

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 isolated in the Black Forest, it is not a far leap to relate this show to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who dwelled in and drew much inspiration from this region. Of particular relevance here is Heidegger's theory of the *unheimlich*, a term which has been translated as the uncanny and has been defined as the unease of feeling not quite at home or the sensation of being wrenched away from one's "homey place". Heidegger explained the *unheimlich* 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 sentiment and that many Germans had lost their connection to their fatherland by being immersed in the distractions and noise of the big city. Attaching great importance to nature and particularly the Black Forest, he regarded the countryside as the place to listen to the "Voice of Being". In the tradition of German idealism, Heidegger, who was a member of the Nazi party, considered the forest as central to the formation of German identity.

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

Like Rosenzweig, Mendes grounds artistic creativity in the fertile groundlessness of the *unheimlich*. 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 mutating 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 uprooted tree roots to reptilian claws, building facades to simian faces, shrubbery to extracted teeth. Subject and object, organic and inorganic collapse and transform in constant flux.

These works suggest that Mendes did not take a pilgrimage to Germany as a Heideggerian attempt to dwell on their lost origins and recover the essence of their being. Indeed, the artist left the orthodox Jewish tradition at a young age. Moreover, while Heidegger searched in the forest for a clearing where Being is unconcealed, 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 this path, Mendes' exhibit takes us on a walk through a kaleidoscopic forest of signs.