

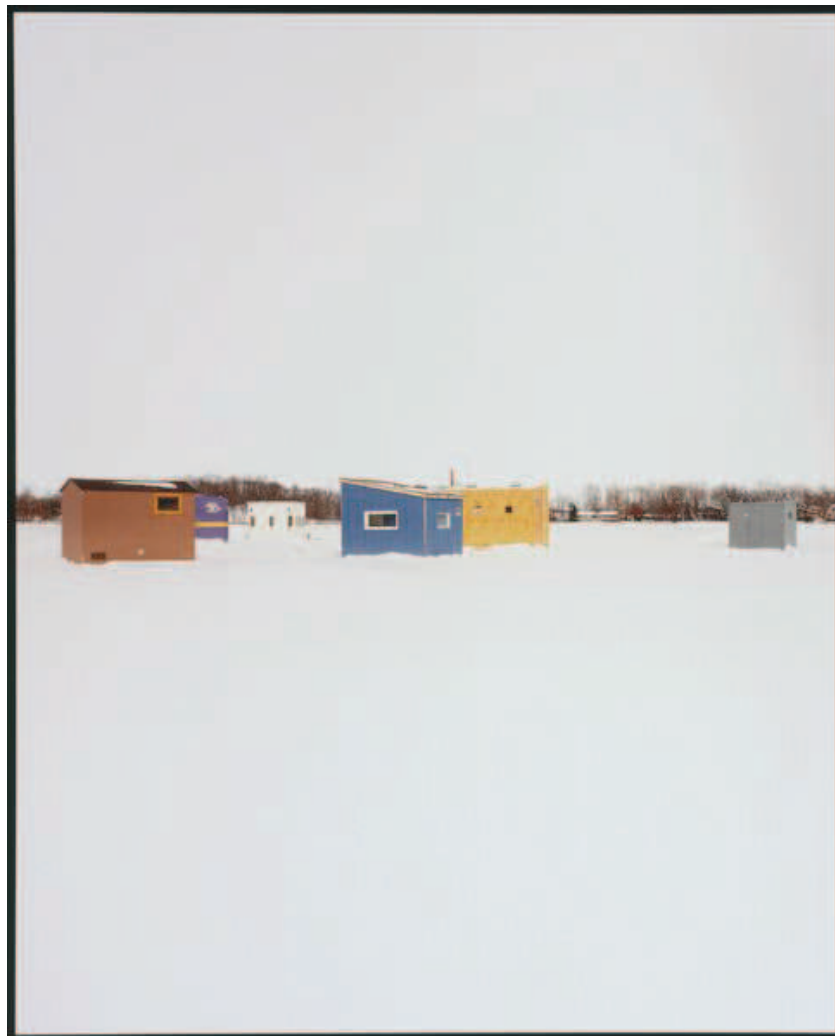
Object: Catherine Opie, *Untitled # 14 (Icehouses)*, 2001,  
G373

Color coupler print



Key Points:

This photograph requires close inspection. From a distant of a few feet, it appears to be nothing more than a solid white image. Upon closer inspection, in the right middle, two small squarish objects can be detected. This is the fourteenth of a fourteen part series photographed by Catherine Opie of icehouses in Minnesota. In the first one of the series, the icehouses are fairly close to the photographer.



*Untitled #1 Icehouses*, 2001

Gradually, she moves further away from the icehouses, showing in some cases, a solitary structure and in others a gathering of structures.

*Untitled #2 Icehouses, 2001*

*Untitled #3 Icehouses, 2001*



As she moves more distant, they become more difficult to distinguish. In the last one, *Untitled # 14* (she waited for a a blizzard) to photograph a nearly invisible group of two icehouses. The viewer must get quite close to the photograph to distinguish their shapes, otherwise it looks like a white landscape.

Catherine Opie (born 1961) is an American artist who has an interest in photographing America. This follows a photographic tradition exemplified by Robert Frank and Walker Evans, among others, of traveling across the country and photographing what seems to them to be the essence of the nation. In particular, Opie is interested in communities. Her early work pictured gay and lesbian communities and then branched into Los Angeles freeways and Beverly Hills homes. She came to Minnesota as an artist-in-

residence at the Walker Art Center in 2000, where her focus became skyways and icehouses and she made a series of photographs of both structures. To create *Icehouses*, she went to northern Minnesota where she braved the elements to photograph (working up to an hour for each exposure) the man made structures created for ice fishing. These structures vary from those carefully constructed to those put together with whatever materials were at hand.

You could speculate that Opie, having spent much time in California and the East Coast, would have found ice houses to be a novelty. The notion of a community that appeared for a season and then was dismantled with the melting of the ice must have seemed intriguing. Also, the fact that there was a group of structures but no sign of humans added an interesting element to the landscape.

Catherine Opie is currently a professor of Photography at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Opie's work was featured in a mid-career survey at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from September 26, 2008 till January 7, 2009. In addition to the Icehouse series, it included a series on Malibu surfers, another temporary community.

Open Ended Questions:

1. While most Minnesotans have at least a passing knowledge of icehouses, what additional perspectives on icehouse can we gain from this series?
2. Accompanying the catalogue for the Walker show of this work, were comments written by people about their experience with ice houses or ice fishing. Would anyone have an experience or thought about this, that they would like to share?
3. Opie's work identifies communities, both long lasting and temporary, which she wished to document. Are there other communities which you have seen documented or would like to see documented?

Sources:

Catherine Opie, *Skyways & Icehouses*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, 2002 (The Hennepin County Library has several copies of this that can be checked out and it is thin enough to be used in a tour)

<http://www.artbabble.org/video/guggenheim/catherine-opie-american-photographer>

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/education/school-educator-programs/teacher-resources/arts-curriculum-online?view=item&catid=728&id=103>

[http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/exhibition\\_pages/opie/exhibition.html](http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/exhibition_pages/opie/exhibition.html)

Submitted by Lora Weinstein