

Cohen, Alina. 'Photos of Elizabeth Taylor's Home Capture Its Beauty and Banality'.
Hyperallergic Online. 11 February 2016

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

HYPERALLERGIC

Photos of Elizabeth Taylor's Home Capture Its Beauty and Banality



Detail of Catherine Opie's "Krupp Diamond" from the '700 Nimes Road Portfolio' (2010–2011)
at Lehmann Maupin (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Like a closed curtain at the beginning of a performance, a red, wavy material with the name "Elizabeth Taylor" emblazoned in white lettering fills the frame. This first photograph in *Catherine Opie: 700 Nimes Road*, on view at Lehmann Maupin, sets a dramatic tone for the rest of the exhibition.

The next photograph, like an opening sequence or a first scene, introduces the photographs' subject: Elizabeth Taylor herself. Or, at least, a multifaceted representation of her through her possessions. In "Andy Warhol to Elizabeth (Self-Portrait Artist)," a photograph of one of Warhol's "Liz" silk screens, reflects Opie as she photographs it. Opie's silhouette is dark against gridded windows. She blends into Taylor's hair, as if trying to insinuate herself into the actress's mind. Warhol signed the work, and his scrawl is still legible. With this photograph, Opie acknowledges the conflating perceptions of Taylor: muse to artists, film icon, and fodder for the tabloids, until her death in 2011. Opie knows she's working with a subject who's been so documented and mythologized that these new photographs add just one more layer to a dense history.

11 DUKE STREET, ST JAMES'S, LONDON SW1Y 6BN

TEL +44 (0)20 7925 2505 FAX +44 (0)20 7925 2506 info@thomasdane.com



Catherine Opie, "Andy Warhol to Elizabeth (Self-Portrait Artist)"

But what a layer it is. Opie's 50 photographs feature the interiors and belongings of Elizabeth Taylor's home at 700 Nimes Road. Opie varies her distance from her subject: she captures full rooms, from Taylor's impressive shoe closet to her living room; she zooms in on smaller details such as pink balloon shades, individual pieces of jewelry, Oscar statuettes, a koi pond, and handbags. Opie challenges her viewer to look more carefully as she obscures some of the objects she photographs. While she brings most of her details into sharp focus, two close-up shots of jewelry blur in a soft, old movie kind of way. Her photographs vary widely in both composition and content, enhancing the sense of her subject's complexity. As a series, they offer an intricate, indirect portrait of a woman through the objects she owned and the spaces she inhabited.

Opie captures the incongruities of Taylor's life. Kitsch and refinement, beauty and banality are all evident. A photograph of three shelves of cowboy boots hangs next to a photograph of a row of Chanel shoes. Small, white dog figurines appear throughout the series, and a shot of a cluttered bedside table features a portrait of Michael Jackson with a flower on top of the frame. The photographs convey a sense of excess — boxes of gowns, full shelves, lots of makeup tools — but also of something delicate, sacred, and personal — a yellow chiffon dress "for Richard," a single yellow diamond ring, an intimate note from Michael Jackson's daughter, Paris, addressed to Taylor, her godmother.



Installation view of 'Catherine Opie: 700 Nimes Road' at Lehmann Maupin



Catherine Opie, "Jewelry Boxes #6"

Then, as in any life, there are a few mysteries. One photograph, "Deer in Snow," looks like a part of a larger painting that may hang somewhere in Taylor's home. Opie, however, offers the viewer no context. Bookended by one photograph of a dresser and one of a wall of photos of Taylor and her former husband, Richard Burton, the deer become a random, comical puzzle. Same goes for the words, "The Quest for Japanese Beef," which are scrawled in what looks like lipstick on a mirror above a vanity full of perfumes and jewelry.

With these photographs, Opie asks us to consider what comprises a life. What significance can we attach to the objects with which we surround ourselves? How many different ways can we tell a story about a single person? She calls for a closer examination of the stories of our possessions, both individually and as a strange, discordant, but ultimately meaningful whole.

Catherine Opie: 700 Nimes Road continues at Lehmann Maupin (201 Chrystie Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through February 20.



Catherine Opie, "Miniatures"

<https://hyperallergic.com/274995/photos-of-elizabeth-taylors-home-capture-its-beauty-and-banality/>