

3.7 Jo by Catherine Opie



Photo credit: Lehmann Maupin Gallery.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Catherine Opie (b. 1961)

Award-winning photographer Catherine Opie uses her lens to explore individual and collective identity. Born in Sandusky, Ohio, Opie began photographing her family and community at the age of 9. She was moved as a child by the idea of social reform through photography. From the beginning of her career as a photographer, Opie has considered herself a political activist.

Her work includes images of friends, family, neighbors, and the people in her community. She explores cultural and personal identities, with much of her work dedicated to documenting LGBTQ and other underrepresented groups.

In addition, Opie has created several series of urban landscapes that are completely devoid of human presence. Her work with landscapes and cityscapes has meshed with her overall exploration of the idea of these areas acting as platforms for new communities throughout the United States.



3-32 How does the pose help communicate information about the subject?

Catherine Opie, *Jo*.
Lehmann Maupin Gallery.

Art Criticism: Jo

Step-by-Step Approach

Follow steps 1–4 to respond to the artwork on page 78.

1 Describe

To describe an artwork, identify what you can see, name, and describe with certainty. Do not include opinions, evaluations, or possible meanings here.

- What is the artist's name?
- When was the work created?
- What medium did the artist use?
- Who or what is seen in the work?

2 Analyze

To analyze an artwork, describe how the subject matter and elements of the work have been organized by the artist. Explain how they work together.

- What is the most important element of art in this work?
- How does the artist create emphasis?
- What postmodern principle of art can be applied here, and why?
- What is *not* included in this image?

3 Interpret

Use the information from your description and analysis to help you identify possible meanings of the work.

- What ideas does this artwork suggest?
- Write a one sentence story about Jo, the portrait's subject.
- What do you think the work is about?

4 Evaluate

Using your analysis in the first three steps, how would you judge the quality or success of this work?

- Describe your engagement with the ideas in the artwork. Are these ideas compelling, disturbing, uninteresting, exciting, or something else? Why?
- To what degree do you feel a personal connection with any aspect of the artwork (subject, media, ideas, or issues presented)?
- How does this artist stir the emotions of viewers? To what degree has this strategy been effective for you or others?

Now try another approach to respond to the artwork on page 78.

Other Ways to Engage with Art

Inquiry is a mode of engaging with art. By asking questions without worrying about providing correct answers, we can think more deeply about the subjects that we see. Look at the portrait of Jo. What aspects make you curious? List as many open-ended questions as you can. Make sure your questions start with who, what, when, where, or why.