

Press Release

Beaux Mendes
Black Forest

June 8 – July 29, 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 are also thoughts in there on centuries of diasporic Jewish identity and on how a fantasy of and longing for landscape later came to warp Israel and its policies.

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.