

STATE OF THE ARTS

I got to be a part of this amazing queer community. It's queer mecca. I got involved with the leather community.

Just Out: What are your main influences?

Opie: It ranges. I bounce off a dialogue around painting, and to a certain extent inherently it's very photographic. I would say that my main influences are the different schools of thoughts and just bouncing off of that and from the first school of thought in relationship to what I really studied with the [John] Szarkowski school, the [Museum of Modern Art] definition of photography through early American photographers, the [Farm Security Administration], what they did in terms of [Dorothea] Lange and [Walker] Evans.

Just Out: Do you think you focus too much on classicism?

Opie: I believe that there's a certain sense of how one should seduce and hold the viewer. In terms of using a classical or traditional approach to aesthetics, it's one way you really end up being able to hold the viewer in relation to pieces. I am somewhat rigid as a formalist.

Just Out: Do you use mainly analog or traditional photography methods?

Opie: Everything is digital now. Once a camera was made that could match what can be done with a 4x5 or 8x10 camera, 'cause I al-

ways shot large format, I was perfectly happy to make the switch. I use the Hasselblad H2 with a Phase One 45+ back.

Just Out: In the *Girlfriends* exhibit, are you using that same camera?

Opie: Yes. *Girlfriends* also for me is a play in terms of identity and relation to girlfriends. So many butches are mainly boyfriends, and not really girlfriends. I really wanted to bring back an old school conversation of "you're my girlfriend vs. my boyfriend" and not in any way to shake up the transgendered community at all. It's always been that I've been butch on butch. I never call my girlfriends my boyfriend. She's still my girlfriend.

Just Out: With *Girlfriends*, how did that series come around? When did it start, and when did it culminate into a show for you?

Opie: I think it started with photographing Kate [Moening, of *The L Word*]. I was really thinking iconic butch women, and Kate being such an odd moment of that. It's an L.A. butch, not what most of us consider as butch. I started thinking about what that meant, and where that was in our culture. There were a lot of complaints that a lot of the good butches have been

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-CATHERINE OPIE



lost to transitioning in terms of men. I was thinking about how butch [is] being lost and what does it mean to maintain that, and I wanted to go back to portraits, too. I missed making a queer body of work, and I wanted to go back to making some portraits. I'm very satisfied when I'm doing that, so the body of work just culminated in my own desire.

Just Out: A lot of the people from *Girlfriends* are very well known. Was that a purposeful choice?

Opie: Yes, I wanted this notion of iconic, but also the iconic [becoming] personal. We've become iconic together; we've grown up together. It's mainly within my generation ... JD being the youngest one, but I've known her since she was 15 years old. She's one of my best friend's nieces out here in California. So I remember when JD came out; in a way she becomes

family.

Just Out: How did it feel to get a Guggenheim retrospective?

Opie: Amazing, of course. Four floors of the Guggenheim. It was unbelievable, scary and exciting. It made me cry, it affected me so much. I get to experience this thing. The best part was the party. All my friends came in; Justin Bond performed, it was this awesome dance party that went until 3 o'clock in the morning, just like art world mixed with my S/M San Francisco leather community. My L.A. community was there—a really amazing celebration. All my friends trusted me with their images early on. ... People that I was meeting, they just trusted for me to do these images of them.

The effect that they became so important in the queer lexicon of language is remarkable. So they were also there to celebrate what it meant beyond me, but on a larger platform as well.

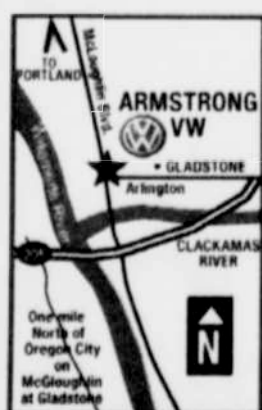


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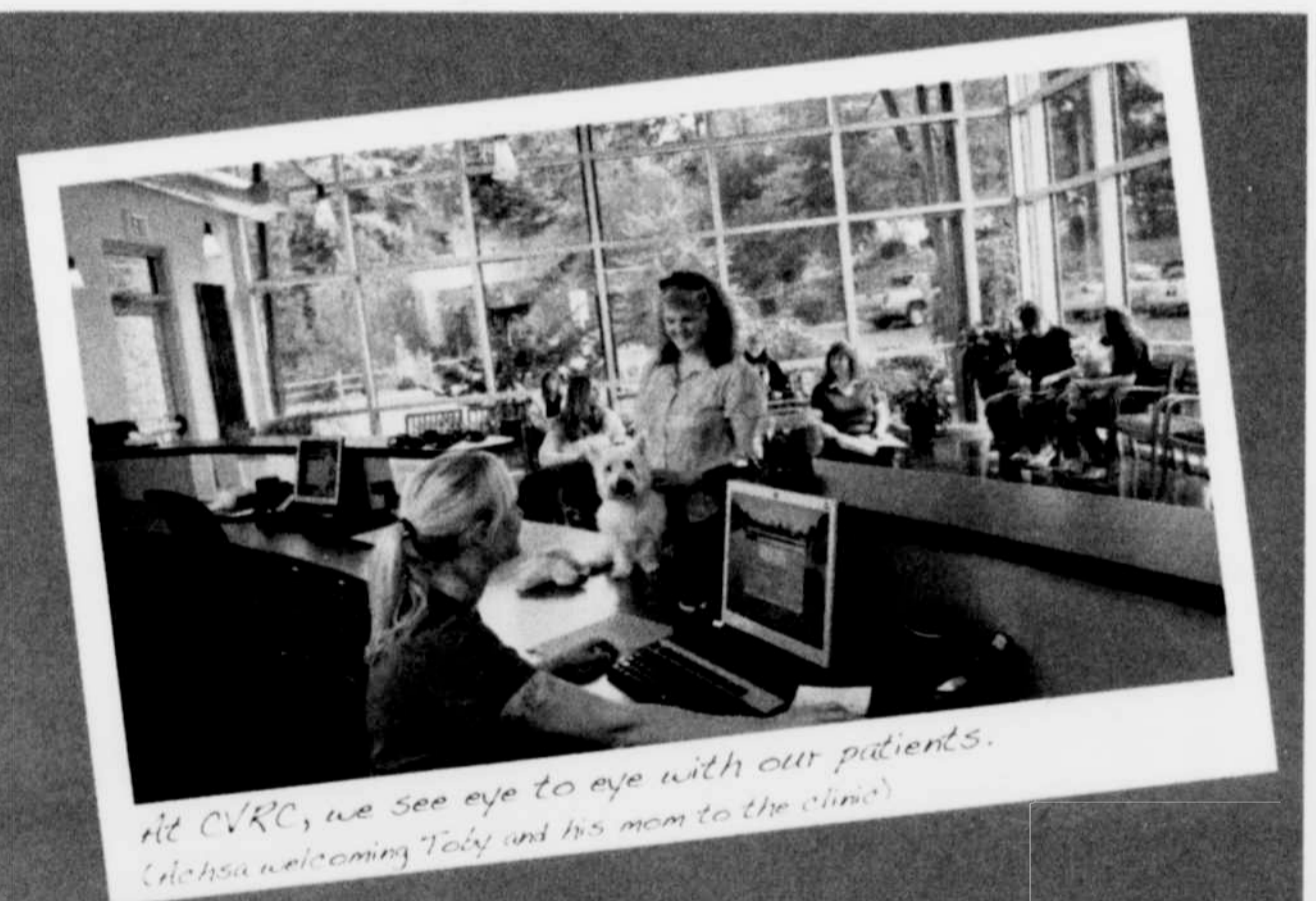
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