

# REGEN PROJECTS

Knight, Christopher, "Stopped at the 50-yard line," The Los Angeles Times, May 2, 2008, p. E14 & E15, ill.

## Los Angeles Times



*Regen Projects*

**CATHY OPIE:** *A moment in time is captured in "Football Landscape #3 (Notre Dame vs. St. Thomas More, Lafayette, LA)."*

### Stopped at the 50-yard line

Cathy Opie came to prominence in the early 1990s with portrait photographs taken in the gay, lesbian and transgender communities. (A 15-year Opie survey will open at New York's Guggenheim Museum in September.) So it is inevitable that her new pictures of high school football teams are framed by unanswerable questions of communal and individual sexual identity.

Indeed, that is a subtle strength of the 29 new works at Regen Projects II. Opie's photographs of a familiar, masculine American ritual assert nothing — except, perhaps,

that being open to the unexpected is advantageous.

Nineteen photographs are player portraits, and 10 show teams out on the field. Opie calls the team pictures landscapes. Together with their large size — roughly 4 by 5 feet — the term neatly distinguishes them from the norm.

These are not the familiar media images of photojournalism, which attempt to capture the compact, explosive moment in the typical football play. Only one shows a play in action, but it's happening off in the middle distance. (Good luck even finding who's carrying the ball.) What dominates this landscape is the number 50, written on the artificial turf.

Opie employs a documentarian's analysis of the moments before and after the main event — on either side of normative society's 50-yard line. In those twinkling instants of concentrated anticipation or exhausted bewilderment, the outcome is not yet clear.

The field in "Football Landscape #8 (Crenshaw vs. Jefferson, Los Angeles, CA)" is shared by clenched opponents, while the foreground pair of blue-and-gold-clad players seen in battle-ready profile seem like a classical relief on a temple frieze.

The formal portraits, mostly waist high or cropped above the knee, recall August Sander's classic typological catalog of the German people, "Man of the Twentieth Century." (Coincidentally, a selection of Sander photographs goes on view at the J. Paul Getty Museum on Tuesday.) Encased in padding, looking into the lens, unsmiling and mostly frontal, the warriors on display are adolescents.

Most of the lavish landscapes were photographed at night, lending the costume dramas the theatrical glamour of artificial illumination. But in the portraits, the eye goes to a freckled arm, the flash of braces on teeth, acne mingled with beard-stubble and perspiration on skin. Heroic communal ideals disappear, supplanted by individual quotidian truth.

**Regen Projects II**, 9016 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood, (310) 276-5424, through May 17. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.regenprojects.com](http://www.regenprojects.com).