

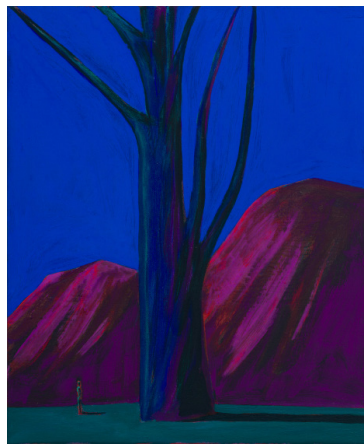
BENJAMIN SWAIM

La nuit qui nous forme [The night that shapes us]

Exhibition : March 14, 2024 – April 27, 2024

Private View : Thursday 14 March from 6PM to 9PM with the artist in attendance

Curated by Agnès Biro



Benjamin Swaim, *L'Arbre*, 2023-2024
Oil on canvas
31.8 x 25.7 in.

«In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent.»

— Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*, 1967

What is intriguing about Benjamin Swaim's paintings is that, although inspired by *en plain air* drawings, they do not seek to represent reality at all costs, but rather to create a singular light within scenes that are most often nocturnal and dreamlike. In line with the «Fauves» traditions, Swaim uses pure colours to intensify the representation. Only here, the coloured contrasts produce an alteration of the places and figures depicted, that becomes peculiar enough to situate Benjamin Swaim's practice at the crossroad between Edvard Munch's expressionist landscapes and Edward Hopper's depictions of loneliness. With this series of nocturnal landscapes and female nudes, he takes us into an 'other' space, both physical and psychic.

In 1967, the French philosopher Michel Foucault introduced heterotopia as a physical space of *utopia* (an idealised representation of reality) which he defines as an enclosed place that harbours the imaginary and in which our relationship with time is no longer the same. Children's huts, theatres, cinema screens and gardens are all places that he presents as such. They have the characteristic of existing in reality and hosting several intertwined narratives on one single ground.

If we ever do dream, it's most often at night that we give free rein to our imagination. Nightmares, daydreams and insomnia: the night takes its toll on our ability to discern what's real from what's not. In Benjamin Swaim's paintings, the flat tones of vermilion red are strident, the mauves are so intense that we do not always know whether the scene is uncanny or moving. Is the empty gaze and lascivious pose of the woman lying in the bath an invitation to join her, or does it place the viewer in the position of a voyeur catching her in a moment of intimacy?

During a lecture given in March 1967, Foucault drew together the mirror and the shadow - two elements that are very present in Swaim's work - defining them as a way of existing outside oneself and of looking where the self is actually absent. Perhaps this is what Benjamin Swaim is trying to depict: a man's gaze on a woman he loves without being able to abolish the distance from where she stands; a landscape loaded with nostalgia.

Ultimately, the exhibition we are presenting evokes the night with its ability to obstruct vision and reveal contours, its quietness that is sometimes soothing, sometimes distressing, but above all the night as a heterotopic space where, through a play of shadows and incandescent light, all kinds of fantasies and illusions take shape.

— Agnès Biro

Benjamin Swaim is a French-American artist, born in 1970 in Paris, where he lives and works.

The series of works in this exhibition was produced with the support of the Fondation des Artistes. Benjamin Swaim is the 2024 laureate of the Michel Nessim Boukris Prize; he has collaborated for over ten years with the Jean Broly gallery and his work has been exhibited at Les Bains Douches (Alençon, 2022), Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2010), La Maison Rouge - Fondation Antoine de Galbert (Paris, 2007) as well as in various group shows overseas. His work can be found in the collections of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Fonds d'art contemporain - Paris Collections and the Fonds national d'art contemporain, as well as in the collections of the Frac Alsace, Limousin and Poitou-Charentes.