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Scandinavian Blues: Catherine Opie's Portraits of Norwegian Mountains

Catherine Opie's latest exhibition at Regen Projects debuts a new series of large-scale landscape photographs of mountaintops

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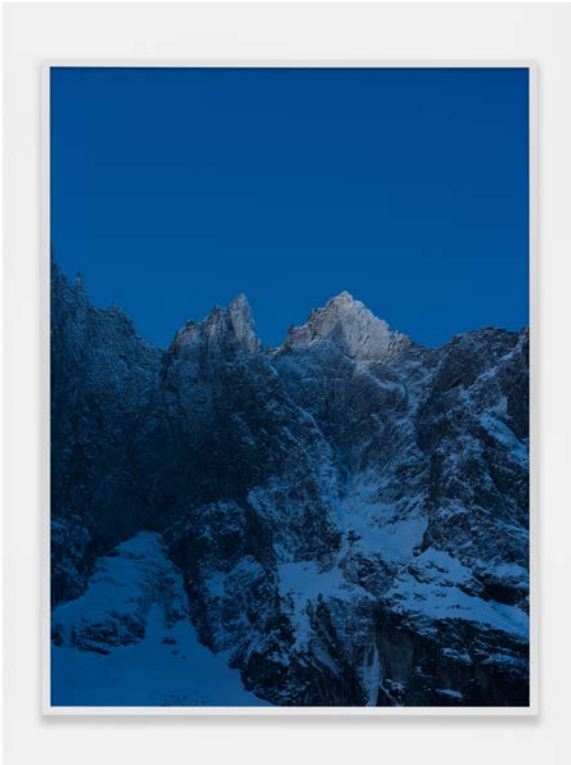
Catherine Opie, *Untitled #1 (Meditation)*, 2024, ink-jet print, 78 1/2 x 59 1/2".

Through July 3, 2026—In Catherine Opie's large-scale photo, *Untitled #1 (Meditation)*, 2024, a snowcapped mountain is enveloped in a delicate veil of periwinkle ombré mist. Though frozen in time by a camera's lens, the scene is suffused with a sense of movement. It conveys the impression that the precipitous landform is playing a game of peekaboo—now you see it; now you don't—with the sun above and the viewer below.

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Seen from a distance, the peak almost seems ethereal, ungrounded, carried aloft by the fog, until one approaches the giant pigment print and apprehends the rough, rocky texture visible in the bottom-right corner, which reestablishes a sense of ground, reminding the viewer that one is, after all, gazing at a picture of terrain attached to Earth, not the heavens.

Similarly evocative and mysterious, nearly all of the subjects of the photos in the main gallery of Opie's show "Holding Blue" are snowy mountaintops. Her decision to frame the mountains vertically rather than horizontally makes them seem more like portraits than landscapes, while the grand scale confers upon them a monumental, mystical quality. All were shot in Norway during a twenty-day road trip taken by the artist in 2024 from Trondheim to Oslo, but that fact almost seems incidental to the experience of looking at them. The names of the places and peaks are not divulged—variations of *Norway Mountain* is about as specific as the titles get. This anonymity takes the emphasis away from the regional or geographic specificities, putting the focus instead on form, color, and feeling.



Catherine Opie, *Untitled #10 (Norway Mountain)*, 2024, ink-jet print, 78 1/2 x 59 1/2".

Each photo is dominated by a different shade of blue, ranging from celeste to azure to ultramarine. The deep hues are natural, not filtered: Opie was determined to capture a specific type of bluish light seen in the Arctic. In fact, the color is so strong and the value differentiations so subtle that many of the photos appear as monochromes; one must

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stand near the print in order for its images of landforms to ultimately cohere. The shapes of the mountains also bear a strong sense of individuality: Some have craggy, jagged profiles that make them seem menacing; others are soft and gentle, like rolling hills.

“Norway Mountains,” 2024, continues Opie’s long engagement with vernacular subjects, as seen in earlier series such as “Icehouses,” 2001; “Surfers,” 2003; and “Freeways,” 1994–95, which reconsidered their titular subjects with a similar sense of critical distance. As with those series, what makes this work so successful is its reframing of stereotypes as her subjects flip back and forth between cliché and specificity.



Catherine Opie, *Untitled #1 (White mountain)*, 2024, ink-jet print, 41 × 31”.

Depictions of mountains often function as vehicles for potential allegories of sublimity and in this ambition betray the specific qualities inherent to the source. Take, for instance, Albert Bierstadt’s paintings of the Sierra Nevadas; or Norway’s national painting, Harald Sohlberg’s *Winter Night in the Mountains*, 1914. By contrast, Opie’s mountains are so specific, the detail so crisp, with light and color so accurately rendered, that it almost feels as though you are seeing them firsthand. Yet the wide-angle perspective and cool haze never allow you to get close, fostering a sense of longing while also intimating the forbidding nature of the Arctic in all its dimness and chill. The dramatic crux of this series, as with of many of Opie’s photographs, lies in its ability to mine this space between wanting and knowing.

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