

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Mulleavy, Kate and Laura. "Sunday Styles: Reflections Of a Photographer." *The New York Times*
21 February 2016

SundayStyles

The New York Times

Catherine Opie in Conversation With Rodarte By Kate And Laura Mulleavy Feb. 16, 2016



Kate & Laura, 2012 Credit © Catherine Opie, courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Lehmann Maupin, New York & Hong Kong

The photographer Catherine Opie is the focus of several new shows on both coasts. A current exhibition at Lehmann Maupin in New York, split between the gallery's Chelsea and Lower East Side locations, showcases a wide assortment of her work — including landscapes, portraits and pieces from her "700 Nimes Road" series, photographs of Elizabeth Taylor's belongings. She is also currently the subject of three shows in Los Angeles — at LACMA, MOCA's Pacific Design Center and the Hammer. She spoke to the Rodarte designers Laura and Kate Mulleavy, her frequent collaborators who will show their fall/winter 2016 collection today, for T.

Can you tell us about growing up in Ohio?

There was something sweet and blissful of the idea of Ohio and looking, and cornfields, and the incredible freedom of exploring the landscape as a kid at that time. Kids don't ride around all summer long on their bikes anymore, at least not here in L.A. There's a certain nostalgia of the idea of freedom and the charm of the Midwest.

Has it influenced your work and in any way?

Well, I think the influence comes from allowing myself as a child to have a sense of space and exploration that has carried through to my adult life. I still have wanderlust and want to try to continue to make sense of either landscape or place through imaging it. Also the way I explored Ohio with a camera as a 9-year-old was an influence.

Was there anyone — a mentor or subject — who transformed the way you approach photography?

It's always hard to pick one mentor. Voices swirl in my head — certainly many out of SFAI and CalArts, where I went to school. I would say if I had to pick a voice that gave me incredible self-confidence it would be that of Larry

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Sultan. I think he recognized something in me that brought out my ability to begin to communicate the content within my photographs. But I feel bad leaving out all those other great mentors such as Catherine Lord, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Millie Wilson, Hank Wessel, Judy Fiskin. I'm sure there's more.



Catherine Opie, 2012 Credit Heather Rasmussen

Did you have one moment or many that led you to discovering your talent as a photographer?

I can say there was no “ah-ha” moment. For me it was just the fact that I was so passionate about photography that I circled it for years knowing that's what I wanted to do. But it was hard giving myself permission to follow the path of being a photographer with my parent's voices in my head saying, “How are you going to earn money?”

Tell us about the discoveries you made being able to photograph Liz Taylor's belongings? They are relics of another time, in a way.

I can see where the photographs can be thought of as relics because of Elizabeth's iconic status of being one of the great movie stars of a certain generation, but my discoveries of being able to photograph her belongings lie within the simplicity of exploring her home. And the discoveries are really edited down in both the body work and the book “[700 Nimes Road](#).” They really try to approach the making of a still life as a portrait that conveys the ability to look at somebody so iconic in a humanistic way.

Do you ever let outside viewers influence what you create? If so, have you regretted it? Or learned that you trust your vision solely?

I would have probably never made the early portraits in the '90s without the influence of my good friend Richard Hawkins. I appreciated that voice so much because it allowed me to move my work to a place that I'd never explored before (studio photography). No regrets. I don't really let that many people into my process. I don't have studio visits with fellow artists that much — I keep my process pretty close to myself. I think that, more and more, I'm realizing how curators are influencing the translation of my work, and I'm really starting to value that voice in my head to let go of control because of my trust of various curators in my life.

Right: *Handbag Reflection* from the *700 Nimes Road Portfolio*, 2010-2011 Credit © Catherine Opie, courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Lehmann Maupin, New York & Hong Kong



THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Tell us about the series of portraits set against black backgrounds. How did they develop as a concept?

They actually developed with me photographing the book we worked on together. I rarely use black backgrounds, but I did for some of the photographs for the book. It definitely influenced me to think how black operates as a space and non-space. I realized for me that non-space was the subconscious, and for the figure to emerge from it, while kind of having a conversation with Renaissance lighting in painting, I could create a portrait that has presence as well as functions from a potential dream state in my mind. It's hard, because I've fallen in love with that process and have to end the body of work sometime, but I'm still really enjoying thinking about those figures and my friends and how they emerge from that blackness.

Can you tell us about one day in your life? An hour-by-hour account.

Wake up, yell upstairs for Oliver to get downstairs and eat breakfast so I can get him to the bus by 7 a.m. Go and work out in the gym or play tennis. Either head to the studio or teach at UCLA, then often there is a meeting or dinner plans afterward. But my favorite is when the day ends and the class is over and I can go home to the family for a home-cooked meal, a glass of red wine, and sit and watch television.

What is a color you could not live without?

Easy, blue.

"700 Nimes Road" is on view Jan. 14 - Feb. 20 at Lehmann Maupin, 201 Chrystie St.; "Portraits and Landscapes" is on view Jan. 14 - Mar. 5 at Lehmann Maupin, 536 West 22nd St. www.lehmannmaupin.com. "700 Nimes Road" is on view Jan. 23 - May 8 at the MOCA Pacific Design Center, 8687 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, moca.org; "Portraits" is on view Jan. 30 - May 22 at the Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, hammer.ucla.edu; "Catherine Opie: O" is on view Feb. 13 - Sept. 5 at the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, www.lacma.org.

A version of this article appears in print on February 21, 2016, on Page ST3 of the New York edition with the headline: In Conversation: Reflections of a Photographer.

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/16/t-magazine/catherine-opie-rodarte-interview-fashion-week.html?mcubz=0&_r=0