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Gregory Crewdson's An Eclipse of Moths

Summer Myatt



Funerary Back Lot, 2018 - 19 Digital Pigment Print 50 x 88 7/8 inches © Gregory Crewdson, courtesy Gagolian

Any one of Gregory Crewdson's images looks like a movie still from a dark A24 psychological thriller. Plumes of fog lurk ominously over abandoned train tracks, harsh spotlights illuminate eerily entranced characters, an overturned school bus lies smoking in the middle of the road. Crewdson's knack for combining the familiar comfort of American small town scenery with quietly jarring tableaux and subtle allusions to the paranormal makes for an altogether unsettling body of work.

Underneath the façade of suburban normalcy lies something sinister and urgent; there's a creeping uneasiness in his photos that makes you want to shake the subjects by their shoulders and yell at them to run.



Red Star Express, 2018 - 19 Digital Pigment Print 57 x 96 x 2 inches. © Gregory Crewdson, courtesy Gagosian

A Brooklyn native, Gregory Crewdson received his undergraduate education at SUNY Purchase and a Master of Fine Arts from Yale University, where he now serves as director of graduate studies in photography. Drawing inspiration from unnerving thrillers like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Blue Velvet*, Crewdson's style is brooding, mysterious, and cinematic. His famously detailed, meticulously staged landscapes provide an almost-too-quiet backdrop for the intriguing scenes that inhabit them. The juxtaposition of the ordinary with the extraordinary gives Crewdson's work a compelling dynamism from which you just can't look away.

While staying true to his signature enthralling, larger-than-life production style, Crewdson's new work feels like a bit of a departure from the gorgeously gruesome shock that characterizes his earlier work. His familiar swift kick of surprise has evolved into a soft gut punch of despair. Set in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, an area deeply affected by the opioid crisis, *An Eclipse of Moths* documents the slow, sad decay of the forgotten industrial towns that litter Northeast America, and the depressing beauty of inevitable erosion.



Redemption Center, 2018-19 Digital Pigment Print 57 x 96 x 2 inches. © Gregory Crewdson, courtesy Gagosian

In Crewdson's image "Redemption Center", a shirtless figure stands in the middle of a desolate parking lot dotted with rusted shopping carts and bordered by the lush green of overgrown weeds. Staring at a handful of rose petals floating in a puddle, a forlorn old man is lost in

thought, suspended in a despondent trance. Two teenagers loiter behind a rusted building, on whose side the words “Redemption Center” are painted in once-hopeful, but now faded letters. The scene is a stunning post-thunderstorm “rock bottom” sparkling with the faint tinge of possibility and vindication.

In another image from the series, “Red Star Express”, the warm, low sunlight of dusk glows upon hills which rise up beyond a tired, cracking two-lane street rife with potholes. Adolescent boys on their bikes stand in the middle of the road staring lethargically at a decommissioned semi-truck trailer tucked away and burning quietly in an empty lot behind a barbwire fence. A now defunct GE plant lies dormant at the end of the street like some great, unearthed fossil. The image is simultaneously apocalyptic and timeless, as if those boys might go on peddling listlessly around that old stretch of road forever.



The Cobra, 2018-19 Digital Print 57 x 96 x 2 inches. © Gregory Crewdson, courtesy Gagosian

That same bated-breath feeling of suspense is what first drew the photographer to orchestrating and capturing these soaring yet intimate scenes. Photography’s “inability to tell the full story” continues to inspire Crewdson in his work. There’s a sort of eternal fascination, a thrill that comes with studying these story-less images though. Crewdson’s ability to so dynamically capture the terror and beauty of a singular moment in time has made his work iconic.



The Taxi Depot, 2018-19 Digital Pigment Print 57 x 96 x 2 inches. © Gregory Crewdson, courtesy Gagosian