

Compare and Contrast: Catherine Opie + Nan Goldin

Art + Social Justice



Themes

- Identity
- LGBTQIA History
- Equality
- Representation
- Liberation
- Intersectionality
- AIDS Epidemic

The following artworks are in the permanent collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

Each work relates to the theme of art and social justice. Explore their meanings, answer questions, and discuss together.

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Catherine Opie

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Catherine Opie

(American, b. 1961)

Jerome Caja, 1993

Silver dye bleach print

SBMA, Gift of Dan and Jeanne Fauci,
2000.65.3

© Catherine Opie



Catherine Opie

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1. Observe the clothing and accessories that this person is wearing. Explain them using descriptive details.
2. The artist is employing classic strategies of portraiture in this artwork. Name two strategies she is using that you may have seen in other paintings or photographs.
3. How might the artist be addressing the theme of self-expression in this photograph? What does the photograph suggest about non-conforming gender identity and/or roles?



Catherine Opie



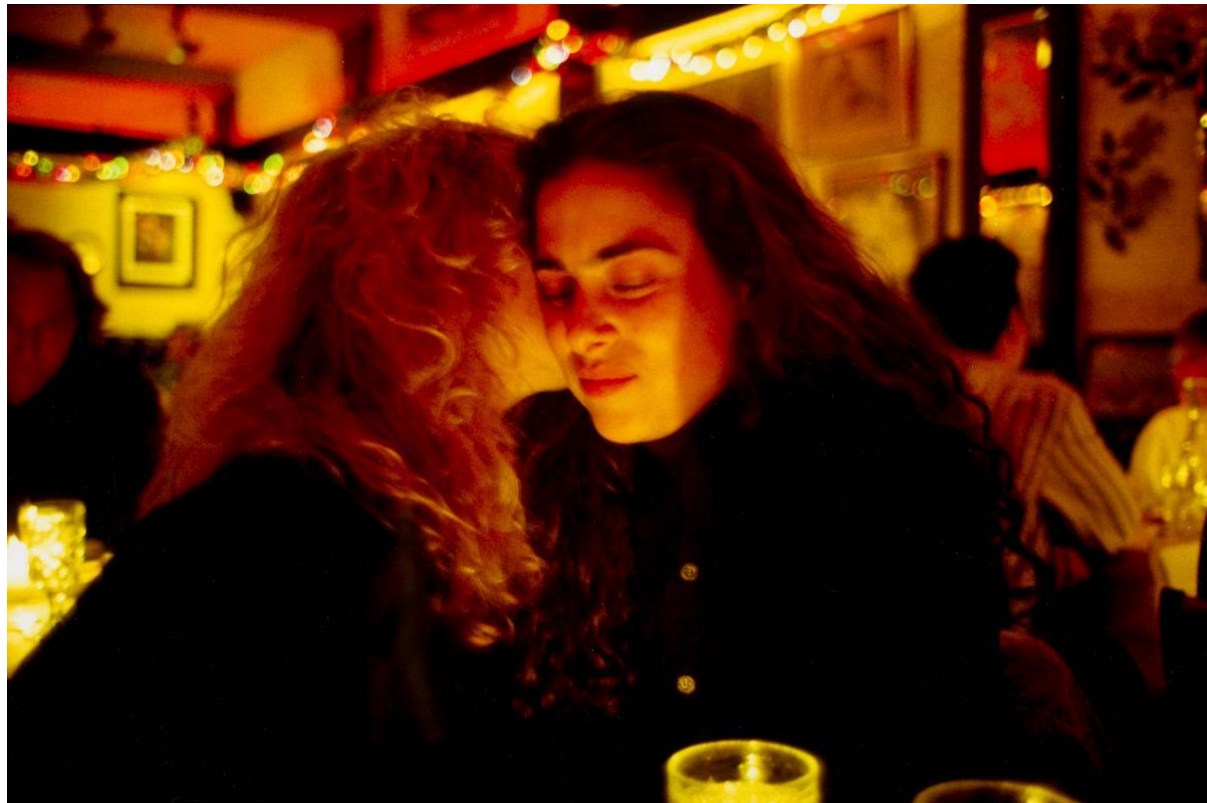
Los Angeles-based artist Catherine Opie creates photographs that provoke and challenge histories of representation. She frequently documents political movements, social phenomena, and queer subcultures. This photograph is from a 1993-97 series titled *Portraits*, in which Opie created intimate portraits of her friends in California's LGBTQIA community. The photograph shows artist and drag performer Jerome Caja (1958-1995), a fixture in San Francisco's radical queer art and performance scene of the 1990s. Reframing traditional portrait photography through the inclusion of new subjects, Opie's photographic project celebrates the expression of individual identity.

Nan Goldin

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Nan Goldin
(American, b. 1953)
*Lynette and Donna at
Marion's Restaurant, NYC,*
1981, printed 1991
Silver dye bleach print

SBMA, Gift of Arthur B. Steinman,
2000.50.39
© Nan Goldin



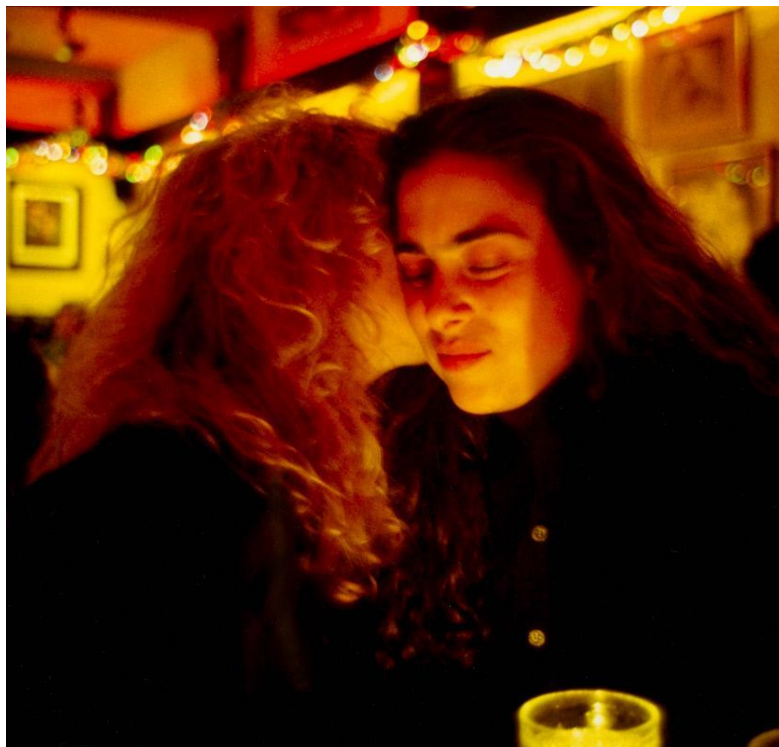
Nan Goldin

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1. Observe the photograph. Who do you see? Where are they? What is the overall mood of the image?
2. This is an example of a documentary photograph. What is being documented in this image? Why might it be important for the artist to capture this moment?
3. How might the artist be addressing the theme of equality in this photograph?



Nan Goldin



New York-based artist Nan Goldin is known for her deeply personal and intimate documentary photographs. As a teenager, she frequently took photographs of her close friends, even turning to the camera as a political tool to document issues she cared about. As a young adult in the 1980s, she increasingly photographed herself, her friends, and her partners, creating a visual autobiography that challenged traditional documentary norms. Goldin's groundbreaking work captured numerous subcultures in New York City, including the LGBTQIA community. She described her group of friends as "bonded not by blood or place but by a similar morality, the need to live fully and for the moment." While it is unclear if the two individuals depicted in this photograph identify as LGBTQIA, Goldin captures them in an intimate moment of friendship. Celebrating self-expression and freedom, her photographs offer a candid and, sometimes, painful portrait of individuals navigating love and loss.

Compare + Contrast



DISCUSS: What are the similarities and differences between these two artworks?

Compare + Contrast



DISCUSS: How do the artists challenge or incorporate traditional photographic norms in these artworks? And, as a result, how do the photographs celebrate self-expression?

Art + Social Justice



This presentation was created by the Education Department at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 2020 in collaboration with Santa Barbara-based high school teachers.

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