



Peder

Catherine  
Opie

Walls, Windows and Blood

Peder Lund

2024

Lund

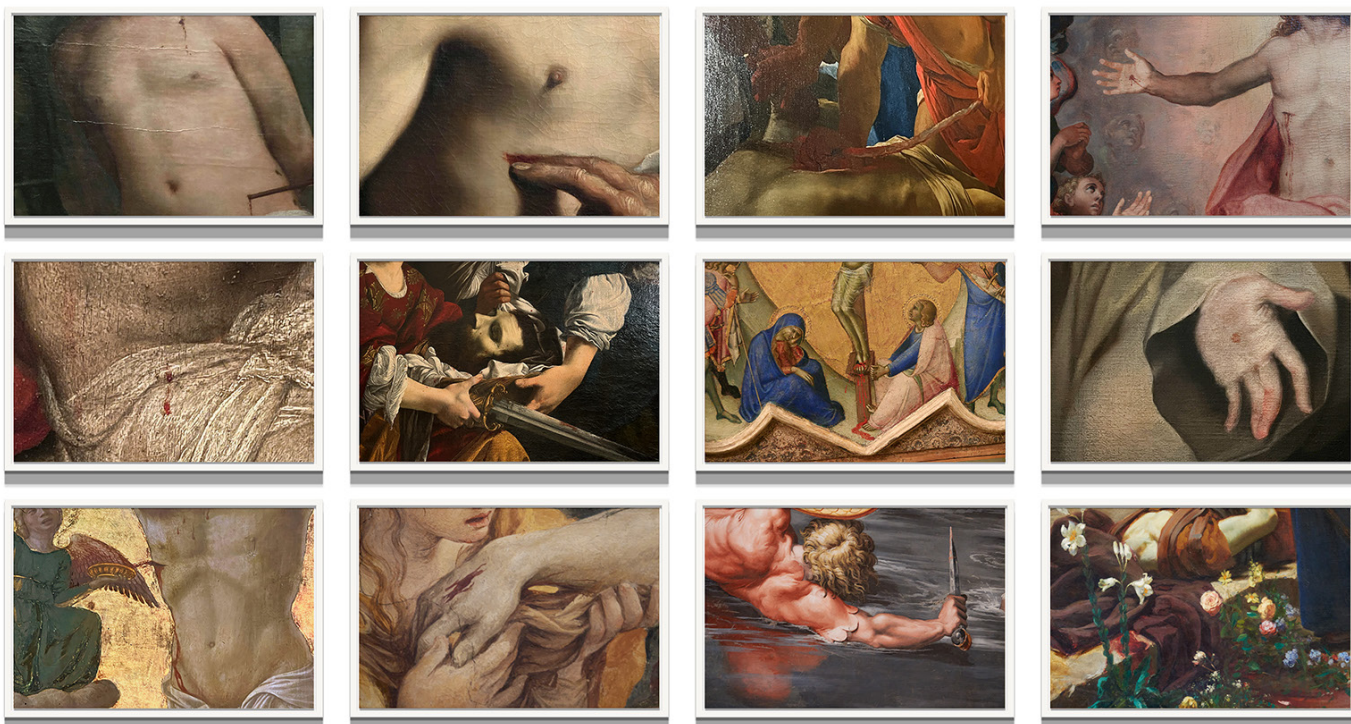




Peder Lund is delighted to announce the exhibition *Walls, Windows and Blood* with works by the American artist Catherine Opie (1961-). The exhibition opens on January 20th and continues through March 23, 2024. An opening reception will be held on January 20th from 12-4 pm.

Over the past thirty years, Opie has created a boldly original and complex body of photographic work that explores notions of communal, sexual, and cultural identity. Tackling such diverse genres as studio portraiture, landscape photography, and urban street photography, she has offered profound insights into the conditions in which communities form and the terms in which they are defined. From her lustrous portraits of the queer subcultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco to her expansive urban landscapes of cities like Chicago, Minneapolis, and New York, Opie has imbued her otherwise overlooked or misrepresented subjects with a newfound sense of dignity and respect. She also references the aesthetic identity of the great American photographers, whose work she quotes and refracts in her images. All the while she has maintained a formal rigor and technical mastery over her chosen medium, working in stark and provocative color, and richly toned black-and-white. Keenly aware of art-historical standards and contemporary political attitudes, Opie purposefully creates photographs that function as objective records and subjective interpretations. Opie has in this fashion produced some of the most striking and important photographs of the 1990s and 2000s.

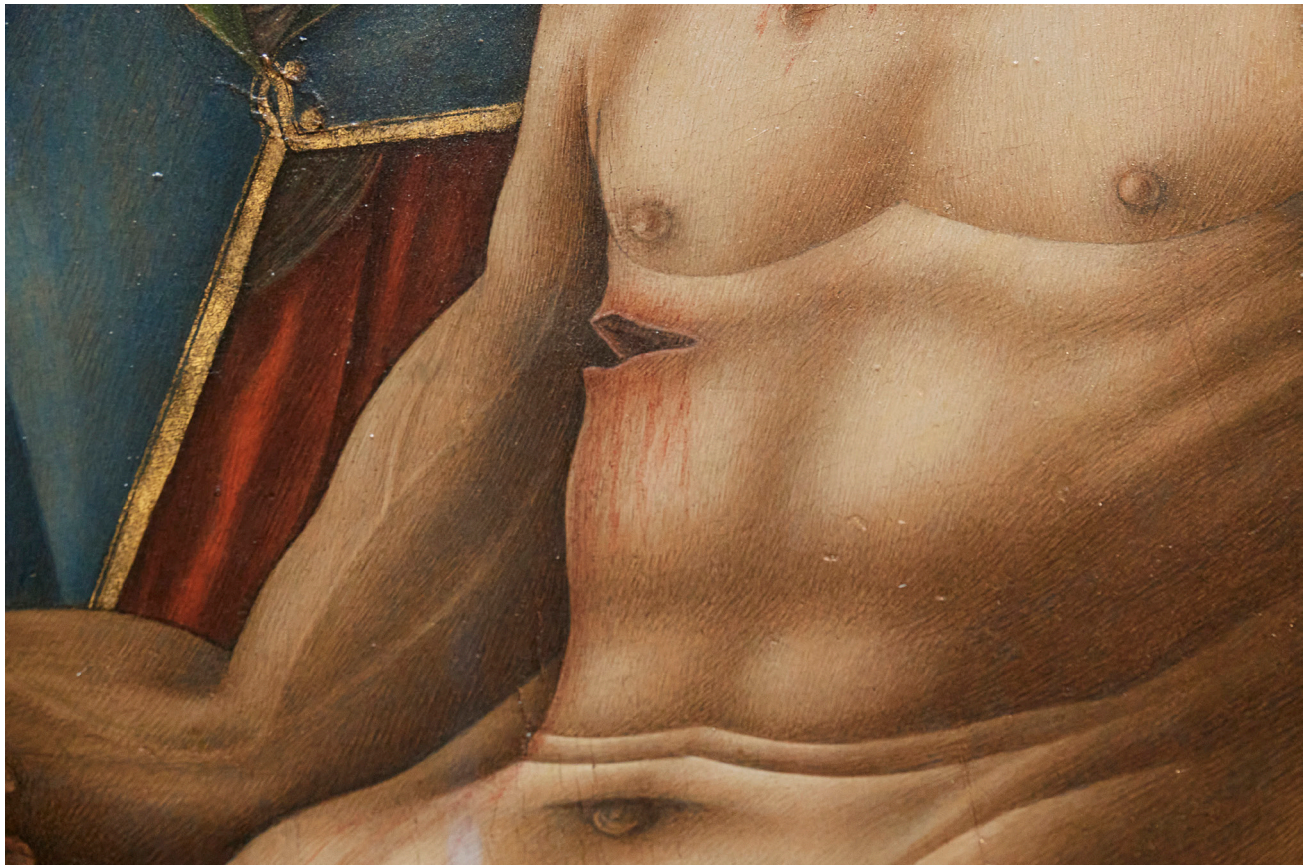
Opie creates discrete bodies of work in series, each with specific parameters. Opie's three latest series of work, titled *Blood Grids*, *Walls*, and *Windows* were conceived and photographed while the artist completed her residency at the American Academy in Rome. Selections from each of these series will be installed at Peder Lund for the artist's forthcoming exhibition at the gallery, titled *Walls, Windows and Blood*. A singular print, titled *No Apology (June 6, 2021)*, will also be included. This will be the artist's third exhibition with the gallery; it has been ten years since the





artist's last installation at Peder Lund, however, in that time, the gallery has assisted with important solo institutional exhibitions and placed her work in some of the most prestigious public and private collections in the world. Peder Lund is delighted to welcome the artist back to the gallery.

In each of the four sets of *Blood Grids*, Opie has arranged twelve photographs in a grid, with each photograph showing close-up details of the bodies of men, women, and animals. These details were taken from masterworks from the Vatican Museums, which the artist had unprecedented access to due to the unique circumstances of the Covid pandemic. As the artist detailed in an interview with Cristina Ruiz for *The Gentlewoman Magazine*, "I'd be in the Sistine Chapel and there would be five other people there. I got to experience the Vatican like nobody experiences the Vatican." Opie continues, "A lot of my work is about revealing different ideas of systems: either community or identity. But what is identity? And how do we begin to unpack it? And how do we unpack it in relationship to physical structures?"



In these images, which depict stabbings, beheadings, crucifixions, and blunt force, Opie has distilled the Catholic church's message of violence which lies at the foundation of Western culture and art. The decadent wool, silk, silver and gold thread used to create the magnificent Vatican tapestries and the richly colored, often gilt, and precisely detailed painted masterpieces complicate for the viewer these images of gruesome death and destruction.

Opie has remarked that even though she was born to a Midwestern family in 1961, she was raised mostly as an atheist – a highly unusual occurrence for this time and place in America. The artist

did, on occasion, grapple with this familial peculiarity, once attempting, at 13, to "find Christ" after a drive-in screening of the classic horror film *The Exorcist*. This moment of religious fear, however, was only temporary, as Opie states, "Coming out as queer gave me more intense skepticism of religion as people in the 1980s rallied with cries of 'You're going to hell.'"

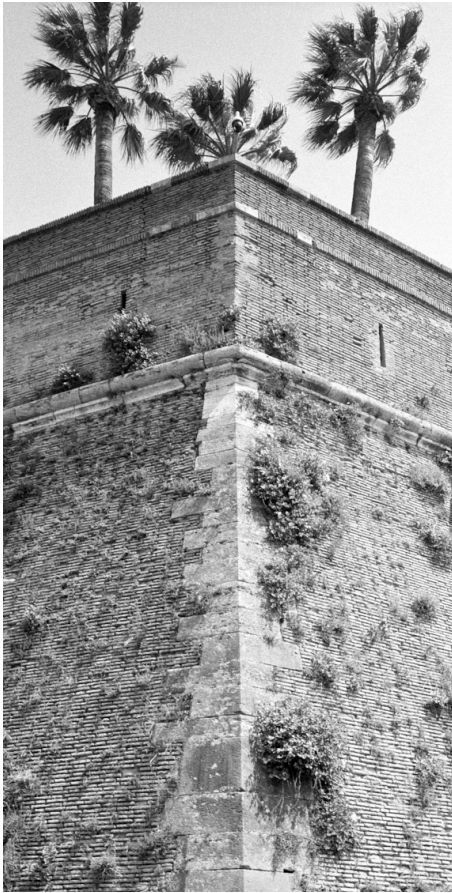
Opie's *Blood Grids*, when seen in the context of her position in the queer community, feel sadly prescient for the current political climate in the United States. Countless highly detrimental laws have been introduced or passed in the country which aim to systematically dismantle the health care, political position, and personal rights of gay and transgendered people. Additionally, with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June of 2022 by a religiously minded majority on the Supreme Court, Opie's horrifying images of blood spilled in the name of God seem to be inevitably prophetic for the assured loss of women's lives due to reduced access to health care. In an interview with the *Financial Times* in September 2023, Opie remarked, saying "I'm not Lewis Hine," referring to the 20th-century sociologist and photographer whose images of children at work helped bring about laws against child labor. "I'm not going to create social change in my pictures, but I still think I can help to start a conversation."



Opie's photograph titled *No Apology* (June 6, 2021) was taken on the day the Pope addressed the people in St. Peter's Square for Angelus, which is an important holy day in the Catholic church to celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. This homily was the first time the Pope spoke to the public after the



findings of the mass gravesites in Kamloops, Canada that hit the global news at the end of May. The Pope recites a prayer in Saint Peter's Square every Sunday at midday. He also gives a brief reflection on the Gospel of the day and often comments on some issue of international concern. The Pope's words are broadcast all over the world on radio and television and widely shared on social media. Unfortunately that day, the Pope failed to make any comment or give an apology for the horrific abuses that led to the deaths of native children in Indigenous residential schools in Canada, which the public was expecting (he later did apologize publicly for the Church on July 25th).



The artist's series titled *Windows* and *Walls* have a fantastic typological influence, which Opie has explored numerous times throughout her career, in works such as *Being and Having* (1991), *Portraits* (1993-97), *Freeways* (1994-95), and *Mini-malls* (1997-98). These series reflect a typological interest and tradition that has formed the basic grounding to much of the artist's production. This approach can be traced from nineteenth-century archival documentation through August Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* project – best known for the portraits taken during the Weimar Republic – which Opie has cited as an influence. Sander's legacy can be traced in the post-World War I period through Bernd and Hilla Becher's grids of obsolete industrial buildings and to their students, including Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, and Thomas Ruff, who have expanded the Bechers' formal rigor to color photography and nonarchitectural subjects.

In the group of twenty *Windows*, ten of which will be installed in the gallery, Opie has captured images looking out from every single window in the Vatican Museum onto the city of Rome. The windows evoke a world that can be opened and closed, however, is always tightly framed. While some windows are ornately decorated or look out onto grand vistas of the Eternal City, others are much more humble or include soft skrimms which obscure the view almost into abstraction. In Opie's *Walls*, the artist produced the works with a panoramic camera turned vertically to reflect the powerful presence of the outer defensive walls of Vatican City, a sovereign entity within the city of Rome; they suggest both the physical and metaphorical fortress of a sometimes oppressive Catholic faith, but are equally a landscape, alive with vegetation that grows freely in the cracks and crevices, a lesson that man cannot suppress nature.



As the artist detailed in an interview with Cristina Ruiz for *The Gentlewoman Magazine*, "A lot of my work is about revealing different ideas of systems: either community or identity. But what is identity? And how do we begin to unpack it? And how do we unpack it in relationship to physical structures?"<sup>1</sup>

Opie, as a lesbian woman and long-time champion of LGBTQ+ rights has used the power of her lens to create visibility for queer subcultures existing on society's fringes. By cataloging the diverse viewpoints from a single location, Opie is able to underscore the idea that many of the most harmful viewpoints to herself as a member of the gay community, have been formulated and perpetuated by those who are the least exposed to the outside, modern world.

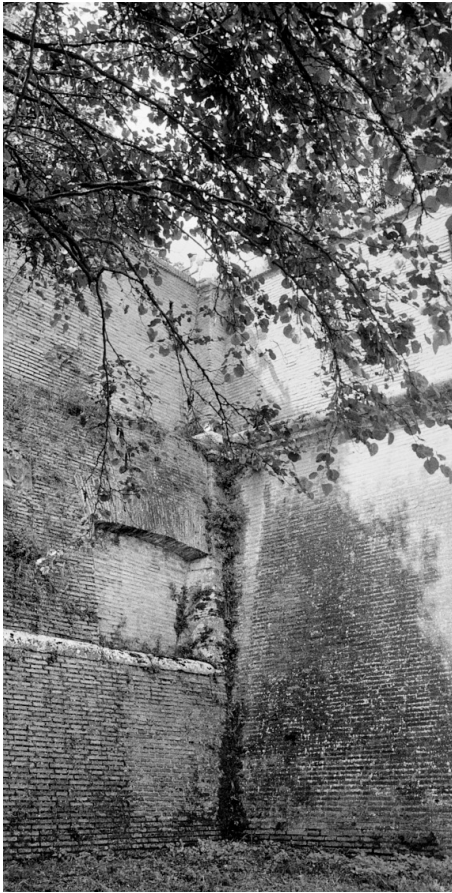
Opie had visited Italy previously, but her residency at the American Academy was her first trip to Rome. As an artist interested in the "specificity of identity of place," Opie planned to formulate how to photograph the Vatican, to "really look at the borders and the boundaries of the Vatican being its own city within a city." Her challenge was to produce images that explore the position of Catholicism in relation to place and history. "My American identity is pretty tied up in my work," Opie remarked at the outset of her time in Rome. "Identity is something that you just don't slap on. You live it, and you look at it. You have to think about it."<sup>2</sup>

As the American Academy in Rome President, Mark Robbins wrote in the catalog for the group exhibition *The Academic Body*, held at AAR in 2019:

Photographer Catherine Opie's expansive range of images shows an America that is sometimes hidden, but often in plain sight. She strives to make apparent the things we no longer see in her subjects, whether that subject is surfers, football players, mini-malls, the abstract blues of Lake Michigan, the S&M community, or lesbian couples.

With her work produced during her time in Rome, Opie applies a distinctly American voice, both artistically and politically, to some of the deepest entrenched concepts of a powerful entity like the Catholic Church. While a physical attack on the inhabitants within Vatican City is far less likely than it would have been 500 years ago, the forces for challenge and change to the power structure have never been more pressing. In many traditionally Catholic-majority regions, such as Europe and parts of Latin America, there has been a decline in regular church attendance and overall participation in recent decades. Factors contributing to this decline include secularization, changing social norms, and a decrease in the influence of religious institutions. Conversely, in Africa and parts of Asia, Catholicism has seen growth due to factors like population growth, missionary efforts, and conversions. While there have been efforts to affect progressive change to the institution, the fact that the growth of the religion is most prominently taking place in areas that have been historically brutally colonized by white Europeans does not bode well for sustained questioning of the assumed power structure of the Catholic Church.

Since 2001, Opie has worked as a tenured Professor of Photography at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and in 2019 became the Endowed Chair of the Department of Art (UCLA). She has exhibited widely in museums and galleries internationally. Her 2008 mid-career survey at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Catherine Opie: American Photographer* (2009), was accompanied by a major monograph. Recent solo exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (1997), St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (2000), the Photographers' Gallery in London, UK (2000), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2002), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL (2006), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (2010), Portland Art Museum,





Portland, OR (2010), the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Boston, MA (2011), the Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA (2012), the Julius Shulman Institute, Los Angeles, CA (2013), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2016), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2016), MOCA Pacific Design Center, West Hollywood, CA (2016, traveled to several institutions), Henie Onstad Art Center, Oslo (2017), Centro Internazionale di fotografia, Palermo, Italy (2018), moCa Cleveland, Cleveland, OH (2019), and Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, Australia (2023).

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.

List of notes:

- 1 Cristina Ruiz, "Catherine Opie: The views and tattoos of the all-American artist," The Gentlewoman, no. 26, Autumn and Winter 2022.
- 2 *Ibid.*

List of illustrations:

- 1 Portrait of Catherine Opie.
- 2 Catherine Opie, *Blood Grid #1*, 2023.
- 3 Catherine Opie, *Blood Grid #3*, 2023 (detail).
- 4 Catherine Opie, *No Apology (June 6, 2021)*, 2023.
- 5 Catherine Opie, *Untitled #12 (Walls)*, 2023 (detail).
- 6 Catherine Opie, *Untitled #1 (Windows)*, 2023.
- 7 Catherine Opie, *Untitled #1 (Walls)*, 2023 (detail).
- 8 Catherine Opie, *Untitled #8 (Windows)*, 2023.