

Issue: Vol. 41 / No. 2 / 13 January 2011

BAY AREA REPORTER

Serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities since 1971



About News Opinion Arts Columns Search Classifieds

Beautiful for who they really are Fine Arts

'Transfigurations: Photos of Self-Made Women and Men'

by Patrick Letellier

Published 07/20/2006

It's a photo exhibit unlike anything most people have ever seen. Thirty-one large, black-and-white portraits of what appear to be ordinary men and women looking relaxed, peaceful and directly at the camera, their eyes holding your gaze as you move from picture to picture.

One man sports a trim beard, a print tie and a sly smile. Another crouches over slightly, balancing his five-year-old son on his shoulders. A third, shirtless and thickly muscled, rests both hands on the back of his head, as if gently flexing his biceps.

Like the men, the women are both elegant and unremarkable at the same time. One looks regal in a sleek print dress, hands folded, her face softly framed with dark, wavy hair. Another, with a wool cap and pretty smile, tilts her head slightly, her long, lean arms crossed on the table in front of her.

They all look like people you know, have worked with, or stood next to on the bus. Or people you've slept with. And that's the point.

The award-winning exhibit called *Transfigurations*, by Santa Cruz photographer Jana Marcus, features studio portraits of transgender men and women that strip away the veneer of drag-queen-glamour associated with trans women and add a modicum of visibility to the mostly invisible population of transgender men (think, um, can you even name one? OK, maybe you can, if you live in San Francisco.)

"It shows people who we are," says Marcus Arana, the man in the tie, better known locally as a discrimination investigator at the San Francisco Human Rights Commission. "It also shows that we walk among you. B



Lyle, from *Transfigurations*. Photo: Jana Marcus

ARTICLE TOOLS

- Print this Page
- Send to a Friend
- Share on Facebook
- Share on Twitter
- Share on MySpace!



Tiffany, from *Transfigurations*. Photo: Jana Marcus

ut you won't recognize us if you're looking for the stereotypical image of a transsexual."

The subjects include men and women of varying ages, races and class backgrounds, and shows them at different points in the transition process. The show includes before-and-after nudes of men and women who have surgically altered their bodies to better reflect their inner sense of themselves as male or female. One subject, Aidan, is featured in five portraits taken over two years that depict his breasts and, later, surgical scars after his breasts were removed.

Show and tell

Each portrait is accompanied by the subject's personal statement, a testimony about what it means to be transgender, and their musings on gender, the body, and societal prejudice.

"I don't feel a need to prove myself as a guy any more, and I have grown accustomed to the luxury of passing," Aidan's statement reads. "Most remarkably, I don't think about trans issues any more until someone else brings them up."

"By constructing the woman I am today, I was able to become my own creation," says the statement by Tiffany Woods. "The outcome of my struggles is what makes me special, not whether I've had surgery to create a vagina."

Woods, who runs an HIV prevention program for transgender people in Alameda County, says the exhibit is important not just to show the rest of the world what transgender people actually look like, but to show transgender people themselves what is possible.

Follow The Bay Area Reporter



To speak to an agent or to learn about a career click here

Meet Your Perfect Match

Call today for your free consultation

1-877-967-7250

nueranetwork.com

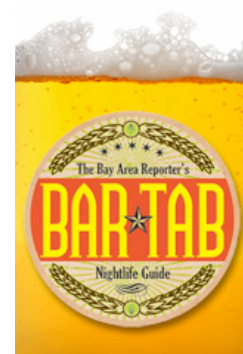


Anthony Conde, Market Development Director New York Life Insurance Company

The perfect Stella Artois has its ritual.

Always Enjoy Responsibly. ©2009 Import Brands Alliance, Importers of Stella Artois® Beer (Malt Liqueur in TX, St. Louis, MD)

LEARN HOW TO POUR THE PERFECT STELLA ARTOIS ▶



DUI?

LAW OFFICES OF Eloy I. Trujillo
Criminal Defense Attorneys



hplist.org
the world of messages

"There's always this sense in transitioning that somehow you're just not there yet. Then you look at yourself through Jana's lens, and you see the photos she took, and you say, 'Oh my God. I made it,'" Woods says. "I want younger trans people or people going through the transition to see these photos and get a sense of 'that could be me.'"

The exhibit, which started two years ago as Marcus' graduate school photography project, originally featured transgender men only. It won a slew of awards, including the prestigious Best Photos of the Year Award in 2004 and 2005 by New York's *Photo District News*.

But after spending two years interviewing and photographing transgender men, Marcus wanted to balance the work by including trans women. She has photographed 50 people so far, and now has an exhibit too big for any one gallery. For upcoming shows around the country, various curators pick through her collection for the images they want to display. And she is still shooting. She is also shopping the exhibit to literary agents with the hopes of turning the array of photos into a coffee-table book.

"This project has taken on a life of its own that is much bigger than me," Marcus says. "These people have struggled their whole lives to become who they are today, so to see themselves in a photograph in a gallery as the beautiful, dignified woman or man they are is very powerful."

Transfigurations shows at Good Vibrations, 1620 Polk St., SF, through Aug. 21. Info and a slide show of the exhibit at jlmphotography.com.



Copyright © 2005 - 2007, Bay Area Reporter, a division of Benro Enterprises, Inc.

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Open Forum](#) | [Columns](#) | [Arts & Entertainment](#) | [Arts Columns](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Archives](#) | [About the BAR](#) | [Advertising](#)

Get on the Stick . . .

Candlestick Park Antiques & Collectibles Faire

Antiques, Arts and Anything Collectible!

NEXT SHOW: SUNDAY
JANUARY 16, 2011



6 am to 3 pm
Admission:
6-8 am \$10, 8 am-3 pm \$5
Free Parking
Rain or Shine • No Pets
Up to 500 Booths
All Items 20 Years or Older

For more info:
(510) 217-8696
info@candlestickantiques.com
www.candlestickantiques.com



FJS Construction

Serving the community in San Francisco & Guerneville since 1994

For all your construction needs...

Design & build
Remodels
Additions
Carpentry
Dry Rot
Foundations
Decks
Kitchens
Bathrooms

FJS-Construction.com
415.407.7840
License #759746
Insured