

Galerie Barbara Weiss
Trautwein & Herleth

Beaux Mendes, *Capitol Reef*
Miguel Abreu Gallery
January 26 – March 12, 2022

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.

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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.