

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

UpstateDiary

Gregory Crewdson, Artist
1.14.16 Berkshire County, MA

Kate Orne



Reclining Woman on Sofa, 2014 Digital Pigment print. © Gregory Crewdson. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

KO: During an emotional time in your life in 2010 you moved from your home in the city to one constructed in a former small town church in the very landscape where you spent your holidays as a child. In the acknowledgments of your forthcoming book, *Cathedral of the Pines*, you touch upon your state of mind and your inability to work creatively for several years. Can you elaborate on your relationship with the landscape in the Berkshires and how you found your way back to creating photographs?

GC: During the making of my previous body of work, *Sanctuary*, my marriage fell apart. What followed was a very dark time for me. Moving out of New York into this rural area in Massachusetts was really an act of survival. Since my childhood, when my father built a log cabin for my family in Becket, this region has always felt like a place of freedom and solace

Later, it became a source of artistic inspiration and was where I made nearly all my pictures. I was desperately trying to reconnect with all of these things. It's true that I couldn't make pictures at all during that time — not for several years... certainly more than two.

I started ritualistically hiking, doing long distance swims in a remote lake and cross-country skiing in the wilderness. At the time I didn't even realize why I was doing it but it's clear to me now that this was the gestation period for the new work.

KO: Through my own travels I have had the experience of walking through ‘cathedrals of pine’ and was thus struck by the beauty of your book title. What meaning does the title hold for you?

GC: In all of the hiking, swimming and skiing, there was a slow, gradual process of finding myself. And then there was a particular moment when I knew I wanted to make pictures again and that I could, more or less, envision the entire body of work.

At the time, I happened to be on a trail called "Cathedral of the Pines" and I knew that it would be the title of the series. I don't think it's an accident that it has the word cathedral in it or that I happen to live in a church: I was seeking some kind of larger meaning in my life. I'm not a religious person, but I do think that the act of making art is a spiritual endeavor. It requires you to come to terms with your own fears and desires.

KO: What I love about your work is the narrative that you, perhaps unintentionally, invite us to elaborate on. I suspect that many viewers have approached you with their interpretations, are those narratives of interest to you?

GC: I'm very intent on leaving the narrative element of the pictures open-ended so that the viewer can bring their own meaning and interpretation. The pictures in *Cathedral of the Pines* really tell very little in terms of narrative, so I am very curious to hear how they're interpreted by the viewers. Yes, I'm always interested, and fascinated.

KO: These isolated, still and quiet tableaux you create are brewing with suggestions of what might have been, or, is about to happen. Can you speak of your interest in those very specific, re-occurring, “perfect” moments you aim to create?

GC: Leaving the narrative unexplained and open-ended means that I don't try to suggest a before or after. It's also the nature of a still photograph and points to how my mind works really: I very clearly see a frozen image — I don't see an entire scene with a beginning or end.

KO: Your work is generally of an intimate, quiet and evocative nature, do you experience this body of work to be more intimate because of what you went through in the years leading up to its creation?

GC: I'm not quite sure if one was directly a cause of the other but going through a personal crisis and the soul searching that it took to come out on the other side opened me up to very raw emotions; very acute sadness and longing, desire, hope, and certainly alienation — and then intense closeness. I think all these things come through in the pictures.

KO: What made you so interested in this vernacular, the ordinary aspects of the human condition?

GC: Like so many people, until a certain age, my childhood home was the whole world to me. I grew up in a brownstone in Park Slope. My father was a psychoanalyst whose office was in our basement. This was endlessly fascinating and felt reverential to me.

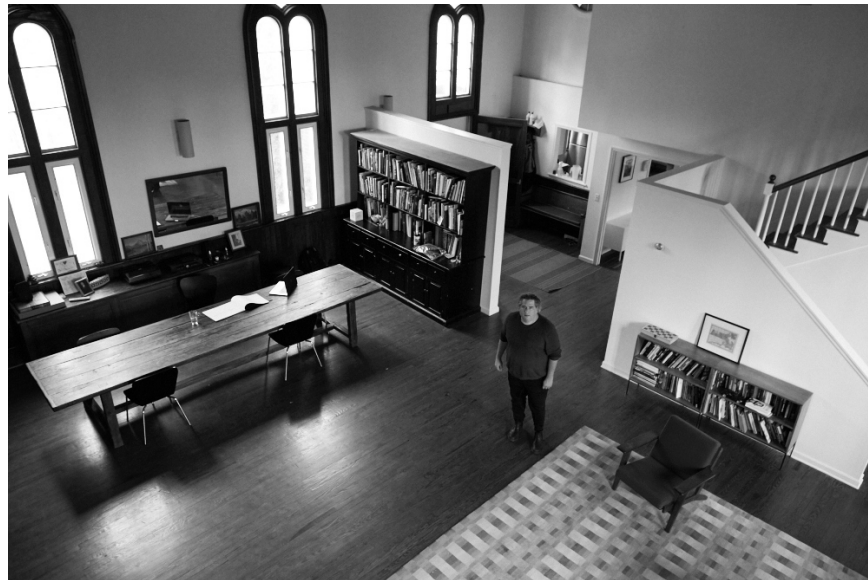
The familiar domestic space is a place I tend to go back to whenever I revisit certain feelings or longings. But in addition to that, many of the artists that I most admired when I was starting out

worked in these themes of daily life; Edward Hopper, Diane Arbus, Sally Mann, even Steven Spielberg.

KO: You are known to stage elaborate productions with large crews, not unlike movie productions. A good example of this is the work *Twilight*. I learned that *Cathedral of the Pines* was made on a smaller scale — did you find the process liberating in some ways?

GC: When I say that *Cathedral* was made with a smaller crew it's all a bit relative. I was still working with 15 to 20 people. It was much more scaled back than *Beneath the Roses*, for example, where we were working with over 50 people at times, closing down entire city streets and dealing with dozens and dozens of lights in each shot. These pictures are far quieter and more subdued and didn't require that large of a crew nor nearly as much rigging.

KO: The psychoanalytic part of the work goes back to your father and your desire to hear what was spoken behind the closed doors of his practice. Do you think your desire to get inside of people's minds is an urge to experience a sense of intimacy with strangers? Did you ever consider pursuing the psychoanalytic trade yourself?



Crewdson at his home

GC: I'm not quite sure if getting inside people's minds is what I'm after. I'm more trying to express what's in my mind. Though, I do see my pictures as private moments that are photographed in a detached way. So that collision of intimacy and distance could be a play on the relationship between the psychoanalyst and his patient.

But, to your question, there was a time, just out of high school, when I did want to be a psychoanalyst. Actually, my sister went into that profession but as an undergraduate I discovered photography and that was it for me.

KO: Was there a specific point where you shifted from analog to digital, do you still find both useful?

GC: I moved to shooting in a digital format for *Sanctuary* and used a similar camera

for *Cathedral of the Pines*. The advantages are considerable when shooting digital but I can't say I'm married to any one format for the rest of my career. Each new body of work has its own visual and practical demands.

KO: You have been drawn to the cinematic narrative since early in your career, is movie making of interest to you? If so, are there any genres, remakes or books that are of particular interest?

GC: Movie making has definitely been a recurring possibility throughout my career. I've resisted it because I'm really a still photographer by nature. It's the most natural way I've found to tell stories. However, recently I've been more serious than ever in pursuing the possibility of directing a feature film. So, I guess time will tell. It would have to be the right project with all the right circumstances. KO: Juliane Hiam has been a very important part of the creation of this particular body of work, can you tell me more about how you met and ended up working so closely together?

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GC: Juliane and I had known each other for many years — since she started handling the casting in the later productions of *Beneath the Roses*. (She was also in a *Beneath the Roses* picture.) We became close friends about five or six years ago, when both our marriages ended and I started spending more and more time in the Berkshires. We would get together with our kids and then, later, to hike and ski. Juliane is a writer and filmmaker, and it was very natural when we fell into a working relationship as well. She worked on every aspect of *Cathedral of the Pines* in addition to being in a number of pictures. And, eventually, we became a couple as well.

KO: Did the casting for *Cathedral of the Pines* differ from your previous bodies of work, if so, how? Can you also elaborate on what your casting requirements were?

GC: Casting was far more personal in these pictures than in previous work. I used many people I know, including friends and family, which I've never done before. Even those that were cast more conventionally were all found locally.

KO: What was the process of choosing the locations for this body of work?

GC: Again, the process was different, and more personal. I felt strongly that I wanted all the locations to be in Becket. The entire first production was shot at Juliane's childhood home. The winter pictures were mostly shot at the home of another friend. And the landscapes were largely made in places where I had hiked and skied or had driven by on the way to hiking and skiing. It all felt very connected to that particular place and all the associations I have with Becket. In almost every way, making these pictures was a deeply personal process.

KO: Congratulations on your powerful book and the exhibition at Gagosian Gallery, we are all so much looking forward to experiencing your new work!

Gregory Crewdson is represented by Gagosian Gallery.

Cathedral of the Pines by Gregory Crewdson is published by Aperture.