

**Permanent Collection work:**

**Judy Dater**

***Imogen and Twinka at Yosemite, 1974***

**gelatin silver print**

**Helen Johnston Bequest, Focus Gallery Collection**

**6.28.1989**

**Essay written by student, Lindsay Lawson, Spring 2001**

**Judy Dater Photograph:**

**“Imogen and Twinka” Yosemite, 1974**

By: Lindsay Lawson

This image, *Imogen and Twinka, Yosemite*, is a playful photograph with strong narrative qualities as well as pleasing composition and beautiful textural detail. This image is a fairly early one in Judy Dater’s career, taken ten years after she decided to study photography. Dater started her photography career in 1963 and had her first one-woman show at the Witkin Gallery in New York in 1972. Her artwork in the years that follow treats themes of self-assurance, female sexuality, and universal human emotions. Her photographs are sensitive and straightforward and seem to hold a balance between their objectivity and their intimacy. Dater proclaims that her main focus has always been on people rather than landscapes or still life. She has made many portraits of friends, other artists, and strangers as well. Her subjects were often chosen off the street because they had some flair or mystery that caught her eye.<sup>1</sup> The subjects in this particular photo are indeed intriguing and delightful personalities. The juxtaposition of Imogen

Cunningham, famed photographer, and the young Twinka makes for a fun and interesting narrative image.

Judy Dater met the famous photographer, Imogen Cunningham, at an Edward Weston conference in 1964. Dater says of Cunningham in an interview from 1989, “She was fabulous, completely outrageous, very feisty, very outspoken...a real showman.”<sup>2</sup>

In this interview with Jody Hoy, Dater recalls how, at the age of 22, she met this flamboyant 80-year-old woman whose energy drew her in and changed her life.

Apparently Imogen befriended the young artist and asked to take some photos of her.

When Dater returned to San Francisco, she would share lunches and long conversations with the animated older artist, who quickly became her mentor. Dater knew Imogen Cunningham for 13 years before she died in 1976 at the grand age of 93. Dater saw Imogen as a teacher by example, in the way that she lived her life with intention and vigor. She was also an inspiration to the younger photographer in her quest to capture that “charged moment” between her subjects and her lens.<sup>3</sup>

The other subject in the photograph *Imogen and Twinka* is a famous model, Twinka, who is also the daughter of the painter Wayne Thiebaud. Twinka is standing, nude, in front of a large tree trunk as she turns to meet eyes with Imogen. The contrast of the ninety-one-year-old Cunningham interacting with the breathtakingly beautiful young model is truly great. Cunningham has a camera around her neck, implying her identity as a photographer and Twinka is shown nude, which references the role and traditional representation of female models. Besides the contrast of age and youth, clothed and

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<sup>1</sup> Hoy, Jody. *The Power to Dream, Interviews with Women in the Creative Arts*. Global City Press, 1995, 218-219

<sup>2</sup> 220

nude, photographer and model, there is a formal use of contrasting texture as well. The texture of the rough bark placed right behind the soft, youthful skin of the nude model provides a very sensual juxtaposition. The poses of the two women are also interesting in that they seem to evoke some sort of undefined story or fairytale. Twinka seems to be a magical nymph creature that Cunningham has just encountered in the forest. There is a very light, playful tone to this photo that is not seen much in Dater's other images. This wonderful photograph displays Judy Dater's formal artistry as well as her precision in capturing what she calls a "charged moment."

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<sup>3</sup> Hoy, Jody. *The Power to Dream, Interviews with Women in the Creative Arts*. Global City Press. 1995, p.212.