

# Galerie Daniel Templon

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## Gregory Crewdson

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

One of Emily Dickinson's best-known poems begins, "There's a certain Slant of light, / Winter Afternoons - / That oppresses, like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes-." The winter light Dickinson saw in Amherst, Massachusetts, is the same light that drifts through many photographs in Gregory Crewdson's new series "Cathedral of the Pines," 2013-14. Crewdson and Dickinson share not only the landscape of western Massachusetts, but also a sensitivity to the weight of light and what it reveals about the melancholic spaces of human interiority.

The images comprising the new series are clearly connected to Crewdson's previous work, such as "Beneath the Roses," 2003-2008, and "Twilight," 1998-2002. "Cathedral of the Pines" again presents scenes that are at once oneiric and unsettling, depicting solitary persons caught in states of mortification: individuals often alone, often naked, always an erotic, with every object in these rooms and outdoor spaces seemingly atomized in isolation. Yet in this new work there are additional layers of emotional intensity, revealing the photographer's deepening ability to realize in digital images certain emotional states existing just outside our ability to name them in language. One might be tempted to describe the palette of the new work as muted, and perhaps it is when contrasted with the saturation of "Beneath the Roses." Yet the colors of these photographs also have a discernible warmth, making the affect they present that much more emotionally complex. It is as if the conflict of Crewdson's photographs hovers in this reluctant absorption of the outer world into some inner world.

Often with these digital pigment prints, each one measuring forty-five by fifty-eight inches framed, the boundaries between photography and midcentury realism start to become somewhat fluid. While Crewdson has often shot on soundstages, here he has shifted his settings to real-world locations at the edges of the small, largely rural town of Becket, Massachusetts, and the images, though still thoroughly composed and staged, aren't so directly evocative of cinema as his older work has been; now they are painterly. It is hard not to think of Edward Hopper when seeing these new photographs. In the past, Crewdson also seemed to be evoking the slow, building anxiety of the films of David Lynch, and he has acknowledged that seeing Lynch's *Blue Velvet* was a defining experience for him as an artist. With these new, somewhat quieter works, however, it is as if the essence of these images has transformed from the spectatorial to the spectral. The photographs of "Cathedral of the Pines" are no less haunted and resonant. Yet rather than seeming like these are moments about to break open into Lynchian chaos and violence, "Cathedral of the Pines" comes across as if these were Hopper's bad dreams of a frozen loneliness. One almost sees brushstrokes where the light, for instance, crosses a naked thigh sprawled across an unmade bed or in the frost at the edge of a window. In the case of *Woman at Window*, 2014, one catches oneself questioning the precision of the draftsmanship before remembering it is a photograph we are looking at.

In the newest work, Crewdson again gestures toward narrative elements. From photograph to photograph, there is still the persistent impression of a story that we are actively not being told. As is usually the case with the people in Crewdson's photographs, the figures' stares are fixed, but their faces are almost neutral. Rather than projecting the longing or wistfulness of a Hopper painting, the people appear resigned

to whatever fate is coming or whatever trauma they have passed into. Dickinson, in her poem, tells us that in those moments of afternoon intensity, "the Landscape listens." In Crewdson's "Cathedral of the Pines," we become mute witnesses to that listening.

—Richard Deming



Gregory Crewdson,  
*Reclining Woman on  
Bed*, 2013, ink-jet  
print, 45 × 57 1/2".