



Vojtěch Kovařík

In Between

Sep 9 – Oct 24

Mendes Wood DM is pleased to present *In Between*.

Vojtěch Kovařík's latest body of work explores relations of touch and distance, of memory and myth, tracing the space in which human relationships are formed. Through an evolving exploration of mythology, a touchstone in the Czech painter's practice, Kovařík opens classical myths to an archetypal lens, loosening his devotion to instantly recognizable mythological narratives and their inherited imagery. Drawn to universal themes, he works through monumental paintings and chamber paintings, terracotta reliefs, and glass sculpture, communicating spaces where intimacy is monumentalized and past and present intertwine.

Kovařík receives mythology as "an open language," a vocabulary available for use. He is, therefore, a bricoleur in the way Claude Lévi-Strauss used the word for mythical thought itself, "a kind of intellectual 'bricolage.'" [1] The French verb *bricoler* comes out of games and hunting, where it described a deflected movement, a ball rebounding off a cushion, a dog straying from the trail, or a horse swerving to clear an obstacle. The bricoleur inherits that sideways motion. His materials were never designed for the job at hand. They are a finite secondhand stock, remnants kept on the principle that they might come in useful one day, heterogeneous and closed at once. Against this Lévi-Strauss set the engineer, who questions the universe directly and orders his materials to specification. The artist he places halfway between the two, neither starting from nothing nor merely rearranging, a halfway position that gives the exhibition its title.

Drawing creative vibrancy from Archaic and Classical Greece, the profile of a frieze, the strict frontality of a votive figure, and the marble body on its plinth, Kovařík's imaginary also takes in hard blocky volumes and sharply profiled faces not unlike Eastern European monuments and war memorials, the visual grammar of Socialist Realism, an idiom that had already amalgamated classical and mythological elements into its own rhetoric of strength. Both traditions monumentalize; the Western one idealizes, the Eastern hypertrophies. A Gallicized approach runs through as well, Picasso's classical phase of the 1920s, Picabia, and Léger's *Three Women*, the cubist estrangement of the body into shapes and volumes. None of these vocabularies was designed for what he is making with it. He describes freeing himself from "their given visuality."

The artist's monumental paintings work directly across proximity and separation. *Aglauros, Herse and Pandrosos* (all works 2026) folds three coral-red women together among broad leaves, the daughters of Athens pressed close enough that limbs and glances cross. *Born of the Sea* reduces a birth myth to one woman rising an arm raised against a bare pink sky. *Between Two Worlds* suspends a single yellow figure face-up in black water, arms spread.

The chamber paintings turn an analogous tension toward smaller formats. *What the Night Reveals*, for instance, works through obstruction, a face half-hidden behind a hand, a profile turned away. Others bring two heads almost into contact, accentuating the interstices, and it is at this scale that "intimacy can become monumental," Kovařík explains.

The petrified bodies depicted are decidedly not mimetic. Kovařík came to painting through ceramics and sculpture, and that formation governs how the figures sit on the canvas. They look carved out of stone, or born from it, drawing the durability of sculpture into a flat medium. Sand worked into the paint and exaggerated shadows give simplified shapes their volume, relief-like against varnished grounds. He began working with it at the same time he turned to mythological subjects. He calibrates color one work at a time, from books or from botanical sources, each hue set against those around it. The figures crowd their frames, pressing at the edges, too large for what contains them.

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What they quote are other bodies from art history, classical, neoclassical, interwar, so that they read as monuments briefly reanimated. That weight descends historically from the marble bodies of Praxiteles and Polykleitos, politically from the monuments those bodies were later made to serve, and formally from the frontal, planted, blocky pose the tradition has settled into. Any story, once fixed, tends toward ballast, which bricolage sets down. They can appear solemn, in reflection, in doubt, in moments where power recedes. And yet, across the series, they are oriented toward one another.

Two terracotta reliefs sit alongside them, the figures modeled against a rectangular ground. *The One Who Thinks Before and the One Who Thinks After* sets two heads close together, forethought and afterthought. *Keeper of the Grain* shows a woman gathering stalks, the pose of the *udarník*, that idealized figure of labor, pulled toward classical antiquity's goddess of the harvest, Demeter. Clay is the oldest of his materials, one worked by hand, arriving at a space where "past naturally meets present."

[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966; Paris: Plon, 1962, 16 – 22.

Vojtěch Kovařík (b. 1993, Valašské Meziříč, Czech Republic) lives and works in Brno.

Recent solo exhibitions include *In Between*, **Mendes Wood DM**, New York (2026); *Soulscape*, **Galerie Derouillon**, Paris (2026); *Inner World*, **Mendes Wood DM**, São Paulo (2025); *From Lines to Matter*, **Kampa Museum**, Prague (2024); *Under the weight of the world*, **Power Station**, Dallas (2024); *The Labours of Hercules*, **Mendes Wood DM**, Brussels (2023); *Dusk of the Gods*, **Mendes Wood DM**, New York (2022); *Destinies of Stone Faces*, **Galerie Derouillon**, Paris (2022); *In the Thickets of Unexplored Places*, **Mendes Wood DM**, São Paulo (2021); **Mendes Wood DM at Villa Era**, Vigliano Biellese (2020); *Hidden Garden*, **Galerie Derouillon**, Paris (2020). Recent group exhibitions include *Mundo Mágico*, **Kunsthal kAdE**, Amersfoort (2026); *NGV Triennial*, **The National Gallery of Victoria**, Melbourne (2023); *Ars22: Living Encounters*, **Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma**, Helsinki (2022) and *Baltic Triennial 14: The Endless Frontier*, **Contemporary Art Centre**, Vilnius (2021).

The artist's work is present in museums and public collections worldwide, including **Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)**, Los Angeles; **Musée d'art Moderne de la ville de Paris**, Paris; **National Gallery of Victoria**, Victoria; **Zuzeum Museum**, Riga; **X Museum**, Beijing; **ICA Miami**, Miami; **Blenheim Foundation**, Oxfordshire; **Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo**, Turin; **THE EKARD COLLECTION**, the Netherlands; **Bunker Artspace**, West Palm Beach; **Deji Museum**, Nanjing; **K11 Foundation**, Hong Kong; **National Gallery Prague**, Prague; **Kistefos Museum**, Jevnaker.

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