

Applying a range of critical theories, identify, discuss and evaluate an artwork of your own choosing:



In this essay, I will be undertaking a deep analysis of Gregory Crewdson's *Sleepwalker* (1999) which is from his *Twilight Series* released in 1999. I chose this art piece because I adore how bizarre it is; it draws so many questions. This seems to be a common theme in Crewdson's art but I think this one is unique due to the thought process it requires.

The photograph is set in what seems to be around the 1960s to 1970s. By analysing the background, I can spot a vintage muscle car from a similar period. The car leads me to believe this image is based in the United States. The majority of the details in the photo are from looking through the window. I think this was done to make the idea of the pregnant woman being outside in that condition even more jarring because we the viewer, are looking out from a perspective that would be comfortable and warm as opposed to where the woman is standing which would be cold and chilly.

The curtains and sills are both white with the retro blue wallpaper surrounding them. The decor of the house also proves the point of it being based around the 70s. Dark blue seems to be the most

familiar colour, yet the green is still so noticeable and vibrant. The trees in the background are so well lit, they seem almost fabricated. The light brushes though but causes some very odd dark shadows. Perhaps they are truly fake trees, or the saturation of green has been increased. The possibility of them being fake is high because the creator, Gregory Crewdson is known for his artificial and staged photographs but also his post-production skills.

I admire his controversial methods because you can analyse every minor detail of the image. Everything has a purpose and meaning. Crewdson designed everything to his liking. His work has a cinematic style due to his use of motion picture film equipment. Everything looks like a still image from a film.

The house behind the subject (women) appears to be incredibly cosy and welcoming. This gives the impression this is based in a middle-class suburb. I suspect this was purposed to raise questions about the woman standing on the edge of the grass between the road and the property.

The woman is very lit. There is almost a sandstorm of light around her. Which makes her more striking and stands out more. I believe this was done to draw more attention to her being semi-nude and pregnant. This draws attention and makes the viewer question it. I think that is what the creator is trying to do; create as many questions as possible. It's concerning to glance at as she is pregnant. In English-speaking countries, we tend to look left to right when first glancing at an image. The woman is placed in an ideal position for that. Perhaps the creator had this in mind.

I think the title (sleepwalker) gives a part of the narrative away before reading the title. My first analysis was slightly different before I read the title. My first analysis was that she wasn't sleepwalking. Maybe she had a mental condition, leaving her confused. Possibly side effects to medication. She doesn't look concerned or troubled. She appears to be standing upright with the correct posture. I don't think it's common to sleepwalk with correct posture. The way she has been represented alone and isolated outside in the cold bothers the viewer when considering she is pregnant.

The fact that the woman is visibly pregnant confuses the viewer. Therefore, it makes it intriguing and raises more questions. "why is this pregnant woman standing outside at night semi-nude?" Is what would what the average individual would think at first glance. Crewdson has left enough details for us to come up with our interpretation but not enough for us to be entirely certain.

"My pictures must first be beautiful, but that beauty is not enough. I strive to convey an underlying edge of anxiety, of isolation, of fear." - Gregory Crewdson. I believe this is the perfect quote to represent this art piece. We all have a similar thought process while analysing this particular art piece. I'm convinced Crewdson is trying to strike feelings of anxiety and discomfort on the viewer in a thought-provoking manner.

I have established that Crewdson is trying to make the viewer anxious and tries to convey loneliness and fear. But how does he achieve this? He conveys emotion by using colours. The colours in an image are just as important as the sound in a video. There seems to be a lot of dark blues. There aren't any bright vibrant colours in the light. They're usually covered in the shadows. The image doesn't resemble anything upbeat but something to be taken seriously.

Crawdson conveyed loneliness by placing the woman in an empty area. She is very isolated, with no one in sight besides herself. The position for everything is ideal. If she were standing inside looking out the effect of loneliness would not be as significant.

You could argue that if that were a white male dressed the same, the effect of it being bizarre and intriguing would not be as bold and striking. This is due to women being perceived as more precious and vulnerable than men. Through reading The Big Issue online news article, I discovered that women are the minority when it comes to being homeless. They are more likely to be taken in and given a second chance. Could you imagine what the statistics are on pregnant women being homeless? These facts prove my point of them being perceived as more precious and cherished. Women tend to be treated with more sympathy. Especially if the woman was pregnant. I'm not claiming that the subject is homeless but her being semi-nude spikes the curiosity of the viewer. It adds another layer of questions on top of the ones we already have. The bottom line is that the creator has made this image special by including the vulnerable pregnant woman.

During when this photograph was based, desegregation was starting to be abolished legally. There were still a lot of discrimination for people of colour. Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in the late 60s. During this time racism was a larger issue than what is it in the present. Maybe this is something Crewdson considered. How would the race of the woman change the public's interpretation?

Racist people would have no pity or empathy towards the black community and if the woman in the image were black it could be a possibility that they would not care as much considering when it was based. The black community were also the minority in the United States in the 70s but has had rapid growth since. The photograph is more relatable to the white community as opposed to people of colour. The more relatable; the more of a discomfort feeling we would get. Which is Crewdson's objective.

A common theme for Crewdson's work is to be set in around this era. But if this image had been based on the present. Perhaps he would have used a black woman. According to Pew Research Center the black population in the United States has increased by 30% since 2000. That's an increase of 11 million. The recent Black Lives Matter movement has encouraged feelings of remorse and empathy towards that community. It could be a more striking photograph if it were based on the present.

To summarise Crewdson wanted to convey anxiety and isolation. He achieved this by placing a vulnerable white woman in an empty area. She's dressed inappropriately for where she's standing and it's a very unusual time.

References:

To assign or attribute a gender to; to divide, classify, or differentiate on the basis of gender. - Oxford English Dictionary

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Of a woman or other female mammal: having offspring developing in the uterus. †Also of the womb
- Oxford English Dictionary

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Prejudice, antagonism, or discrimination by an individual, institution, or society, against a person or people on the basis of their nationality

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