear sense either of where it is going or how it might get there.

The second floor is the strongest section at this central site. Netta Laufer's compelling *25ft* (2016) comprises a video installation and still photographs repurposing surveillance footage from the border wall with Palestine, picking out the wild animals whose presence accentuates the inherently unnatural character of such divisions. Yet the sound bleed from the video upsets the delicate balance between Andrius Arutiunian's *Below* (2024) and Sung Tieu's *System's Void* (2024) in an intelligently twinned installation on the far side of a thin partition. The disruption of borders is clearly intended to serve a curatorial point—Bourriaud has enlisted "echoes, overlaps and chords" between elements in his "operatic" design for the exhibition, adjusting the volume of sound and video works to serve an overarching "soundscape"—but this gesture is here to the disservice of the work.⁴

In a neighboring space, Dora Budor's *Passive Recreation* (2024) presents a video shot on a Manhattan cruising ground transformed into family-friendly beauty spot, with all the tight control over social behavior that this entails, on a floor scattered with fragments of the electric fencing used to herd cattle. The irony of this unnerving work is hard to avoid: that unruly expressions of individual feeling should not be corralled into patterns more amenable to a supervisory authority is a lesson that might have been heeded.

That might be less of a problem if the end to which the works were being put were clearer. The wall texts that introduce the sections into which the exhibition is divided, each taking a property of sound as metaphor for an organizational principle, present ideas so broad as to defy meaningful application. From the opening chapter, entitled Feedback Effect, for example: "Space, whose division is always geopolitical, is the bond that joins together all emancipatory struggles, from feminism to decolonization to LGBTQIA+ rights."

The imprecise phrasing—space is not a "bond," the tacitly agreed boundary between mine and my neighbor's rooftop clotheslines is not "geopolitical"—is indicative of a convenient vagueness. Do emancipatory struggles exist in space? Yes, as do watering cans and Sophia Loren and Milton Keynes's many roundabouts. Do we learn anything from this statement beyond that the curators feel the need rhetorically to protest—rather too much—their political commitments because they fear that, left to its own devices, the show itself might not adequately communicate them on their behalf?

In fairness, they have selected many works capable of rising above their enlistment into every cause going. Beaux Mendes's hypnotizing paintings, notably *Jacob's Ladder* (2023), succeed because they work against easy interpretation, whether perceptual—they hover between abstraction and figuration, never allowing the eye to settle—or intellectual. Presented on a freestanding LED wall in front of metal bleachers, Lucy Raven's *Demolition of a Wall (Album 2)* (2022) uses military surveillance technology to represent the shockwaves at an explosives range in New Mexico, creating a work so

formally uncompromising as to resist incorporation into any overarching “visual symphony.” Similarly, Yuyan Wang’s *Green Grey Black Brown* (2024) features a montage of images of floods and landslides that—set to a glacial version of Yes’s “Owner of a Lonely Heart” (1983)—work to undermine the conceptual constructs for which metaphors like “feedback effect” and “resonance” are molds.

Collectively, they offer a reminder that works of art also exist in space. Which is to say, they are not abstractions: they have material effects that cannot perfectly be recuperated into linguistic or intellectual frameworks (a plausible working definition for a work of art). The sonic metaphors by which the biennial is arranged—resonance, harmony, polyphony, etc.—work as pleasing intellectual analogues for the organization of a society (dissonance is productive, harmony through the broadcast of diverse voices, and so on). But works of art are like people in that they cannot be so easily subordinated to logically satisfactory patterns of relation. From the same Moore poem, “these things are important not because a / high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are / useful.”

Much the most successful part of the exhibition is that which works against the proposition that works of art conceived independently, in wholly different contexts and in pursuit of diverse artistic programs, can be remixed into a symphonic whole. In the satellite presentations dotted around the district of Yangnim, each artist is allotted their own space and thus freed from the need to participate in the main exhibition’s “opera you can walk into.”⁵ At Podonamu Art Space, Arutiunian’s own interpretation at one-hundredth speed of a composition for harmonium by the Armenian spiritualist philosopher George Gurdjieff is played through four speakers arrayed around this otherwise empty nook in the neighborhood’s back streets, creating a drone that combined with the patter of rain on the window over the door to build a mesmerizing atmosphere.

The photographs and slides of Lydia Ourahmane’s *House of Hope Archives* (1989–ongoing) find an ideal home in the basement beneath Jun Hyoungsan’s clanking, glowing sound installation *Suspension of disbelief #3* (2018) at Horanggasinamu Art Polygon. The abandoned Old Police House is filled with songs written by artists acquainted with Saâdane Afif and interpreted by a celebrated singer of Pansori (*Sora Kim Sings Eternity*, 2024), the traditional Korean folk music that originated in shamanistic rituals and which lends its name to Bourriaud’s exhibition. A live performance by Sora Kim of these songs in a packed bar, to the accompaniment of a female percussionist, and an exceptional installation in a dedicated gallery of Togar’s captivating film *That is not still* (2024) offer further examples of how much more engaging these works are when liberated from the curatorial *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Notes

- 1 “15th Gwangju Biennale 2024 title revealed,” Gwangju Biennale, <https://www.gwangjubienale.org/en/Board/11524/detailView.do>.
- 2 This Gwangju Biennale also includes a number of national pavilions scattered around the city, along the model of the Venice Biennale. This review concentrates on the “main exhibition” curated by Nicolas Bourriaud.
- 3 Credit to Jeremy Noel-Tod’s recent article on Marianne Moore for bringing this poem to my attention (“The Triumph is Reflective,” *Some Flowers Soon* substack, September 21, 2024).
- 4 Elisa Carollo, “Nicolas Bourriaud Discusses the Curatorial Approach of the 2024 Gwangju Biennale,” *Observer* (September 9, 2024), <https://observer.com/2024/09/interview-nicolas-bourriaud-director-gwangju-biennale-pansori-2024/>.
- 5 <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/595141/pansori-a-soundscape-of-the-21st-century/>.



9/27/24, 2:05 PM

9/27/24, 2:05 PM



8 Standout Artists at the Gwangju Biennale 2024 | Artsy

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Art

8 Standout Artists at the Gwangju Biennale 2024

Josie Thaddeus-Johns



Sep 26, 2024 3:45PM



Noel W. Anderson, *In Defense of Black Leisure*, 2024. Commissioned by the 15th Gwangju Biennale. Courtesy of the 15th Gwangju Biennale.

tesy of the 15th Gwangju Biennale

As an art event, the Gwangju Biennale has a unique remit: to commemorate the horrific tragedy of the violently suppressed student-led uprising that took place in the city in May 1980. But for the 2024 Gwangju Biennale, unlike previous editions, this legacy was less of a central focus. Directed by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud, the event, mainly located in Gwangju's Biennale Hall, instead is based on the idea of *pansori*, a Korean folk musical tradition whose name translates to "noise from the public space."

Courtesy of the 15th Gwangju Bien

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-8-standout-artists-gwangju-biennale-2024>

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9/27/24, 2:05 PM This theme brings together works from 72 artists to create a "soundscape of the 21st century," according to the exhibition's

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tagline. In sharp contrast with this year's Venice Biennale, all of the participants are living.

Sound, as one might expect, features prominently in the show. Noel W. Anderson, for instance, cleverly splices James Brown songs into a supercut of the singer's grunts and vocalizations, echoing through

the exhibition's stairway in a meditation on Black masculinity. Many of the works on view explore oppression and marginalization: issues, according to the curatorial framework, of taking up, and making noise, in public space. Climate change also features prominently in the artworks' themes. The soundscape of the current moment, according to this show, is a lamentation for a world in crisis.

Elsewhere, in the various satellite pavilions spread across the city and running outside of the main show's curatorial framework, some

artists have taken on the mantle of the city's history of political dissent. At the CDA Holon pavilion, a troupe of university student performers will march to the city's Democracy Square once a week throughout the Biennale's run, their choreography developed by the pavilion's artists with movements based on state-sanctioned violence.

Here are the standout artists from the Gwangju Biennale 2024.

Beaux Mendes

B. 1987, New York. Lives and works in Los Angeles.



Beaux Mendes, detail of *Jacob's Ladder*, 2023. Photo by Jens Ziehe. Courtesy of the artist and Trautwein Herleth, Berlin.

Scanning the row of Beaux Mendes's small paintings in the Biennale's main show, it is difficult to place them as landscape paintings. But though these canvases seem devoid of sunlight — containing mostly ghostly gray or obscure dark brown shapes — they stem from a process that begins *en plein air*. The series on view, "Black Forest," is named after an area in the south of Germany that inspired it.

9/27/24, 2:05 PM <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-8-standout-artists-gwangju-biennale-2024> 8 Standout Artists at the Gwangju Biennale 2024 | Artsy

Mendes comes from a long line of German rabbis, and their grandmother was a Holocaust survivor. They traveled to Germany to work in isolation on these shadowy works in both the Bavarian Forest and the Elbe Valley (beloved by Romantic painters such as Caspar David Friedrich). Made with unusual mediums and techniques, such as marble powder and water marbling, these sometimes murky, shadowy works conjure an ambivalent image of the artist's familial history of displacement from this land. They also subvert the history of Romantic landscape painting, which glamorized the natural world with depictions of sweeping vistas and was used to bolster the fascistic ethos of the Nazis.

Beaux Mendes
Black Forest

June 8 – July 15, 2023

Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 11am–6pm

This project resides in that space between performance and possession. I have been interested for a while now in the psychic speech of artifacts – it involves, I think, approaching space as a sort of crime scene – what is leftover has a message.

I've kind of felt for years my grandmother – Oma – haunting me. She was a difficult woman, but she was also a survivor and had an intense attachment to Germany, even after the war, and to her memories of hiking in its woods. I'm returning to Frankfurt to paint her house and I think I may also paint myself.

So the work in this show is in many ways more explicitly personal than my work has been to date. To give some brief context: my great grandfather was one of the head rabbis of Frankfurt and my great great great grandfather, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, was the founder of modern orthodoxy within Europe – I was raised orthodox (although I left years ago) and in the rebuke of this somewhat burdensome lineage.

This past fall, I spent several months working mostly in the Black Forest, but also in the Elbe Valley (where Caspar David Friedrich often painted). I'm returning this spring to complete this work, mostly staying in a boy-scout house in the woods, a subsidiary of the local church there, called the House of God (on a street called Höll, or hell in English, ha!).

Although in some ways what I'm about to say sits beside the point of the paintings, the work does orbit around the following concrete thoughts: forest romanticism and forest nationalism and the centrality of the forest to the formation of German identity. And then also the very different German Jewish orientation to these same woods. German Jews being thought of as people of the city and as having no authentic connection to or understanding of its forests. I'm also thinking about my own ambivalent relationship to representation – to locking meaning as it's on the brink of resolution – in a trans space.

There has been a text in particular that's really informed my thinking around some of this: "Rosenzweig's Aesthetic Theory and Jewish Unheimlichkeit," which I'm attaching here.

In preparation for this exhibition, Beaux Mendes travelled to Germany where they spent months painting in the Black Forest, the Elbe Valley (where the German Romantic painters did much of their work), and Frankfurt where the artist's family lived for many years. Among other sites in Frankfurt, the artist painted the house of their grandmother, a Holocaust survivor who remained deeply attached to Germany even after the war. Mendes comes from a long line of rabbis who were central to the German Jewish orthodox community. Certainly, it would be hard not to read these trips as a pilgrimage in which the artist returned to the lost home of their ancestors.

Since Mendes made most of the paintings in isolation in the Black Forest, it is not a far leap to relate this show to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, especially his theory of the uncanny (*unheimlich*). Heidegger explained the uncanny as the groundlessness of the modern condition. He argued that everyone has a profound feeling of not being at home and that this experience of "angst" plays a fundamental role in human existence. The philosopher warned that urban life exacerbated this homelessness and that many Germans had lost their connection to their fatherland by getting wrapped up in the tumult of the big city and the dangerous diversions of technology. Attaching great importance to nature and particularly the Black Forest, Heidegger regarded the countryside as the best place to listen to the "Voice of Being". In the tradition of German idealism, he considered the forest as central to the formation of German identity.

On the other hand, German Jews were regarded as city dwellers with no authentic relationship to the woods and soil which emphasizes the unnaturalness of Jewish language and identity. In this regard, Mendes' pilgrimage relates not only to their personal family history but to the uncanniness that permeates the history of the Jewish diaspora. Arguably, this uncanniness links Judaism and aesthetics. The philosopher and theologian Franz Rosenzweig, a contemporary of Heidegger whose theories influenced Mendes while working on this show, went as far to assert that homelessness lies at the heart of art.

Like Rosenzweig, Mendes grounds artistic creativity in the fertile groundlessness of the uncanny. Accordingly, all of their paintings appear to inhabit a non-place somewhere between figuration and abstraction, landscape and portraiture. The artist's palette consists mainly of earthy browns and grays- mixed colors- more like tints or shades that lack purity. They adhere to blurry zones of indiscernibility indicating a transition of passing from one state to another.

The imagery is always in movement with various fluid forms emerging and transforming depending on the angle from which they are seen. In several paintings, rows of empty beds, not tied down to any specific situation, evoke numerous associations. A lost community or a community to come? Perhaps it's both. For Mendes seems more interested in the conjunction "and" than in "or". For many works in this show, Mendes painted on an armature made of wood, a support they often use. Collaborating with the tendencies and capacities of the material, the artist lets the wood speak for itself. Through the interplay between the cosmic patterns in the wood and the layers of diluted paint, images resembling galaxies in formation and swirling nebulae come to the surface. In other paintings, plants and rocks possess animistic qualities, often staring back at the viewer. Panpsychic populations of human-non-human aggregates oscillate from tree roots to reptilian claws, building facades to simian faces, shrubbery to walrus tusks. Subject and object, organic and inorganic collapse and metamorphose in constant flux.

These works suggest that Mendes did not take a pilgrimage to Germany as a Heideggerian attempt to dwell on their ~~family tree or their~~ lost origins, the supposed essence of one's being. Indeed, the artist left the orthodox Jewish tradition at a young age. Moreover, while Heidegger searched for a clearing in the forest for the unconcealment of Being, Mendes' interests lie in the creative potential of becoming. Unlike the anthropocentric Heidegger, who believed that among

all the beings in the universe- from atoms to asteroids, bees to bears- humans are the only ones able to understand Being, Mendes does not ascribe to human exceptionalism. To be sure, for them, man is not an autonomous substance. It's an unstable term in an ever-morphing language. Following these thoughts, Mendes' exhibit takes us on a walk through a kaleidoscopic forest of signs.

– Zoe Stillpass

ARTFORUM



Beaux Mendes, *Oma*, 2022, oil and charcoal on half-chalk ground on panel, 10 1/4 x 10 3/4".

BERLIN

Beaux Mendes

GALERIE BARBARA WEISS
Kohlfurter Strasse 41/43
June 8–July 29, 2023

For this exhibition, Beaux Mendes—a descendant of a long line of rabbis and Holocaust survivors—returned to their ancestral home of Germany in order to reckon with their inherited legacy. The LA-based artist painted in the Black Forest, where the Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger kept his hut, as well as in the Elbe Valley, which inspired Caspar David Friedrich, among other German Romantics. In an accompanying exhibition text, Mendes writes, “I’m returning to Frankfurt to paint [my grandmother’s] house and I think I may also paint myself.”

While this exhibition features no self-portraits in the conventional sense, Mendes’s small paintings, executed on nontraditional surfaces like wooden panels and muslin, instead do something uncanny in the Heideggerian sense, fusing metaphysical exploration with landscape excavation. This is not to say that the human body is totally absent; its form might be, but its absent presence figures into these rigorous, often dark-pastel examinations of place. *Oma*, 2022—titled after the affectionate term for grandmother in German—offers a homely cabin in the forest, the sloping ground in front of it animated with a slush of yellowish white. Here, as elsewhere, the thin washes of paint elicit a sense of dreamy, watery wonder.

In another untitled painting from 2023, is that a close-up of twisted tree trunks, or is that the buttocks of one nude body mounting another from behind? These haunted landscapes come encrypted in a mist of secrecy, and it is this mystery that sustains them, enabling them to linger on the walls of our minds. Perhaps you *can* go home again.

— Travis Jeppesen

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Beaux Mendes
Capitol Reef

Location: 88 Eldridge Street, New York, NY 10002

Dates: January 26, 2022 – March 12, 2022

Opening: Wednesday, January 26th, 12 – 7 PM

This exhibition is dedicated to Jenni Crain, in loving memory.

My paintings contain a double negative: the surface works to undo itself and representation is obscured to reveal a subject that is not an image of the past, but an impression directly inscribed in it.

– Beaux Mendes

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce the opening, on Wednesday, January 26th, of Beaux Mendes' *Capitol Reef*, their first one-person exhibition at the gallery. The show will be held at our 88 Eldridge Street location.

In *Capitol Reef*, some twenty-odd small to medium-sized paintings and shaped panels occupy the walls of the gallery. They each bear the same name, repeating the title of the exhibition; otherwise, no further language is offered. Across these works, predominantly abstract and densely layered image-textures produce a shifting array of latent forms, many of which seem to be approaching the picture surface and receding at once, hesitant or subtle enough to evoke a figure momentarily perceived in the periphery but obscured among blind spots when studied directly. In other paintings, a varied world of references come into more distinguishable view: the body of a primate, a thickly wooded scene, the sudden outcrop of a sloping cliff. Situated within the different configurations proposed by these works lies the crux of Mendes' poetics: an image is a kind of transference, its nature is never wholly perceptible, let alone conceivable—apprehension is a balancing act on changing, uncertain ground.

Mendes' practice involves rituals of passage and pilgrimage, inviting altered states of experience resulting from estrangement and even imposture. In their recent work, this desire to traverse boundaries has led them through the male-coded historical conventions and sites of the Euro-American landscape and *en plein air* traditions, as though in drag. Throughout the exhibition those conventions are suspended in transitory and vulnerable states of becoming. Broadly inspired by trips to Utah's Capitol Reef National Park—initially drawn there given its echoing of Capitol Hill, a sensational constant of last year's news cycles—Mendes found themselves among a spectrum of images suggested, disclosed, and sensed within the topography. At stake is a disruption of received representations played out through psychic, spiritual, and geographic strata of resemblances: the formal elements of Western Classicism (the column, the capitol) like the debris of empire's mythos and American expansion; or the attributes of early religious settlers who claimed the region as the original Eden and a new Zion. In one painting, a faint apparition of Moses's tablets appears, a potentially heretical depiction in the Orthodox Jewish tradition that Mendes left as a young person.

To register these emanations enters into a conspiracy of the senses and visual shapes, receiving what's accumulated in the land over centuries of its exploitation and erasure as landscape. With the artist as relay, the park's present and obscured realities travel through their own personal history, and the work moves through a troubling of boundaries. The painting becomes a transitory medium for the contact and blurring of distinct forms, a generative crossing that risks infringement and transgression, rendering the final state of a given artwork as a relic of that action, at once alluvial and evidentiary. As such, in *Capitol Reef*, appearances arrive as

much as they withdraw, opening a space of irresolution that stains the eye while imprinting all the traces of a wide-reaching phenomenal story. Their effect is to manifest a unique and reflexive threshold of in-betweenness at which the environment, the painting, and the artist relate in a constant shift of position. Roger Caillois, in *The Writing of Stones*, describes a similarly enigmatic, almost mystical interplay in the mesmerizing recognition of images discovered in gems: “an encounter between a subject and medium which might be called a demonstration of that subject.” As though gaining access to the land’s long evolution, Mendes’ work even affects a transmutation of materials—the very muslin or canvas receding to reveal more elemental constituting forms: rockface, clay deposits and hardwood grains, an ecology of substrates. The paintings of *Capitol Reef* seem to hold the overlay of image, encounter and environ at the brink of returning to dust.

Beaux Mendes (b. 1987, New York, NY) lives and works in Los Angeles. They received an MFA from University of California, Los Angeles as well as from Bard Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts. In 2021, their first one-person exhibition, Willow Staging Area, was held at STARS, Los Angeles. En Plein Error, an eponymous exhibition of a collaborative drawing group’s work, was staged at ltd los angeles in 2019. Mendes’ work has been included in group shows at STARS, Real Pain Fine Arts, The Gallery at Michael’s, all in Los Angeles, at Palazzo Tamborino Cezzi, Lecce, Italy, and at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, New York, among others.

THEGUIDE.ART



Beaux Mendes
Capitol Reef

Miguel Abreu Gallery
88 Eldridge Street, 4th Floor

New York
Lower East Side

Jan 26th — Mar 12th

An epigraph, Beaux Mendes knows, is an art form unto itself. "My paintings contain a double negative," they write as an epigraph to the press release. "The surface works to undo itself and representation is obscured to reveal a subject that is not the image of a past, but an impression directly inscribed in it." This statement—and the work which accompanies it—will take some time to parse. A sense of obfuscation is present in the fact that the more than twenty paintings on display bear the exact same title. One work appears, at most angles, to be an obsidian coffin; other vantages, however, reveal extra appendages built into one side of it. Another work appears at a distance to be a textured canvas, but reveals itself up close to be a rippling cross-section of eucalyptus wood.

Utah's Capitol Reef National Park, from which Mendes draws the name of their exhibition, is named for its white-domed sandstone cliffs. In this way, it is a kind of false mirror of Washington D. C.'s Capitol Hill. Each location degrades the truth value of the other—one example of Mendes's doubling-as-effacement. The entire exhibition can indeed be conceived as a rite which summons something to the surface, only to banish it, spanning topographical, historical, and linguistic registers. In one painting, what resembles a Corinthian column flickers into a fan of flame-like abstract marks. In another, an impression of Moses's tablets are perhaps a reference to the Orthodox Jewish faith which Mendes rejected as a youth.

Ultimately, Mendes's thesis is something more easily felt than intellectualized, perhaps most clearly in the abstract or mostly abstract works. They are unapologetically beautiful, with subtle palettes of olive, ochre, gray, and umber. Wood grain billows as a secret texture in one work; the central shape in another appears to have been swabbed on with a single stroke. Are they fully abstract? Or are they shadowed invocations of natural forms, like the Capitol Reef? Always suggestive, they are only occasionally divulging. In our world, there is a presumed order to things: where there's smoke, there's fire. Not so here. Each element is felt to be absolute, to have arrived into our senses with no forbears and no antecedents—all smoke, no fire. —*Lisa Yin Zhang*

Peter Brock

This section contains writing that wasn't published, but that I felt compelled to articulate anyways.



Beaux Mendes: Capitol Reef @ Miguel Abreu, New York - March 2022

Beaux Mendes crafts ghostly images with few legible references, relying instead on luminous whispers of pigment to animate their surfaces. Their commitment to the subtler registers of physical mark-making generates ambiguous yet compelling images and sets them apart from many in their generation who prioritize punchy subject matter over paint handling. Mendes has a talent for conjuring shapes that are evocative yet incomplete—inviting our imagination to repair the fissures in their spatial logic. I was compelled to revisit this show and found the time I spent with the work deeply enriching and a bit irksome—a combination of feelings that I’ve become familiar with as the aftertaste of a powerful show.

Mendes’s work is strongest when concrete elements pull against the delicate ambiance of erasure. Since all the paintings are untitled it doesn’t help to name them here, but one of them features a partial silhouette of what looks like an upturned goose against a predominantly white ground. Besides pointing to a legible referent, the snippets of animal anatomy generate pictorial force because they have hard edges that contrast with wispy bits of beige. Besides the graphic outcome of a crisp line, this move entails a dynamic shift in energy within the picture—something which feels missing from some of the other work in the show. Another off-white panel features a knotty junction that resembles a knee joint that stands out against its backdrop. This declarative form still

maintains its mystery, and kept me wondering as to the specificity of its referent. Some of the other references that creep into the work (a banister, an owl, a crudely rendered humanoid) didn't do much for me, but the huge marbled dog-shaped coffin landed like a gut-punch. This sculpture is stunning in a way that makes me not even want to explain my feelings for it.

Despite yielding some quietly radiant surfaces, Mendes's reliance on the aura of erased marks wears thin at points. Their frequent use of scraping and wiping away emphasizes the texture of a painting's support. At times the woodgrain or brushy primer beneath results in gorgeous and ghostly forms. In the less successful instances, this approach feels like artificial aging—a shortcut to visual complexity that is a touch nostalgic. A faint haze of color over a textured surface will certainly charm a screen-weary eye, but this tactic needs a counter-force to generate pictorial tension—the real source of lasting interest. A drawback of Mendes's preference for thinned down paint is that it limits the consequences of erasure. Thicker and more oily paint leaves a wider range of textures and tones as it is removed. I found myself thinking of Bill Jensen's paintings in relation to some of Mendes's work. They seem to share an interest in excavating unforeseen hallucinations from the surface of the painting. Jensen goes to great lengths to mix his pigments with damar varnish and turpentine such that his scraping away leaves wild and varied textures. I found myself wanting a wider range of surfaces from Mendes's work, specifically some passages that aren't drained of saturation by thinning and sanding.

Two larger works consist of minimally altered pieces of wood, and their presence elevates the entire exhibition by complicating the notion of authorship at work in the paintings. One of them is a magnificent specimen of burlwood whose swirling grain and irregular shape are simply gorgeous. Apparently unaltered by the artist, this appears to be a spectacular example of a non-anthropocentric readymade. What can we possibly do with our hands and egos that would rival this exquisite found form? The second of these unpainted works complicates the reverence for nature that underlies the burl-wood. This undulating rectangle displays the repeating grain pattern that occurs when you peel a log—as happens in the process of making plywood. I overheard the gallerist mention that Mendes used a CNC router in this work, and so I suspect that intervention is the source of the small scoops taken out of the work's surface. The oval-shaped cross-section of a knot repeats itself in the upper third while a band of dark grain travels horizontally beneath them. The resulting image feels mechanical in its repetition, despite the overtly organic quality of the wood grain—like when you slice a carrot into many discs how it no longer resembles a vegetable. Unlike the burl-wood, I found this work haunting in that it suggests that our relationship to the natural world involves both reverence and violence.

Taken together, this suite of paintings and the coffin-sculpture constitute a substantial offering amid a painting discourse which often feels drained of material pleasure by the pressure to yield attractive JPEGs. Mendes's work rewards a patient viewer, and resists the market fervor for hyper-legible politics in painting. Also, for what it's worth, Capitol Reef is one of the best titles I've seen for an art show in years.