TEMPLON

GREGORY CREWDSON

VANITY FAIR, October 31, 2026

Gregory Crewdson: "A tale of loneliness, mystery, and the ghosts of everyday life." From "*Twilight*" to "*Stranger Things*," all the secrets of the artist beloved by Cate Blanchett.

MEMBER EXCLUSIVE

Gregory Crewdson is one of the most renowned names on the American and international art scene. His images often have elusive meanings, which we tried to grasp by talking directly with him: here's what he told us.



BY MICHAEL SONCIN

OCTOBER 31, 2026



GREGORY CREWDSON, *The Shed* (2013), detail, *Cathedral of the Pines* series , Digital pigment print, image size 95.3 × 127 cm © GREGORY CREWDSON

His father was a psychoanalyst. And perhaps this says a lot about how the celebrated American photographer **Gregory Crewdson** creates his art and, above all, how much he's willing to reveal about it: very little. But there's a reason.

The task is entrusted to the viewer, who must skillfully weave their own Ariadne's thread to escape the labyrinth, after patiently uncovering the messages deciphered within. The opportunity to delve into his **mysterious world, imbued with matryoshka-like meanings , is the exhibition** *Gregory Crewdson Eveningside* , running until January 17, 2027, in Reggio Emilia .



GREGORY CREWDSON, ***A1 Auto Sales*** *(2021–2022), Eveningside* series , Digital pigment print, 87.6 × 116.8 cm. © Gregory Crewdson

Here , photography , cinema , and **painting** intertwine, giving life to a single artistic expression. The images we see particularly portray the small towns of western Massachusetts: **streets , houses , forests , parking lots , shops** , and **industrial areas** . Environments that, while belonging to real places, are transformed into suspended scenarios, in which everything is reconstructed and where **the boundary between what has happened and what has yet to happen remains undefined** .

The exhibition features projects developed over the last decade, which form a single narrative, structured as a trilogy: ***Cathedral of Pines*** (2012–2014), created in Becket, a place linked to the artist's childhood, explores the theme of family, between memory and the idea of refuge; ***An Eclipse of Moths*** (2018–2019), set in Pittsfield, paints a portrait of an area marked by industrial decline and a fragmented society; ***Eveningside*** (2021–2022) focuses on everyday life, dwelling on work environments and the dynamics that permeate them.

A direction for a shot

When speaking of **Gregory Crewdson,** the similarity to the film not only conveys the idea, but is also the most appropriate. He is the **master** par excellence of **staged photography** . His photos are meticulously crafted, just like on film sets. **Every element is chosen with extreme care** : from the locations to the sets, from the actors to the objects, and above all, the light, which takes on a particularly significant significance. Behind even just one of these photographs lies a long process of reflection, a true **intellectual gestation** , which, to be translated into an image, requires the involvement of a team **of 50 to 100 people** .



Gregory Crewdson on set while taking a shot.



A still from *Making Eveningside* , the behind-the-scenes film.

From *Twilight* to *Stranger Things*

Which came first, the works of *Twilight* and *Stranger Things* or those of Gregory Crewdson? Looking at his work from the beginning, one could say he pioneered the atmospheres that have captivated millions of viewers in front of the screen.

According to **Jean-Charles Vergne** , curator of the exhibition, they may have been influenced by it: «When you look at *Stranger Things* , the quality of the light, the type of atmosphere, it's obvious...». He also says that, between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the American photographer published a series whose name – coincidentally – is precisely *Twilight* .



GREGORY CREWDSON, ***Pickup Truck*** (2014), *Cathedral of Pines* series , Digital pigment print, 95.3 × 127 cm. © Gregory Crewdson

Focusing on the Pickup Truck photo , it really feels like living inside the landscapes of *Twilight* , the very famous literary saga by **Stephenie Meyer** , which made its way to the cinema and starred Kristen Stewart as **Bella Swan** and Robert Pattinson as the dark **Edward Cullen** . Moreover, the pickup truck depicted somewhat resembles the one driven by Bella on her way to high school, when she meets Edward.

The image seems to have an **auditory connotation** , as if Crewdson were able to evoke a sonic presence through visual language alone: one has the sensation of treading on that ground, of feeling the sound of branches breaking, gravel crunching, and dry leaves shattering under one's feet. Small noises, the only ones that make their way through the deafening silence of a boundless forest, inhabited by **elusive and disturbing presences** . A sense of bewilderment in which it can also be pleasant to abandon oneself, to let go.



GREGORY CREWDSON, ***Cathedral of the Pines*** (2014), Cathedral of the Pines series, Digital pigment print, 95.3 × 127 cm. © Gregory Crewdson

Interview with Gregory Crewdson

Shy , introverted, enigmatic , Gregory Crewdson didn't tell us openly about his art: he whispered it to us.

Behind each of his shots, he has an entire film crew. We see it in the screening of *Making Eveningside* .

"I think not everyone is fully aware of the work that goes into making a single photograph. It's like making a film: we have a lighting team, a location team, an art department, assistants, and camera operators. I think it's interesting to show the process and how things are created. But, in the end, it all comes down to the effort to create an image that has to be as beautiful and powerful as possible. That's what matters."

Photography is also a subject he teaches at Yale University. What does he try to convey to his students?

"To find their own voice, their own way of looking at the world. It's the most important thing every artist, every young artist, must do. What is their story, how do they want to tell it? That's really the crux. I think it's the one thing I really want to try to convey to them. It's as if every artist has a story to tell: the task is to find a way to translate that story into visual form, always remaining honest with themselves."

Honesty is a fundamental element in the artistic journey, but how do you learn to recognize what makes your work authentic?
"Mostly through criticism, how to look at your work. When I talk to them about it, I never refer to my way of making images. My aim is to help them find their own voice. My father was a psychoanalyst, and perhaps that's why I'm sometimes interested in the psychological aspect of making images: where that idea comes from and what it expresses about you and your relationship with the world."

On the other hand, what do your students teach you?
"There's always something to learn from the new generations of artists: I'm interested in discovering what they watch, what they read, what music they listen to. It's a way to continue learning and engaging with what surrounds us. After all, for an artist, growing also means trying to understand themselves and their place in the world. The experiences we gather over the course of our lives become reference points we continually return to, and each time we reinterpret them differently."

Brooklyn is where you were born: how important has it been in your life?
"Brooklyn has been fundamental to me. My mother still lives there, in the house we grew up in, in Park Slope, and it has been incredibly influential in many ways. It's not like it is now: it's a very different place than it was all those years ago."

Where does he live now?
"In Great Barrington, a small town in Massachusetts. I live in a church, a Methodist church. And my studio is a former firehouse."

What's your source of inspiration?
"I'm very inspired by directors, photographers, writers, and painters who are interested in finding a kind of theatricality in everyday life. Whether it's Walker Evans, Edward Hopper, Diane Arbus, or Steven Spielberg . I feel connected to all of them."

If you had to donate one of your photographs to history, which one would you choose and why?
"I couldn't answer that question: I really can't. But if there's one image that sums up my vision, I'd say it's the man on the street. It's emblematic of many of the themes of my work: empty streets, the ability to capture beauty in everyday life, the type of light, and the presence of an upside-down streetlamp at the center of the scene, which introduces a kind of upheaval."



GREGORY CREWDSON, ***Starkfield Lane*** (2018–2019), *An Eclipse of Moths*, Digital pigment print, 127 × 225.8 cm. © Gregory Crewdson. (The photograph the artist would choose to summarize his work, despite having reiterated the impossibility of choosing just one.)

The underlying message?

"All my photos are simultaneously beautiful, sad, and ugly. There's a sense of loneliness , a sense of hope, a sense of darkness. I simply try to make images that are honest to me, that reveal something about me and that, hopefully, say something about the world we live in. I don't want the images to provide answers: I want them to raise questions. And I'd like the viewer to bring their own personal stories with them, projecting them onto these images. I don't want to say what they represent or how I feel: I want the images themselves to communicate that."

What causes today's loneliness? It seems to be a recurring theme for her.

"She and I are on Zoom now. Everyone lives their lives through phones, computers , screens, artificial intelligence , and social media. But all of this ultimately makes us feel lonelier, more disconnected. In a way, we're all lonely, but at the same time, we long for connection. Photography is a particularly lonely medium for making images. It's like looking through a viewfinder, feeling somehow separated from the world, but the reason we take photos is to try to connect, to connect to something bigger, more vast. So I think in my work, there's a beautiful dynamic between feeling lonely and the desire to connect."

A solution?

"The people around us and art. Art is a regenerating medium; it also offers a sense of hope and possibility, and it does so through beauty and mystery. When we go to museums and exhibitions , we go there to try to understand who we are and the world we live in."

In *The Shed,* there's a sense of contrast between the person and the surrounding space. It seems abandoned, yet at the same time there seems to be a strange presence. The woman seems to be wandering, separated from time and space.

"It's Joanne, my life and work partner. And it was made in the house where she grew up. In many of my photos, I always imagine the figure through a window or a door, and this creates a sort of isolation between the interior and exterior space. She's as if she's wandering at night, looking down at the pile of mud with the flowers . It's simply, once again, about finding something that makes sense in a lonely world."



GREGORY CREWDSON, ***The Shed*** (2013), *Cathedral of the Pines* series , Digital pigment print, image size 95.3 × 127 cm

The places we see have been described as haunted. In what sense?

"It's an evocative word because it speaks of loss, it speaks of ghosts, it speaks of some kind of spirit, and it also speaks of moving forward, of progress. And we are all, in one way or another, haunted."

What would you say to those who will be seeing your work for the first time?

"I feel like, even when I create images, they're never complete until the viewer encounters them and establishes a connection with them. I hope they can do that. I hope my images mean something to them."

The masterpiece with noir and Shakespearean references

If we had to choose one work that epitomizes Crewdson's mastery, it would probably be ***The Storefront Window***. Curator Jean-Charles Vergne suggests it.



GREGORY CREWDSON, ***The Storefront Window*** *(2021-2022), Eveningside* series , Digital pigment print, image size 87.6 × 116.8 cm © Gregory Crewdson

"The man is sitting on the step, barefoot: one usually takes off one's shoes when entering a sacred place. Then there's a girl who seems to be looking at herself in the mirror, but is actually looking at us. It's a detail that gives the viewer an active role: the girl and the boy don't see each other, but I see them both, connecting them," explains Vergne. The girl could be Ophelia, as suggested by the third figure, her last projection on the right, which is barely visible. "The boy could therefore be Hamlet. When I told Gregory, he smiled but never wanted to confirm it. He never confirmed my interpretations, and I believe this attitude of his represents the quintessential of his work." These are just small details. The work still hides many meanings, which the artist leaves directly for us to discover and interpret.

In Crewdson, we find references to classical Italian and Flemish painters, including religious references. The spiritual aspect is a pervasive element in his work.



Detail from *The Storefront Window, Eveningside* series , © Gregory Crewdson

This is why dedicating thirty seconds or a minute to one of his works is like watching an entire film rewound in a few seconds: it would be impossible to grasp its meaning. It's better to choose a few images, linger on each one, and then return to observe them.

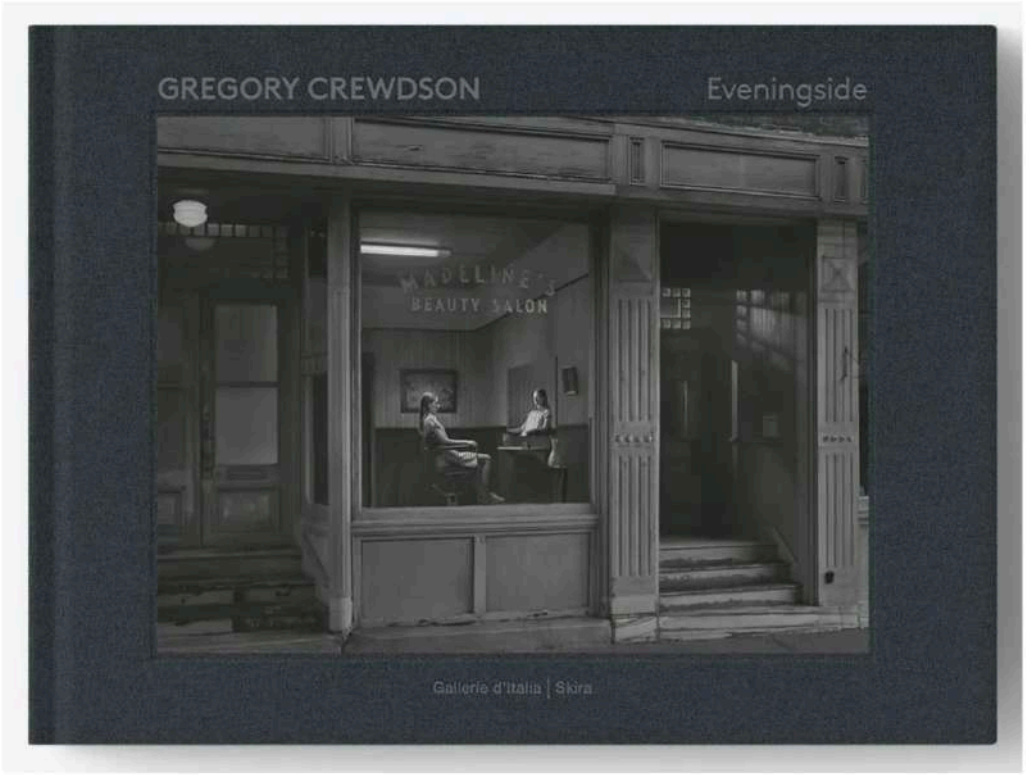
The masterpiece *The Storefront Window* belongs to the body of work called *Eveningside:* "It's unusual from my other works because it's in black and white. These images hark back to film noir, and the black and white really defines the atmosphere and setting . They're also smaller, more intimate, and more subdued than the images in my other works," Crewdson explained.

The exhibition of Gregory Crewdson, the Hopper of photography

Introspective , **enigmatic** , at times **alienating** . This is what visitors will find as soon as they enter the *Gregory Crewdson Eveningside exhibition.* Just over forty works are gathered together in three connected series, created between 2012 and 2022, curated by **Jean-Charles Vergne** in collaboration with Gallerie d'Italia – Intesa San Paolo.

An art and a genius that also captured the actress **Cate Blanchett** , his great fan and friend (some will remember the video interview they shot together during Covid).

The Edward Hopper of photography awaits you at the **Chiostri di San Pietro** , Reggio Emilia, until January 17, 2027.



The volume *Eveningside* by Gregory Crewdson, edited by Jean-Charles Vergne (Skira, 224 pp., €60)