

REGEN PROJECTS *

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Los Angeles Times

Opie Landscape Photos Put Sentimentality on Ice

Art Reviews

By HOLLY MYERS
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

"Icehouses," a new series of works by Catherine Opie, transports viewers from the dry, sun-drenched streets of Los Angeles to the cold back country of Minnesota. Produced during the artist's yearlong residency at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, each 40-by-50-inch photograph depicts a snowbound lake shore: a low, modest skyline of bare trees, scattered houses and colorful fishing cabins adrift in wintry white.

The sky, which takes up the top half of each picture, is indistinguishable in color and texture from the frozen water below, and the skyline stretches between them like a patterned ribbon across a flat, blank page. In some of the images the buildings are clear and distinct, while in others they're almost invisible behind veils of falling snow. The foggiest images are nearly monochromatic.

The work constitutes another chapter in Opie's ongoing exploration of the American landscape—a project of civic portraiture that has so far come to encompass Minneapolis, St. Louis, New York and L.A. The "Icehouses" series embodies several of the important qualities of these earlier series, such as an unwavering sense of frankness, an unsentimental approach to landscape and an acute appreciation for banality.

If the city pictures—particularly in the "Freeways" and "Wall Street"

series (taken in Los Angeles and New York respectively)—demonstrate Opie's formidable command of the geometric logic of urban space, however, these new works betray a curious degree of abandon. Rather than pinning the landscape into a strict, legible frame, in "Icehouses," her lens is consumed by it.

The whiteness in this world, one senses, is vivid, fearsome and omnipotent—not so much a product of normal cycles of precipitation as an ethereal governing force. In subjugating formalism to the lyrical power of this presence, Opie has cultivated a new element of poetry. She has produced a portrait of strange but consummate beauty.

Regen Projects, 629 N. Almont Drive, West Hollywood, (310) 276-5424, through June 15. Closed Sunday and Monday.