

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Wallpaper*

A sense of refuge: Gregory Crewdson finds solace with ‘Cathedral of the Pines’

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The new series, comprising 31 digital pigment prints, is on view at the Gagosian Gallery in New York. Photography: Rob McKeever. Artworks © Gregory Crewdson. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

It's been five years since Gregory Crewdson last exhibited a new body of work. Following a period of turmoil in his personal life and the collapse of his marriage, the American photographer abandoned the clamour of New York, moving into a former Methodist church in rural Massachusetts.

There, Crewdson withdrew both personally and professionally. 'I was shut down in many ways during that time, and in fact didn't produce work for at least two years,' he says. Instead, he sought solace in the hinterlands, going on long hikes and open water swims; in winter, he turned to cross-country skiing through woodland trails.

'I found that spending time in the wilderness was comforting, and Becket was a familiar place for me,' explains the artist. 'I was doing all of this solely as a way of keeping my head clear, and to find a sense of refuge.' And it was there in the rural town of Becket that Crewdson, the artist, would be reborn.

Launched last week at the Gagosian Gallery in New York, 'Cathedral of the Pines' is a new series comprising 31 digital pigments captured during Crewdson's sojourn in Becket. It was a

homecoming of sorts for the artist, whose family had a country home in the area, and where he spent a great deal of time as a child.

Crewdson recalls the moment of his epiphany, skiing on a trail miles from anything: 'The light, the cold air, the smell of pine triggered a sense memory, and I had this feeling of revelation. I knew I wanted to make pictures that explored that simultaneous sense of isolation and connection that you feel in nature.' As it happens, he was on a trail known as the Cathedral of the Pines. He knew immediately that this was going to be the name of his next body of work.

The series bears all the hallmarks of Crewdson's inimitable style – immaculately composed mise-en-scène, cinematic lighting and somber figures caught in forlorn trances in small-town America – but there's an undoubted shift in the visual narrative. Crewdson's staged twilight seems to give way to something more uninhibited here.

"Cathedral of the Pines", in many ways, represents a turning point for me. There's a sense of return on many levels, but specifically to using colour and light as a way of telling a story and creating a mood,' says Crewdson. 'I think the pictures also come out of a place of personal reconnection.'

To wit, the artist worked with a smaller crew than usual (up to 60 people would normally assist on a Crewdson production) and also cast friends and family in his pictures – a new experience for him.

Becket's forests – and ultimately Crewdson's salvation – are brought to the fore in this series, recalling 19th century American and European rural canvases. In *Mother and Daughter*, 2014, a smattering of snow sweeps in through a balcony door left ajar, while the woodland engulfs Crewdson's subjects in *The Haircut*, 2014. Even in a shot of a timber-clad interior with narrow windows, the reference to nature is made through the paintings that hang along the walls.

'Everything about the final work is very intimate, quiet in tone, subtle,' Crewdson muses, 'and hopefully evocative of something very personal and very private.'