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TRANSFIGURATIONS: A PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK EXPLORING GENDER IDENTITY AND TRANSITION

Friday, October 14, 2011 - 2:47pm by [Danny Heffernan](#), GLAAD's Advertising & Campaigns Fellow ([/blog/dannyheffernan](#))



Well before she began photographing portraits of transgender people, Jana Marcus had never given much thought to gender issues. This all changed when her housemate came out to her as a transgender man. After hearing his story, Jana was compelled to find out more about transgender people and their diverse experiences in the world. As a documentary photographer pursuing an MFA degree at San Jose State University in

California, Jana decided that for her thesis she wanted to share the stories and experiences of transgender individuals through photographs and interviews. This was the beginning of [Transfigurations](#) (<http://janamarcus.com/projects/projects.html>), an exhibit of images and text that would travel to galleries and college campuses around the country. Recently, the exhibit was compiled into a beautiful 12" x 12" museum quality coffee table book with a foreword by [Jamison Green, Ph.D.](#) ([/blog/transgender-advocate-iamison-green-speaks-about-policy-work-and-education](#)), making it available to a broader audience than ever before.

Jana began *Transfigurations* in 2003. Not wanting to appear as another stranger with a camera, she reached out to Susan B. Murray, a sociology and gender studies professor at her university, who helped her approach the transgender community in a sensitive and unobtrusive way. As more and more people came forward wanting to participate, Jana's project grew as she photographed and interviewed roughly 150 transgender individuals. She continued to be surprised by what she saw as unprecedented courage in her subjects for wanting to be seen, recognized, and heard as themselves.

Like the new book, the original exhibit consisted of large black-and-white portraits accompanied by text from each participant discussing their respective thoughts on gender and its relationship to both the body and the transition process. These diverse views, in addition to the images, make the series truly magnificent. "I discovered that gender is both real and illusory, natural and constructed," Jana writes in the book's introduction. "By capturing the physical and mental transformation from one sex/gender to another, the photos reveal the importance of the body in gender identity, as well as the effects of transformative practices on the body..."

As an exhibit, *Transfigurations* received a number of accolades, having notably been included in the prestigious Best Photos of The Year in both 2004 and 2005 by [Photo District News of New York](#) (<http://www.pdnonline.com/pdn/index.shtml>). It was also included in the 2004 Center for Photographic Arts Awards, the 2005 [International Photography Awards](#) (<http://www.photoawards.com/en/>), and the 2005 [Phelan Art Awards](#)



<http://www.sff.org/programs/awards-programs/art-awards>). Despite this success, Jana was unable to find an agent willing to represent her book to publishers, many believing that a book featuring a transgender theme would not be lucrative. With the help of [Kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com/) (<http://www.kickstarter.com/>), over 100 supporters, and, in particular, the seven individuals who came together to form [7 Angels Press](http://www.7angelspress.com/about/about.html) (<http://www.7angelspress.com/about/about.html>), Jana self-published *Transfigurations* as the high-quality photography book she had hoped for. [The book can be purchased here](http://www.7angelspress.com/order.html) (<http://www.7angelspress.com/order.html>) on the 7 Angels Press website.

Speaking about why this project was so important to her, Jana related how deeply enriched she has been by the people who entered her life through participating in *Transfigurations*. She feels a great deal of responsibility to the transgender community, and so it was imperative that her work did not sensationalize or over-sexualize their lives, identities, and bodies. Transgender issues are so important for the world to know, she says, and her mission in creating the book was to help the world at large know this community. She asserts that transgender people are just that – people – and hopes that the violence and confusion directed towards them can be eradicated through projects that encourage awareness and social change.

GLAAD is grateful to Jana for putting her incredible talents to work in creating this meaningful project. *Transfigurations* provides a much needed outlet for presenting the multiplicity of identities and ideas within the transgender community.