

CATHERINE OPIE

Walls, Windows, and Blood

February 8 – March 9, 2024

New York



Catherine Opie, *Untitled #11 (Windows)*, 2023 (detail)

Lehmann Maupin announces *Walls, Windows, and Blood*, the U.S. debut of the latest body of work from acclaimed American photographer Catherine Opie. In this series Opie turns her lens towards the history and architecture of Vatican City. By examining the power systems and architectural structures that exist within the Vatican, the artist engages with both the legacy and present identity of this city within a city, raising critical questions about the history of the Roman Catholic Church and Catholicism and its impact today.

In *Walls, Windows, and Blood* Opie carefully examines the politics of place as it relates to identity, advancing ideas explored in many of her recent bodies of work including *The Modernist* (2017), *Rhetorical Landscapes* (2019), and *2020*. While *The Modernist* dealt with themes of political breakdown and global upheaval, *Rhetorical Landscapes* pictured a portrait of America through the prism of the physical and political landscape, considering the violent language rife in U.S. political discourse as well as the impending ecological destruction resulting from climate change. In *2020*, Opie documented the lead up to the presidential election on a cross country road trip, with photographs taken against the backdrop of the global pandemic and widespread uprising against police brutality. In each of these series Opie seeks to map the complexities of our contemporary moment, especially with respect to the relationship between identity and structures of power, both physical and social.

The images in *Walls, Windows, and Blood* were taken over the course of six weeks during the summer of 2021, while Opie was the Robert Mapplethorpe Resident in Photography at the American Academy in Rome. Due to pandemic access restrictions, the Vatican was uncharacteristically empty, allowing the artist to document both Vatican City and the Vatican Museum with an extraordinary amount of freedom. In photographing the Vatican's external walls—a crucial element of its architectural identity—Opie focused on corners that were pointing inwards and outwards, towards and away from the Vatican City center. Printed to stand 7 feet high, the artist's Vatican Walls are installed on hand-crafted Italian marble pedestals designed by American Academy Architecture Fellow Katy Barkan and positioned leaning against the walls of the gallery, giving them a sense of physical precarity. These large-scale works consider essential themes of inclusion versus exclusion, wall building, and borders, in addition to the more contemporary concern of modern surveillance, signaled by the security cameras that can be seen peeking over the ramparts.

In contrast with *Walls* are the artist's photographs of windows, which alternately depict glimpses of the Vatican's interior lawns and architecture and look out over the wider Roman capital, within which the Vatican occupies a unique position. The visibility from Opie's *Windows* ranges from brilliantly clear to completely opaque, with frosted glass or pulled shades; in these works the artist contemplates the relationship between transparency and power, considering who controls the ability to see or be seen.

Interwoven throughout the *Windows* and *Walls* are the artist's *Blood Grids*. To create these works, Opie first photographed every representation of blood depicted in the artwork in the Vatican Museum's collection, subsequently framing specific selections at close range. The scenes of violence and conquest in the tapestries and paintings in the Vatican's holdings are visual reminders of the power and dominance of the Catholic Church throughout history. Arranged aesthetically by Opie in a modernist grid, each image is isolated, erasing its narrative context and calling into question the ways in which these histories are told and experienced.

Shown in dialogue with the *Walls, Windows, and Blood Grids* is *No Apology* (June 5, 2021), a seminal work from the series that places the viewer outside, looking up at Pope Francis on his papal balcony during his Sunday morning address. June 5, 2021 marks the day the Catholic Church first acknowledged, but did not apologize for, the bodies of Indigenous children found in unmarked graves in Canada. The children had died in the care of government-funded boarding schools run by the Church, which were designed to forcibly assimilate them into Canadian society. The inclusion of the lone figure of the Pope, and this particular address, recalls the colonial legacy of the Church and the far reaching impacts of its centuries-long drive for power, expansion, and influence. The image takes on an additional layer of meaning when shown in New York, where some of the most conservative Cardinals of the Church are in power.

In *Walls, Windows and Blood*, Opie continues her acute analysis of societal power structures and how they intersect with the formation and understanding of identity. By examining the Vatican as a city, with a keen eye towards how the architecture and aesthetics of the space inform the identity of the Church itself, Opie asks viewers to reevaluate and deconstruct the often routinely accepted systems, aesthetics, and modes of power that govern our modern world.

Catherine Opie (b. 1961, Sandusky, OH; lives in Los Angeles) is known for her powerfully dynamic photography that examines the ideals and norms surrounding the culturally constructed American dream and American identity. She first gained recognition in the 1990s for her series of studio portraits, photographing gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals drawn from her circle of friends and artists. Opie has traveled extensively across the country exploring the diversity of America's communities and landscapes, documenting quintessential American subjects—high school football players and the 2008 presidential inauguration—while also continuing to display America's subcultures through formal portraits. Using dramatic staging, Opie presents queer and trans bodies in intimate photographs that evoke traditional Renaissance portraiture—images of power and respect. In her portraits and landscapes, Opie establishes a level of ambiguity of both identity and place by exaggerating masculine or feminine characteristics, or by exaggerating distance, cropping, or blurring her landscapes.



Opie received a B.F.A. from San Francisco Art Institute in 1985, and an M.F.A. from CalArts in 1988. Solo exhibitions of her work have been organized at The Current Now, Stowe, VT (2022); Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, Canada (2020); Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Cleveland, OH (2019); Marciano Foundation, Los Angeles, CA (2019); Princeton University School of Architecture, Princeton, NJ (2018); Centro Internazionale di Fotografia, Palermo, Italy (2018); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art, Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles, CA (2016); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2016); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2015); Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA (2012); Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, NY (2012); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2011); Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR (2010); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2008); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, IL (2006); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2002); and the Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, MO (2000).

Select group exhibitions featuring her work include *Face to Face: Portraits of Artists by Tacita Dean, Brigitte Lacombe and Catherine Opie*, International Center of Photography, New York, NY (2023); *Coming Attractions: The John Waters Collection*, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD (2022); *13 Women*, Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, CA (2022); *Our Selves: Photographs by Women Artists from Helen Kornblum*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2022); *Picturing Motherhood Now: Images for a New Era*, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH (2021); *Any Distance Between Us*, RISD Museum, Providence, RI (2021); *Mother!*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark (2021); *Monoculture: A Recent History*, Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp, Belgium (2020); *In Focus: Election Eve*, The Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2020). *Kiss My Genders*, Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2019); *Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2019); *West by Midwest*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL (2018); *Ansel Adams in Our Time*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA (2018); *Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art*, Bentonville, AR (2020); *Selections from the Permanent Collection: Catherine Opie and Sterling Ruby*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (2017); *Breaking News*, Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2016-2017); *A Slow Succession with Many Interruptions*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA (2016-2017); *Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney's Collection*, Whitney

Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2016); *Who Shot Sports: A Photographic History*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY (2016); *Perfect Likeness: Photography and Composition*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2015); *America Is Hard to See*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2015); and *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. (2008).

Opie's work is in numerous international public and private collections, including Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA; Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL; The Broad, Los Angeles, CA; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, Mexico; Collezione Patrizia e Augustino Re Rebaudengo Sandretto, Turin, Italy; Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY; Hall Art Foundation, Reading, VT; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, Australia; Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, New York, NY; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; Miami Art Museum, Miami, FL; Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis, MO; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX; The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, La Jolla, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; National Portrait Gallery, London, United Kingdom; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL; Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, MO; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; Si Shang Art Museum, Beijing, China; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

Opie has received numerous awards and fellowships, including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Guggenheim Fellowship, Photography (2019), Aperture Foundation Award (2018), Smithsonian Archives of American Art Medal (2016), Women's Caucus for Art President's Award for Lifetime Achievement (2009), United States Artists Fellowship (2006), San Francisco Art Institute President's Award for Excellence (2006), Larry Aldrich Award (2004), and the CalArts Alpert Award in the Arts (2003). She has been a professor of fine art at the University of California, Los Angeles, since 2001 and serves on the board of directors of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Artist portrait by Heather Rasmussen.

**LEHMANN MAUPIN**

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since Inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity, and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.

NEW YORK

501 West 24th Street
New York, NY 10011
+1 212 255 2923

CONTACT

Adriana Elgarresta, Global Director of Public Relations
adriana@lehmannmaupin.com

Alejandro Jassan, Associate Director of Press Relations
alejandro@lehmannmaupin.com

General Inquiries
newyork@lehmannmaupin.com