

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Jason Farago, "A Lighter Matthew Barney Goes Back to School, and Back Home,"  
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## The New York Times

CRITIC'S PICK

### A Lighter Matthew Barney Goes Back to School, and Back Home

The artist dances with wolves, and hunters, in his new film "Redoubt," shot in his native Idaho. It's the most emancipated work of his career.



In "Redoubt," Anette Wachter, a champion sharpshooter, plays Diana, a hunter in Idaho who tracks an elusive gray wolf, an animal returning from near-extinction.  
Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery and Sadie Coles HQ; Hugo Glendinning

NEW HAVEN — Two parallel homecomings give shape to ["Redoubt,"](#) the much anticipated and unexpectedly nimble new project that Matthew Barney debuted here earlier this month. One is to Yale University, where Mr. Barney, class of 1989, began to merge ornery sculpture made with plastics and Vaseline with athletic performances and perplexing symbolism. Thirty years after graduating, the artist elected to present his newest project on the campus where he made his first mature work, in which the undergraduate would dangle from his studio walls or climb naked at Yale's cathedral-like gym.

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The other homecoming is to central Idaho, where the artist grew up. As usual with Mr. Barney — whose epic “[Cremaster](#)” cycle (1994-2002) introduced a whole generation to the sexual potential of bees, rams, racecars and the Chrysler building — “Redoubt” combines sculptures, drawings and performances with a feature-length film that itself generates new artworks. Mr. Barney has filmed in Idaho before: The Busby Berkeley revue of “[Cremaster 1](#)” (1995) takes place on a blue Boise football field, while “[River of Fundament](#)” (2014), his six-hour noble failure of excrement-slicked reincarnation, features a poetic coda of salmon spawning in an Idaho river.

But “Redoubt” is rooted, unlike those expansive works, in a single place: the remote, rugged Sawtooth Mountains, the landscape of Mr. Barney’s childhood. It also speaks more directly to contemporary American themes: the place of the gun, the fate of the environment and the fantasies and paranoias of those who turn their back on constitutional government and American society.



One of the large-scale sculptures by Mr. Barney cast from fallen trees in “Redoubt.” Called “Diana,” the work is from cast and machined brass and copper.  
Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery

Lighter, freer and a little more conventional than usual, it is Mr. Barney’s most engrossing film in over a decade. Mr. Barney appears only in a supporting role, and he now seems especially eager to embrace collaboration and improvisation, notably via dance, a fascinating addition to his cinematic techniques.

It’s certainly less visually striking than the “Cremaster” cycle and “River of Fundament.” But I love the new, more open Mr. Barney of “Redoubt,” which the Yale University Art Gallery is screening on Saturday afternoons and at a few other

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times, alongside an exhibition of large bronze and brass sculptures and strange electroplated engravings inspired by the film. (The show travels afterward to Beijing, then London.)



The trailer for Matthew Barney's film "Redoubt," 2018.



K.J. Holmes, a dance artist, in the role of Electroplater in "Redoubt."  
Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery and Sadie Coles HQ; Hugo Glendinning



The wolf is a living embodiment of the clash between Washington and anti-statist communities in Idaho.  
Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery and Sadie Coles HQ; Hugo Glendinning

"Redoubt" has a cast of just six, and draws its structure partly from the tale in Ovid's "Metamorphoses" of Diana, the chaste goddess of the hunt, and Actaeon, a doomed young hero who spies on her. Diana, here, is a hunter living off the grid

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in Idaho, attended by two dancing Virgins and clad in the military-grade camouflage favored by some anti-government types in the American west. (The film's title alludes to [American Redoubt](#), a far-right survivalist movement in the region.)

We first see Diana crafting her own bullets out of the same bronze and brass Mr. Barney uses in his sculptures, against the awesome backdrop of Idaho's snow-covered mountains. Diana is played by Anette Wachter, a world-champion sharpshooter who does her own marksmanship in the film; she is also a prolific gun blogger, and recently told the [magazine NRA Family](#), "I can't express how much I love being involved in the gun industry and culture."

Diana is hunting an elusive gray wolf, one of many returning to the Sawtooth Mountains after near-extinction, thanks to a federal government effort that drew strong opposition from the livestock industry, as well as hunters. The effort took place when Mr. Barney was a boy. Whatever its symbolic import in "Redoubt" (and Mr. Barney gives us plenty to work with, notably shots of the constellation Lupus), the wolf is also a living embodiment of the clash between Washington and anti-statist Idaho communities whose libertarianism comes in both mild and extremist strains. This project's Diana is an American original, and hunts not as divine action but from political convictions.

"Redoubt" tracks Diana and her two Virgins in search of their prey. (The cinematography is by Mr. Barney's longtime collaborator [Peter Strietmann](#), who pictures the mountains in a breathtaking palette of steely blues and grays, though he relies too much on drone shots that have already become travel-dad YouTube clichés.) The only other human up in the mountains is an Engraver, played by Mr. Barney with a bushy white beard, who observes the women at a distance and etches their hunt on sheets of copper. His character is an artist, but also a federal employee: Note the United States Forest Service patch on his ski cap and green jacket.

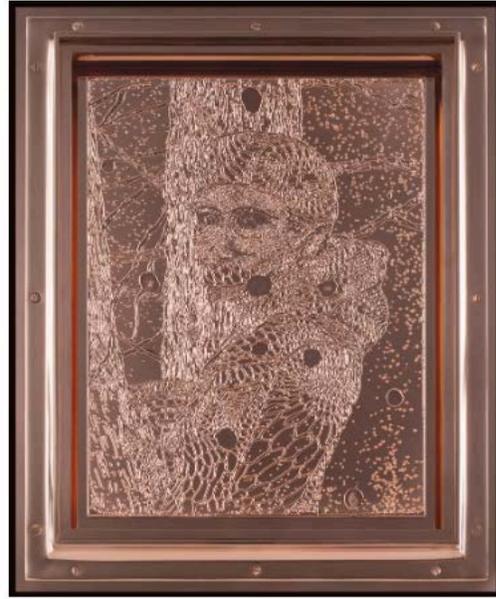


Mr. Barney, in the role of Engraver, etches life and scenery in the Idaho mountains on sheets of copper. The etchings, transformed by electroplating, appear at the Yale University Art Gallery. Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery and Sadie Coles HQ; Hugo Glendinning

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Matthew Barney, "Diana," an electroplated copper plate with vinegar patina. Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery



Matthew Barney, "Diana: State two," electroplated copper plate in copper frame. Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery



In an installation view of "Matthew Barney: Redoubt," the bronze at the front echoes the tripod that the Engraver uses to etch Diana and her Virgins in the film.  
Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery and Sadie Coles HQ; Jessica Smolinski

Each day, he drives to the trailer home of an Electroplater (played by [K.J. Holmes](#), a renowned dance artist). She dunks his copper etchings in chemical baths, and, with the help of rudimentary batteries, coats them with a new metal crust. The etchings appear, transformed, in the exhibition here at Yale: pictures of Diana, of wolves and of the Idaho mountains that are encrusted with metal nodules and scorched in places after too long in the chemical bath.

The show also includes a few larger-scale sculptures cast from fallen trees, which have much in common with the explosive bronze splashes made at the time of

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“River of Fundament” and seen [at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles](#). But it’s the electroplated etchings, sometimes daintily figurative and sometimes scarred into abstraction, that most fully express the aims of “Redoubt,” reflecting an artist seeking newer, freer shores.

That freedom extends to another medium: dance. The revelation of “Redoubt” is Eleanor Bauer, who plays one of Diana’s two Virgins and choreographed the bulk of the film’s movement. (Like most of Mr. Barney’s films — except “River of Fundament,” in which Ms. Bauer also appears — this one has no dialogue.) She and Laura Stokes, playing the other Virgin, communicate through gesture and performance as they hunt. The women roll their legs over snow banks, writhe in a hammock and balance their weight against each other while bathing in a hot spring.



The sense of freedom in “Redoubt” is inspired by its choreography, much of which was created by Eleanor Bauer.  
Matthew Barney, via Gladstone Gallery and Sadie Coles HQ; Hugo Glendinning

One even strings the other from a tree with climber’s rope, lifting her like a lupine carcass. In another dance sequence, [Sandra Lamouche](#), a performer of the Bigstone Cree Nation, executes a hoop dance in an abandoned American Legion hall. Her brief appearance reaffirms that, where so much of Mr. Barney’s earlier work sought to disrupt binary understandings of identity, “Redoubt” is mostly focused on white bodies, and how white Americans live, colonize and kill in one of the continent’s most exquisite ecosystems.

Ms. Bauer’s choreography draws heavily on Steve Paxton’s practice of contact improvisation, in which dancers respond to and anticipate each other’s motions. There are echoes, too, of Trish Brown’s gravity-defying dances with ropes and

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harnesses — especially when Ms. Bauer climbs a huge charred tree and splays her body horizontally. This stunning image of Ms. Bauer rigged in a climber's harness, suspended hundreds of feet up in the Idaho air, has almost none of the mythopoetic baggage that weighed down "River of Fundament." "Redoubt" plants itself in a place and time when the promises of democratic participation are unraveling, and where "prepper" fantasies of societal collapse intertwine with more justified fears of ecological degradation. And these more immediate concerns have produced a different sort of film, less awesome but more urgent, in which the bodies on screen find an unexpected freedom.

This new work may therefore have less in common with "Cremaster" and "River of Fundament" than with the most primordial Barney works: his decades-long "Drawing Restraint" series, in which the artist draws on walls while dragging weights or while tethered by bungee cords. (The first of them took place in 1987, here at Yale.) It turns out that Ms. Bauer has also recently executed new phases of "Drawing Restraint," at Mr. Barney's invitation. In those works and this one, Mr. Barney seems to be forging a more emancipated kind of collaboration, more trusting that another body can replace his own.