

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Ben Luke, "Matthew Barney Redoubt at Hayward Gallery review: you need to be there," Evening Standard, May 18, 2021

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CULTURE › EXHIBITIONS

Matthew Barney Redoubt at Hayward Gallery review: you need to be there

Yes it's 134 minutes long, but what an entrancing experience it is

By [Ben Luke](#) | 1 day ago

Review at a glance



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It's fitting that, after months of closure, the Hayward should re-open with a show that demands our bodily presence.

US artist Matthew Barney's Redoubt revolves around a film, but includes vast sculptures and brass and copper engravings. The sculptures' materials, surfaces and forms are so rich and complex that they must be walked around. They occupy several rooms, including one of the Hayward's outdoor terraces (how wonderful it was to take in these city vistas again). The engravings are intricate drawings made directly on the metal plates, which reflect and project light; the drawings have been subjected to chemical (or alchemical) processes, creating unreproducible textures.

And while the exhibition ticket gives you access to MUBI to watch the 134-minute film in its entirety, I recommend you see as much as you can in the gallery. I watched some at the Hayward and completed it at home. On my laptop, it dragged somewhat; I longed to be as immersed and enthralled as I was in the gallery.

That engrossment owes much to the film's setting: the snowbound Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho, where Barney grew up. Redoubt relates to 1990s debates over the reintroduction of wolves into the national park, and the battle between conservationists promoting rewilding and hunters opposing it.

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Still from Redoubt / Matthew Barney

Barney's film evokes these arguments by re-working the ancient myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of the goddess of hunting, Diana, and the hunter Actaeon. He accidentally encountered the goddess bathing with her nymphs and was condemned by a furious Diana to be savaged by his own hounds.

In this retelling, Diana's a camouflaged, rifle-toting sniper, played by Anette Wachter, a real-life National Rifle Association hero. Actaeon is The Engraver, a US Forest Service ranger played by Barney. He depicts Diana, the landscape and fauna in the engravings, which are treated by The Engraver's accomplice, The Electroplater.

Diana responds violently to The Engraver's attention: bullet-holed copper plates are among the objects on the Hayward's walls. She, too, has company: two Virgins who perform, using experimental "contact improvisation" movement, in the Idaho pine trees, hot springs and snowdrifts. Another dance is performed, with hoops, by Sandra Lamouche of the Bigstone Cree Nation,

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evoking the indigenous people who occupied this landscape for thousands of years before settlers headed west.



Sandra Lamouche of the Bigstone Cree Nation / Matthew Barney

The fate of First Nation Americans, the historic and contemporary politics of American wilderness, the sublime landscape painting tradition, enduring divisions in between rural and urban Americans, and humankind's desire to tame and manage nature are just some of Barney's themes.

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But don't dwell on comprehending it too literally: Barney was attracted to the Diana myth because it's a riddle; to attract him, he says, subject matter must have mysterious aspects.

This beguilement lends his work its power. The sculptures, while encapsulating the film's themes and atmosphere, are deeply strange. They're made through a complex process of casting the Sawtooth's lodgepole pines in copper and brass, carving into them, creating patterns evoking the camouflage worn by Diana, the Virgins and The Engraver, and combining them with machine-made industrial elements so that they suggest the weapons and rifle stands in the film.

Like the copper plates, these vast creations appear to be in the process of change, in arrested movement. So we're back to Ovid and metamorphosis: Barney transports us into the heart of the transformative process of creating art.

Hayward Gallery, to Jul 25; southbankcentre.co.uk