

# CATHERINE OPIE

b. April 14, 1961

## PHOTOGRAPHER

*“Let’s push the boundaries a little bit here about what you guys think normal is.”*

**“Looking at her pictures can be uncomfortable,” observed the New York Times, “not because of their confrontational content but because they reveal as much about the beholder as the beheld.”**

For over a decade, photographer Catherine Opie has used the power of her lens to create visibility for queer subcultures existing on society’s fringes. Her raw and honest photographs challenge viewers to reevaluate notions of sexuality and societal norms. Her groundbreaking work has adorned gallery walls worldwide, including The Guggenheim in New York and The Photographer’s Gallery in London.

At age 9, Opie decided to become a social documentary photographer after studying the work of Lewis Hine. Inspired by Hine’s use of photography as a means to effect social change around child labor, Opie pursued her passion for documenting the world with her camera. At 18, she left her home in Sandusky, Ohio, to study at the San Francisco Art Institute where she received a B.F.A. in 1985. She earned an M.F.A. from California Institute of the Arts three years later.

In 1995, Opie’s career gained momentum after her provocative portraits of gay fringe groups appeared at the Whitney Biennial, one of the world’s leading art shows. Images of pierced, tattooed and leather-clad members of Opie’s inner circle were presented to the public in a bold and unapologetic fashion. “Looking at her pictures can be uncomfortable,” observed The New York Times, “not because of their confrontational content but because they reveal as much about the beholder as the beheld.”

In addition to documenting sexual minority communities, Opie photographs landscapes and architecture. In her exhibit “Freeways” (1994-95), she explores the intricacies of Los Angeles’s highway system. In “Mini-malls” (1997-98), she reveals the rich ethnic diversity of Southern California’s shopping centers. Combining both landscape and portraiture in her series “Domestic,” Opie traveled nationwide photographing lesbian couples living together.

Opie is a professor of photography at UCLA. She has received various awards, including the Washington University Freud Fellowship in 1999 and the Larry Aldrich Award in 2004. In 2006, she was awarded the prestigious United States Artist Fellowship.

In an exhibit catalog interview, Opie reflects, “I have represented this country and this culture. And I’m glad that there is a queer, out, dyke artist that’s being called an American photographer.”



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