Gregory Crewdson

Untitled (Ophelia), 2001, from the series Twilight
Digital C-print
Image size: 48 × 60 inches (121.9 × 152.4 cm)
Life and Career

Gregory Crewdson was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1962. His first experience of photography, at the age of ten, was a Diane Arbus retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. At sixteen, he played in a band called the Speedies, whose first single was titled “Let Me Take Your Foto.” In 1985, he received a BA from the State University of New York-Purchase College, where he studied photography with Jan Groover and Laurie Simmons. He graduated with an MFA in photography from Yale University in 1988. For his thesis project, he took photographic portraits of residents of the area around Lee, Massachusetts, where his family had a cabin. It was also in Lee that Crewdson conceived of his later Natural Wonder series (1992-97), in which birds, insects, and mutilated body parts are presented in surreal yet mundane domestic settings. In his next series, Hover (1995-97), Crewdson turned away from brightly coloured close-ups to black-and-white bird’s-eye views of strange situations (a man covering a street with sod, a bear gawked at by onlookers as it rummages through garbage) set in the streets and backyards of Lee. His series Twilight (1998-2002) and Beneath the Roses (2003-08) introduced colour and an enlarged scale – 50 x 60 inches – to this surreal formula, resulting in decidedly cinematic images reminiscent of the films of Steven Spielberg. These photographs have become increasingly spectacular and complex to produce, requiring dozens of assistants, Hollywood-style lighting, and specially crafted stage sets.

Crewdson has taught at Sarah Lawrence, Cooper Union, Vassar College, and Yale University, and he is now a professor at the Yale University School of Art. In 2012, he was the subject of the documentary film Gregory Crewdson: “Brief Encounters”. The film series followed the construction and the behind-the-scenes explanation from Crewdson himself of his thought process and vision for his pieces of his collection Beneath the Roses.

Crewdson is represented by Gagosian Gallery worldwide and by White Cube Gallery in London. Crewdson’s undeniable sense of innovation and creativity has evolved through the course of his career earning him the Skowhagen Medal for Photography and The National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowship in recognition for his recent works along with featured showing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Brooklyn Museum.

Style

Crewdson’s photographs usually take place in small-town America, but are dramatic and cinematic. They feature often disturbing, surreal events. His photographs are elaborately staged and lit using crews familiar with motion picture production and lighting large scenes using motion picture film equipment and techniques. He has cited the films Vertigo, The Night of the Hunter, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Blue Velvet, and Safe as having influenced his style, as well as the painter Edward Hopper and photographer Diane Arbus.

Crewdson’s photography became a convoluted mix between his formal photography education and his experimentation with the ethereal perspective of life and death, a transcending mix of lively pigmentation and morbid details within a traditional suburbia setting. The grotesque yet beautifully created scenes were just the beginning of Crewdson’s work, all affected with the same narrative mystery he was so inspired by in his childhood and keen eye for the surreal within the regular.

The creation of the self-defined American realist landscape photographer and his peculiar style originates from Crewdson’s long appreciation for 20th century melodramas and literature, specifically Hitchcock and Ralph Waldo Emerson. These films drove Crewdson to challenge the essence of light and force it in a new direction in Twilight (1998-2002), a dramatic, highly pigmented collection of images that channel dusk to the subject of the photograph. Crewdson wanted to focus even more heavily on the suburban lifestyle that is the focus of his main movie
inspirations. The look of sadness and contemplation on the subjects’ faces was something most major galleries had never seen, intentional sadness yet in such a bland and unexpected way.

Gregory Crewdson’s most recognized and iconic collection is *Beneath the Roses* (2003-2008), similar to his previous projects, its haunted urgency and profound dislocation from the audience is uncomfortable yet familiar. Branching off of his previous collections, *Beneath the Roses* was aimed to capture cinematic production in the stillness of one picture. With a budget similar to that of a small movie production, each image involved hundreds of people and weeks to months of planning. Crewdson’s interventions into the streets of typical American suburbia became a nuance interpretation of reality of lifestyle focusing on the most dramatic emotions and complex moments of silence and thought for the subject.

Crewdson explored the idea of challenging tradition with experimentation of his title outside of the U.S. at the abandoned Cinecittà studios outside of Rome. Known for its mysterious stillness and emptied character, the set was new to Crewdson’s typical use of subject and storyline but reflected the same balance and organic nature of a created set turned into an art piece. The simplicity of *Sanctuary’s* development contrasts Gregory’s tendency for detail and specificity evoking a more compelling landscape that was already created for him and caught the attention of White Cube, Crewdson’s European agent in London. By converting these cinematic scenes into ordinary life, he explores a new and unfamiliar genre of his own focused on naturalizing a manmade scenario in a world already based on the artifice of American lifestyles.

After years of exploring the idea of cinematic photography, *Sanctuary* (2009) was Crewdson’s return to photography, his original hobby and technical training. Most recently, Crewdson has created *Cathedral of the Pines* (2013-14), similar to *Beneath the Roses* and *Twilight*, a distanced interpretation of exaggerated drama by an intervention into natural in its most synergetic state. The collection was shown at Crewdson’s principal agent, The Gagosian Gallery in New York City. The collection returns to his early photographic origins in Becket, Massachusetts set deep in the woods far from familiarity of subject and setting.
Artist’s works


Begun in 1998 and completed in 2002, *Twilight* consists of forty photographs created as elaborately staged, large-scale tableaux that explore the relationship between the domestic and the fantastical, between the North American landscape and the topology of the imagination. The photographs combine a realist aesthetic sensibility with a highly orchestrated interplay of cinematic lighting, staging, and special effects.

Although Crewdson has described himself as ‘an American realist landscape photographer’, he makes filmic images that strongly reference TV programmes such as *The Twilight Zone* or films such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* that deal with fantasy and the paranormal. In this series of intensely, almost luridly coloured and exuberantly detailed images, Crewdson employs a cinematic, directorial mode of photography, the culmination of weeks of planning and complicated, behind-the-scenes production.

In Crewdson’s photographs a collision between the normal and the paranormal exists which serves to transform the familiar suburban landscape into a place of wonder and anxiety. This series of images has become increasingly dark, penetrating the psychological disquiet at the heart of the American family. In one image, we see a teenage girl standing in the street in just her underwear with shoulders hunched and head hanging low, confronted and shamed by her mother's accusatory and disappointed gaze. In another, a pregnant girl dressed in a nightdress stands in a garden that is bathed in the golden light emitted by a swarm of fireflies. Staring at something beyond the picture frame, she crushes a firefly into her rounded stomach.

![Image of Untitled (Penitent Girl), 2001-2002](image-url)

*Gregory Crewdson
Untitled (Penitent Girl), 2001-2002
48 x 60 in. (121.9 x 152.4 cm)
Digital C-print*
Several of the images possess narratives that are mythic in proportion and seemingly driven by a sense of quasi-religious task and ritual. In Crewdson’s suburban re-working of the well-known Ophelia myth, a young woman floats calmly on the mirror-like surface of her flooded living room, her frozen impassivity reflective of all the characters in this series. In other images, subjects are engrossed in odd, domestic chores such as carving holes in the living room floor or uprooting a huge tree from the rafters of an otherwise standard bedroom.
Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Dylan on the Floor)*, 2001-2002
48 x 60 in. (121.9 x 152.4 cm)
Digital C-print

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Bedroom Tree)*, 2001-2002
48 x 60 in. (121.9 x 152.4 cm)
Digital C-print
Flora and fauna are amassed in abundance – an enormous mound of flowers is built in the middle of a residential street, a mass of brightly coloured butterflies escape from a garden shed and a strange, upright pole entwined with climbing flowers and plants emerges from beyond a living room window.

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Flower Beanstalk)*, 2001
48 x 60 in. (121.9 x 152.4 cm)
Digital C-print

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled*, 2001
48 x 60 in. (121.9 x 152.4 cm)
Digital C-print
Often these photographs present a single isolated figure and the feeling that these strange encounters evoke is of stealing a glimpse of something shameful that should be hidden – something private, enigmatic or transgressive. Threat and danger intermingle with a bucolic sense of suburban bliss. One image depicts an upturned bus, lorded over by a group of teenagers; another is a chilling image of a young girl in pyjamas who stands mesmerized outside her home, beckoned by a man from the empty school bus, the paternal goodwill of the small town becoming something far darker and sinister. Threat is everywhere and danger is a short walk down the garden path. These eerie and evocative photographs recall the films of independent American filmmakers such as David Lynch or Todd Solondz who explore surreal suburban dysfunction and the terror that lurks beneath everyday life.

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Beckoning Bus Driver)*, 2001-2002
48 x 60 in. (121.9 x 152.4 cm)
Digital C-print
**Beneath the Roses** (2003-2008)

*Beneath the Roses* consists of forty-nine large-scale photographs. In these pointedly theatrical yet intensely real panoramic images, Crewdson explores the recesses of the American psyche and the disturbing dramas at play within quotidian environments.

In *Beneath the Roses*, anonymous townscapes, forest clearings and broad, desolate streets are revealed as sites of mystery and wonder; similarly, ostensibly banal interiors become the staging grounds for strange human scenarios. In one image a lone and pregnant woman stands on a wet street corner just before dawn, a small but portentous still point in a world of trajectories. On a stormy night in another nondescript town, a man in a business suit stands beside his car, holding out a hand to the cleansing rain in apparent mystification. In a plush bedroom, a man and a woman—prototypes of middle-class American dislocation—are visited by a songbird, who gazes at the woman from its perch on the vanity unit. Crewdson’s scenes are tangibly atmospheric, visually alluring and often deeply disquieting. Never anchored precisely in time or place, these and the other narratives of *Beneath the Roses* are rather located in the dystopic landscape of the anxious American imagination.

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled*, 2003
Digital chromogenic print
64 1/4 × 94 1/4 in. (163.2 × 239.4 cm)
Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled*, 2004
Digital chromogenic print
64 1/4 × 94 1/4 in. (163.2 × 239.4 cm)
These works fall into the tradition of classic American genres that explore the conflation of theatre and everyday life. His tableaux, in their fine detail and focus on the perplexing psychology of vernacular America, evoke the paintings of Edward Hopper and the photographs of Walker Evans and Diane Arbus. At the same time, in their vast scope and relentless grip, Crewdson’s images inevitably bring to mind the world of film, particularly the work of Alfred Hitchcock, Douglas Sirk, and Terrence Malick. Indeed, Crewdson’s process and approach are patently cinematic. *Beneath the Roses* took shape over the course of three years in collaboration with a full production team. His projects are made both on studio soundstages and on location in various small towns. After the photograph is taken, Crewdson continues his obsessive process in post-production, using state-of-the-art digital compositing and special effects. And in the end – like film at its best – Crewdson’s fictions, elaborately staged and plotted though they may be, convey an experience that is intensely real.

In the body of work shot between 2005 and 2008, Crewdson continues to explore his trademarked terrain of small-town disquiet, but in a decidedly restrained mood, with less focus on character and drama and greater emphasis on atmosphere, setting, and the exacting orchestration of light. Retreating from the surrealist theatre of confrontation and psychological turmoil that pervaded much of his previous work, he draws the viewer into quieter scenes where isolated or strangely displaced individuals are caught in moments of liminal anticipation. In the interior scenes, framing devices of windows, doorways, and mirrors create layers of separation that allow glimpses of characters immersed in moments of self-reflection; in the exterior scenes, small figures, lost in thought, anchor still and silent vistas.

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Birth)*, 2007
58 1/2 x 89 1/2 in. (148.6 x 227.3 cm)
Digital pigment print
These haunting pictures were produced in four seasonal cycles of production during 2006-2007, from winter to summer, then winter to summer again. Crewdson’s first ever winter scenes depict a small town’s bleak, snowy streets and back lots suffused with cold, grey light, while his summer scenes capture the humidity and dark lushness of the forest and residential neighbourhoods. In all of the pictures – which are untitled except for an occasional identifying detail or whiff of intrigue – the transitory nature of his chosen locations, which include street corners, front yards, forest clearings, and so on, serves to enhance the pessimism at the core of Crewdson’s perception of provincial American life. Formally, his masterful renderings recall the work of American realists such as Edward Hopper and Walker Evans filtered through the damp, saturated colours of American Luminists such as Thomas Cole and Albert Bierstadt.
Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Brief Encounter)*, 2006
58 1/2 x 89 1/2 in. (148.6 x 227.3 cm)
Digital pigment print

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (RBS Automotive)*, 2007
58 1/2 x 89 1/2 in. (148.6 x 227.3 cm)
Digital pigment print
Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Shane)*, 2006
58 1/2 x 89 1/2 in. (148.6 x 227.3 cm)
Archival pigment print

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Trailer Park)*, 2007
58 1/2 x 89 1/2 in. (148.6 x 227.3 cm)
Digital pigment print
Sanctuary (2009)

In these pictures I draw upon the inherent quietness and uncanny aspects of the empty sets. As with much of my work, I looked at the blurred lines between reality and fiction, nature and artifice, and beauty and decay. Gregory Crewdson

Sanctuary, a group of forty-one black-and-white photographs, is the first work that Crewdson has produced outside the United States, shot on location at the legendary Cinecittà studios on the outskirts of Rome. Digitally photographed and produced with minimal reworking, Sanctuary is Crewdson’s first black and white series since Hover (1996-1997), where he has moved beyond the construction of the surreal human drama that drove previous series to depicting landscapes virtually devoid of human presence. The abandoned outdoor film sets have become the subject of, rather than the mere setting for, his pictures.

Moving through the empty streets of “Ancient Rome” at the beginning and end of the day, he has captured the palpable atmospheres of melancholy lurking at every twist and turn, cloaked in shadow or suddenly illuminated by a shaft of daylight. Although the links to the great chroniclers of urban environments such as Eugène Atget and William Eggleston are evident, Crewdson has added a new layer to the genre by searching for his particular form of verité within the artificial leftovers of cinematic reality.

Crewdson’s imaginary stems from the impulses that have shaped the surreal visions of American artists from Albert Bierstadt to Stephen Spielberg. In the past he sought particular locations where he could create psychologically charged tableaux vivants that conflated empirical observation with artifice, like film stills from films that never existed. These photographs were often the result of weeks of preparation, a method with parallels in film production. In previous series including Twilight and Beneath the Roses, feelings of alienation and anxiety, and oddness pervade meticulously staged scenes, exposing the hidden dramas embedded in normative suburban existence.

In Sanctuary, Crewdson’s focus on scenographic architecture as the principal subject underscores the illusory techniques that he has previously used to construct his scenes and actions. The series contains certain characteristics of a documentary film by which is exposed the hidden life of movies and their artifacts that remain once production has ceased. In several images the underlying structure of the façades and scaffolding of decaying sets is exposed; in others, period buildings are framed by cobbled streets and open ground now overtaken by grasses and weeds; ruined statues, the odd graffiti on a wall, puddles of rain water, and other detritus further emphasize the eerie absence of life that these images convey, heightened by the ambient light of dawn and dusk. The intimate scale of the black-and-white photographs serves to further intensify the poignancy of each deserted scene.
Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (08)*, 2009
Pigmented inkjet print
28 1/2 x 35 1/4 in. (72.4 x 89.5 cm)

Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (04)*, 2009
Pigmented inkjet print
28 1/2 x 35 1/4 in. (72.4 x 89.5 cm)
Cathedral of the Pines (2013-14)

It was deep in the forests of Becket, Massachusetts that I finally felt darkness lift, experienced a reconnection with my artistic process, and moved into a period of renewal and intense creative productivity.

Gregory Crewdson

Cathedral of the Pines (2013-14) was made during three productions in and around the rural town of Becket, Massachusetts. In images that recall nineteenth-century American and European paintings, Crewdson photographed figures in the surrounding forests, including the actual trail from which the series takes its title. Interior scenes charged with ambiguous narratives probe tensions between art, life, connection and separation, intimacy and isolation.

The series comprises thirty-one digital pigment prints, each measuring $45 \times 58$ inches framed. In Woman at Sink, a woman pauses from her household upkeep, lost in thought. In Pickup Truck, Crewdson portrays a nude couple in the flatbed of a truck in a dense forest – the woman seated, the man turned away in repose. Crewdson situates his disconsolate subjects in familiar settings, yet their cryptic actions - standing still in the snow, or nude on a riverbank – hint at invisible challenges. Precisely what these challenges are, and what fate awaits these anonymous figures, are left to the viewer’s imagination.

For more than twenty years, Crewdson has used the streets and interiors of small-town America as settings for photographic incarnations of the uncanny. Working with a crew, he plans his images as meticulously as any movie director, from the nocturnal Twilight series, to the cerebral Beneath the Roses, to Sanctuary. His careful crafting of visual suspense conjures forebears such as Diane Arbus, Alfred Hitchcock, and Edward Hopper. In Cathedral of the Pines, Crewdson’s persistent psychological leitmotifs evolve into intimate figurative dramas.

Gregory Crewdson
Woman at Sink, 2014
Digital pigment print
37 1/2 × 50 in. (95.3 × 127 cm)
Gregory Crewdson  
*The Pickup Truck*, 2014  
Digital pigment print  
37 1/2 × 50 in. (95.3 × 127 cm)

Gregory Crewdson  
*Beneath the Bridge*, 2014  
Digital pigment print  
37 1/2 × 50 in. (95.3 × 127 cm)
A Place Both Wonderful and Strange: A Conversation with Gregory Crewdson and Ben Shapiro

by Hillary Weston

Speaking to the allure of the unknown, David Lynch once said, “Secrets and mysteries provide a beautiful little corridor where you can float out and many, many wonderful things can happen.” Yes, it’s that delicious mix of fear and desire, those beautiful facades teeming with anxiety, that both passionately attract us and leave our blood running cold. And if you’ve ever seen even one of Gregory Crewdson’s photographs, it’s evident that his pictures possess a mystifying, haunting beauty. Fuelled by his own obsession with what’s lurking “beneath the roses,” Crewdson takes on small-town life with grand expansion. He doesn’t simply take a photograph; rather, he creates an entire world with the complexity of movie-like images that transport you to a place that’s both “wonderful and strange.” Lush with light and colour, his pictures are shot through the haze of magic hour, a time when the world takes on a wondrous and fantastic glow, showing us a moment in time where the ever-looming sense of isolation and alienation in everyday life is always present.

Growing up in Brooklyn, Crewdson always had an attraction to the otherworldly quality that the country and suburbia provides, where the cracks in life are more like concealed wounds – as opposed to the city where everything boils to the surface. Taken in vacant streets, desolate woods, and sound stages in southern Massachusetts, for almost a decade he worked on Beneath the Roses, a project now immortalized in Ben Shapiro’s documentary, Gregory Crewdson: Brief Encounters. The film serves as an introduction to Crewdson’s work for those unfamiliar while giving an immersive view into his process for those already enamoured. We get a sprawling look at a ten-year process that shows some of his most brilliant photographs – from the inception of an idea, to the building of a moment, and the final stunning result as Crewdson reflects on his life and work, his fears and desires, and the things that tickle his creative fancy.

We sat down with Crewdson and Shapiro to discuss how the documentary came to be, the psychological nature of his work.

Ben, how did you begin to make a documentary on Gregory? And why did you choose him as a subject?

Ben Shapiro: I knew of Gregory’s work up to that point, which it was like 2000-2001. And I was doing a lot of work for a PBS show about the arts called Egg, and they assigned me the job of making a short film about him and his process. So I went to film a shoot, which is actually in the movie – that early work in Lee with the guy climbing the beanstalk.

Gregory Crewdson: When I didn’t have grey hair.

Gregory, were you worried at all about someone coming and showing your whole process and that exposure?

GC: The process began, for me, just organically. It started almost imperceptively because he had shot for PBS and then I got used to him being around. So then when he asked if he could come back, I said of course. There’s so much going on in the shoots anyways, and it’s such a big production that I wasn’t truly aware; it wasn’t intrusive in any way. And then it became just habitual. I wasn’t ever fully conscious that there would be a movie at the end of the process. And I didn’t ask to see any footage ever over a ten-year period. It was a big surprise when he called me one day and said there was a final version and it was going to premiere at SXSW.

And what did you think the first time you saw it?

GC: Well, the first time I saw it was at Ben’s apartment. It was mid-afternoon and we watched it on
a small TV set. It was...hard to watch. I knew immediately that he captured it all well, but it was just hard. I got to watch myself aging, and I was going through all these things in my personal life. So the first time I saw it I was shell-shocked.

BS: I empathized! Because there is so much history rolling by packed into this hour and a half. GC: I was physically sick to my stomach. But it should be clear that I didn’t have any say in the movie, and I think that’s really important. He had complete independent control of the film.

In watching the film, I loved learning more about your childhood. Your photographs, to me, feel like these beautiful depictions of what’s asleep in our subconscious, like a haunting and heartbreaking dream that’s part nightmare and part emotional revelation. So in learning that your father was a psychiatrist, and that was being a sort of mystery world to you, was interesting.

GC: The first and foremost thing I’m interested in doing is creating a beautiful image that feels complex and that uses light and colour. So that’s what I’m more conscious of in terms of making pictures, but then, of course, there’s the underneath stuff which is more murky, which maybe I’m a little more removed from. But that’s the real core of the work, that sense of isolation or sadness or anxiety. To me, that’s the reason to make the pictures: to come to terms with all that stuff.

And David Lynch is someone that’s a huge inspiration for you and you’ve said that he changed your life; I feel the same way about his work. I guess that’s something that attracted me to you originally, as well: you both share that juxtaposition between dreams and reality, imperfection and perfection, beautiful and grotesque, etc. Also, your photographs are so narrative even though it’s just one moment in time. Are you not thinking about what’s outside of the image?

GC: Never. And I think that’s pretty apparent in the movie. I’m completely invested in this one image, and I don’t even like to talk about exactly what it means. I’m just interested in preserving that one moment. It starts from location scouting, and then an image comes out. And so then I write
these descriptions. And once that description’s written, it’s locked in. I’m always relieved because then I don’t have to talk about the picture anymore. I can just hand the little description to the actor or the director of photography.

Originally, you conceived *Beneath the Roses* as a film. Do you think that you would want to try envisioning something in that way again?

GC: I don’t think it’s in the movie, but around that time there was a lot of interest around Hollywood. So I wrote a treatment. I had a meeting with a big Hollywood producer, and it was one of the most awkward moments of my life. He read the treatment and I could just see his face falling, and he was like, “Nothing happens in this. It’s just descriptions.” And it was! It was like: “a guy gets out of the car and it’s raining and he has a car full of sod. Cut. A woman walks across the lawn nude, pregnant.” He’s said, “It’s not connected in any way.”

**What’s the role that nudity or nakedness plays in a lot of your work? It’s more an emotionally bareness than anything remotely sexual.**

GC: It’s a kind of nakedness. I relate it to Edward Hopper; it almost increases the sense of vulnerability or loneliness or separation, but also having a desire. Never does anyone actually physically touch in my pictures. There are exceptions to that, but when there is nudity, it’s meant to reinforce the idea of being alone in your own body.
I was thinking, specifically, about the photograph with the woman coming out of the car with the shopping bag and the woman standing in front of her, nude, with her head down. That one always kills me.

GC: That was a student of mine from Yale in that picture. That was funny.

When I first saw your photos I thought they looked like how I always imagined Raymond Carver stories.

GC: Well…well, that’s my favourite – he’s my favourite.

BS: In a sense the process of his production is just as interesting to me as the photos are. And watching that progression is one of the reasons I wanted to make the film and one of the reasons why I thought there could be a film or a process film about it. I always feel like those photographs, *Beneath the Roses* especially, are this personal expression written large onto the biggest possible scale where the germs of these thoughts just grow and you see that growth because of the process. I knew that was cinematic.

GC: No one ever shot the soundstage stuff, so I’m really grateful that’s on film: the making of those pictures. Working on location is one thing and I thrive on that. I think that’s my favourite way of working, but no one has any conception of the process of making those soundstage pictures starting from nothing and building these sets from the ground up. I think it’s great that the film captures not only that, but the very beginning of an idea.
Gregory, do you have any specific films that are like your touchstones of inspiration? Besides David Lynch and *Blue Velvet*, of course.

**GC:** Hitchcock is obviously a big one. *Night of the Hunter*. In a general way, Orson Welles – just the use of deep space, which is such an important aspect to my work; the idea that everything has absolute focus.

**BS:** You know what’s interesting about that? That stuff in *Citizen Kane* that was partly done with multiple exposures.

**GC:** Which is what I’m doing. But I think, to me, the easy answer to that is just: movies. Just bringing cinematic light into a still photograph is the big revelation in my own work – to bring in light and colour in a way that was never used before in terms of creating a photographic language.

The suburban landscape and the terror that’s creeping beneath the surface and hiding between the trees is something that’s there in all of your work. My family lives in suburban New Jersey and, after living in the city, I’m more afraid there at night than I would be on a street in the middle of New York because it’s such a different feeling – there’s a quiet and stillness and the light is different. And there’re these big, nice houses, but that’s not what’s inside them.

**GC:** Yes, exactly. For me, it’s like that feeling of being slightly alien, being there but not there kind of thing. But I would never consider making a picture in New York ever. That just wouldn’t even occur to me. There are artists, writers, filmmakers, who are drawn to a particular place and spend their entire career as an artist just working there for inexplicable reasons, really.
People I know who have seen the film have loved it as much as I do, but I was talking with someone who said there was so much mystery to your work and by seeing this, some of that mystery was gone. It didn’t take anything away, but it was just a feeling.

BS: When you read an interview or see behind-the-scenes with a director, I think it always changes your relationship to the work in some way. I guess all I would hope is that more information deepens your understanding of the whole process and the images, and even if your relationship to them is different, it’s enriched in some sense.

GC: The director’s cut is always great, or the behind-the-scenes features on a DVD. To me, it honestly increases the mystery. I look back on it now and I honestly say to myself, “Did we really do that? How the fuck did we do that?” And then also my favourite parts of the movie are when it goes from shooting to the transition of the actual picture. To me, no matter what, there’s a big shift there. It goes from the making of something, to the thing itself and that feels – even knowing how we made the picture – even more mysterious to me.

BS: I really love those moments; there’s something mysterious about how an artist goes through this process. All this thinking, all this work, and then at some point the work emerges and becomes this world of its own and hopefully the film can capture that in some way. That’s the subtext or even the subject in the film: how the work emerges from that thinking process.

GC: These pictures have been out in the world so long and have become part of the public consciousness, so I think that – and I never really thought about this till now – if the movie had come out then, I might have been more resistant. Let’s say it came out just as they’ve come… but they’ve had a life and people understand them. So it’s interesting to come back now, many years later, and unpack them in a different way.
Glossary

**Cinematography**
Staged photographs that require sets, actors, costumes and the kind of techniques normally associated with film production.

**Digital C-print**
A digital C-print is the same as a C-print (a colour photographic print), but instead of being made from a colour negative or slide, the process is digital. The picture is made from a printer that uses lasers or LEDs to expose an image from a digital file onto light-sensitive photographic paper. It is then developed in a processor using conventional, silver-based photographic chemicals. Just like C-prints, the materials used to create a digital C-print are complex compounds that continue to have chemical reactions after the process is completed making it difficult to protect the print from deterioration.

**Soundstage**
A large, soundproof area/room in a studio used in film production, where elaborate sets may be constructed, to allow film-makers greater control over climate, lighting, and sound, security, and spectators.

**Staged photography**
A posed scene or performance enacted before the camera similar to *tableaux vivants* (living pictures). It can include studio portraiture and scenarios involving people that are directed or manipulated by the photographer. The genre is exemplified by Jeff Wall (b.1946) - see his masterpiece: *A Sudden Gust of Wind* (after Hokusai) (1993, Tate Collection, London); and by Cindy Sherman (b.1954) - see for instance her *Untitled Film Stills* series (1977-80).

**Straight photography**
Photography that attempts to depict a scene or object as realistically and objectively as possible. Straight photography rejects the use of manipulation; the term first emerged in the 1880s as a reaction to manipulated photography.

**Storyteller**
Many of Crewdson’s pictures feature someone speaking, a presence that implies a recounting of a story or a subjective experience in contrast to the silence of the photograph.

**Tableau**
Tableau is used to describe a painting or photograph in which characters are arranged for picturesque or dramatic effect and appear absorbed and completely unaware of the existence of the viewer. The term was first used in the eighteenth century by French philosopher Denis Diderot to describe paintings with this type of composition. Tableau paintings were natural and true to life, and had the effect of walling off the observer from the drama taking place, transfixing the viewer like never before. In the 1970s, a group of ambitious young artists like Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky began to make large format photographs that, like paintings, were designed to hang on a wall. As a result, these photographers were compelled to engage with the very same issues revealing the continued relevance of the tableau in contemporary art.
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