

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

### BLOUINARTINFO

#### Moving On: Gregory Crewdson's "Cathedral of the Pines" at Gagosian

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*Gregory Crewdson's "Woman at Sink" 2014, currently on view at Gagosian Gallery.  
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Gregory Crewdson hasn't exhibited a new body of work since 2011. In a recent interview with ARTINFO, the photographer said he was dealing with personal problems and was preoccupied with what he calls "busy work." There were a few museum shows, and even a documentary about him, but he was beginning to find it hard to get back into the swing of making new work. But after leaving New York City and moving to rural Massachusetts, he stumbled upon a mysterious path in the woods that would provide the inspiration for his next project.

The story is almost too perfect, like the unwritten narrative to one of his elaborately staged photographs. "Cathedral of the Pines," which opened at Gagosian Gallery on January 28, features the images he produced in Becket, Massachusetts beginning the winter of 2012 through the summer of 2013. Many of them are typically Crewdsonian in their focus on isolation, stillness, and suspense, with a more intense interest in landscape

When ARTINFO sat down with Crewdson at Gagosian the morning of the show's opening, the conversation began with the photographer telling a story about attempting to reproduce the gallery's lighting in his own studio before they started hanging the photographs.

**Is the lighting the most important thing for you?**

Lighting is everything [laughs].

### **But what about the size, and the order in which they are presented?**

Light and space are the two main things. Like, the pictures are fairly small-scale, comparatively, but they are very intimate, very private, very detailed. I think they demand space. So that was another consideration while hanging the show, to make sure each picture has its own space around it. Of course, the size of the picture is very important, the decision to make a border, the black frames — all of those things have significance for me.

### **In terms of scale, how early in the process are you thinking of scale?**

Even with that I did a lot of different tests, starting with smaller images and making them bigger. I really want to go against the general trend of making gigantic pictures. I feel like I don't want to be a part of that context. One thing I was thinking about a lot when I was making these pictures was painting more than film this time around. I don't know if you remember a show that was at the Met a few years ago called “[Rooms With a View](#),” a 19th-century painting show. That show had a big influence on me.

### **Were there specific painters or works in the show that influenced you?**

Not specific painters — it was more the context and that theme, and also the scale of the paintings, which was quite small. That was a major thing, the scale being enough to see detail but small enough where a viewer was forced to come up to the picture, and not see it from afar.

### **You said the experience of making these photographs forged a reconnection with your artistic process. The first thing is how was the connection severed? And what was it about creating these images that helped you reconnect?**

There are a few things that happened. There's always a relationship between your life and your art, even if you're unaware of it. In my particular case I went through a divorce, with two children. It was just right after my last body of work, the Sanctuary pictures. I suffered a complete collapse — my marriage ended, my relationship to my previous gallery ended. I was in turmoil. My first step in reconnecting was deciding to move out of New York. I moved into a church in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Initially it was a rental for a summer, but as soon as I walked in I realized that this was where I needed to be. It's a church and then right next door is a secondary building which was the town firehouse, and that's my studio. So then I moved in, but the next two years were very difficult trying to regroup, and trying to be a good father, and dealing with the horror of divorce.

### **When did you start thinking of pictures again?**

I do a lot of open water swimming, so I started these daily hikes on the Appalachian Trail to a place where I could swim. I wasn't really aware of it at the time, but this was part of these first steps of regeneration. Then in the winter months I would cross-country ski in this town called Beckett. So I was cross-country skiing with [creative producer] Juliane [Hiam] in the middle of the woods, we were in a pine forest, and there was this little trail called “Cathedral of the Pines.” That's the thing that triggered the entire body of work.

### **During that period were there other projects you were thinking about that didn't pan out?**

There was a lot of what I call busy work, stuff that makes you think you're functioning as an artist but really you're not. There was museum shows, there was a retrospective book I was doing, I was teaching at Yale.

**Was this when the documentary about you came out as well?**

Yes. So you can fool yourself into the idea that you're working when you're actually not. Meanwhile there was this dread, because I do believe if you're an artist of any kind and not producing, you feel dead inside or fraudulent in some way. But I'm also aware that there are times when it's just impossible to produce work. The way I make pictures, I'm not like a writer or painter, who can go to the studio everyday and work. I have very short periods of time when I'm actually making pictures.

**What are you doing during that time around the actual moment you take the picture?**

I've often said, and there is a reality to it, that I divide my time between pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production can go months and months. That's usually when there is a body of work that's being contemplated, and starts with me alone usually, driving, looking for locations, whether they're interiors or exteriors. Then I work very closely with Juliane, she writes the descriptions with me. Each image has a description. Then we get closer and closer to production, which usually lasts four weeks.

**Is that how long production was on the new series of photographs?**

"Cathedral of the Pines" consisted of three production periods, three individual shoots. Each lasted four weeks.

**Do you think it was a coincidence that you moved into a church and then you stumbled upon this trial called "Cathedral of the Pines"?**

I don't think it's a coincidence. There is a search that runs through every picture, some sense of connection. But I would say that the primary influence, there were a few things. The first thing was the location. Becket was very powerful in my imagination. It's where my parents had a country house. It's where Juliane, who's now my partner, grew up. It's where I go for those hikes. So it was very powerful that all the pictures would be in this one area. Consequently, the next big theme was nature and the relationship the subject, or the figures, have to nature. And there's a certain element of longing and desire in the pictures. There's a lot of naked bodies, or partially clothed bodies. That was really key — flesh, skin, different types of bodies.

**There are also a lot of people looking out windows.**

Even the interiors are very strongly about what's the exterior. One of the big struggling points, I would say, because I work very closely with a [director of photography] named Rick Sands, was trying to figure out a lighting sensibility that worked for these pictures. After different attempts, what wound up happening was, particularly for the interiors, the light comes from the outside. The main narrative light comes from the exterior. Which is a 19th-century trope, really. So there are practical lights that are on [in the images], but the guiding light is the one from the exterior. And then another decision was, for the exteriors, there would be a very general fill light. The

only visible lighting would be in different contained spaces. There's a lot of makeshift homes or containers, outhouses, huts. Light should only be in the interior space, not the exterior space.

**Despite the personal resonance these images have for you, are you accepting of the viewer looking for autobiography in the work?**

I would say that in the end the pictures tell nothing about me and everything about me. I like that dynamic. There's nothing in any of these pictures that's in a direct way autobiographical. However, the mood and themes of pictures represent, very much, things I've experienced, or things I desire, or things I feel disconnected from. I do think that, as a photographer, and maybe all photographers share this thing where, in one way or another we're separated from the world. Even the act of making pictures is an act of separation. The viewfinder is a way of distancing yourself. And I think that theme runs throughout the pictures, even in the most intimate images there's a slight reserve, a slight separation.

**You've talked in the past about how you're never satisfied with the end result of the photographs, and that they never fully match what's in your head. And that disappointment leads you to try again. How do you feel in relation to that with these images? And if one day the images you print do match what's in your head, what do you do then?**

I'm at the moment right now where this is the resolution of years of work, and I must admit to a deep satisfaction to seeing the pictures on the wall. I honestly feel like I'm most satisfied with these pictures. I think partially it's what I went through to make them, there is a deep satisfaction in that, and I think partially it's because they're doing what I want them to do. However, part of what an artist does is having that moment where you say, O.K., this is great, but it's necessary to move on.