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Peter Bradshaw, "Redoubt review – Matthew Barney's mysterious, mythical movie-ballet," The Guardian, May 18, 2021

The Guardian

Redoubt review – Matthew Barney's mysterious, mythical movie-ballet



The artist casts himself alongside a real-life NRA sharpshooter in this wordless exploration of wilderness



Redoubt is a wordless outdoor movie-ballet inspired by the huntress myth of Diana, set in the forested wilderness of Idaho's Sawtooth mountains and brought to us by artist and film-maker Matthew Barney, whose most famous work is probably his colossal five-film sequence, the Cremaster Cycle.

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Cremaster was a headspinningly gigantic folie de grandeur spanning six hours in total, inspired by the interrelation of biology and creativity. Redoubt is a more modest two-and-a-quarter hours, part of an art installation including sculptures and engravings, originally commissioned by Yale University. Barney plays a hardy outdoorsman, an engraver who hikes around the wilderness, making etchings on an engraving plate; his redoubt appears to be a modest trailer which he shares with a woman (KJ Holmes), perhaps his wife or partner, who electroplates the resulting work in a chemical bath. But the engraver is in a mysterious state of antagonism, or at least wary coexistence, with three women in the forest who are hunting wolves: Diana (played by real-life sharpshooter and NRA member Anette Wachter), and her “Calling Virgin” and “Tracking Virgin” (played by the dancers Eleanor Bauer and Laura Stokes) who are dressed in camo, carry serious rifles and hardware; the Virgins go into strange, showy dance moves in the snow (which, it has to be said, rather negates the importance of camouflage and not revealing yourself to the prey).

Wolves and other animals get shot, though a final note on the credits assures us that this is just an effect. Could it be that the engraver himself is destined, like Actaeon in the myth, to be the prey? It is a handsome-looking film, with a strange and compelling soundtrack by Jonathan Bepler. Redoubt is about humanity’s relationship with nature and the business of hunting itself (and the presence of gun enthusiast Wachter implies that the film can’t be interpreted as straightforwardly opposed to hunting). I wondered how much really was being said, in the end, but Barney has a bold and distinctive style.

- Redoubt is released on 20 May on Mubi, and is also screening on 19 May-25 July at Matthew Barney: Redoubt at the Hayward Gallery, London.