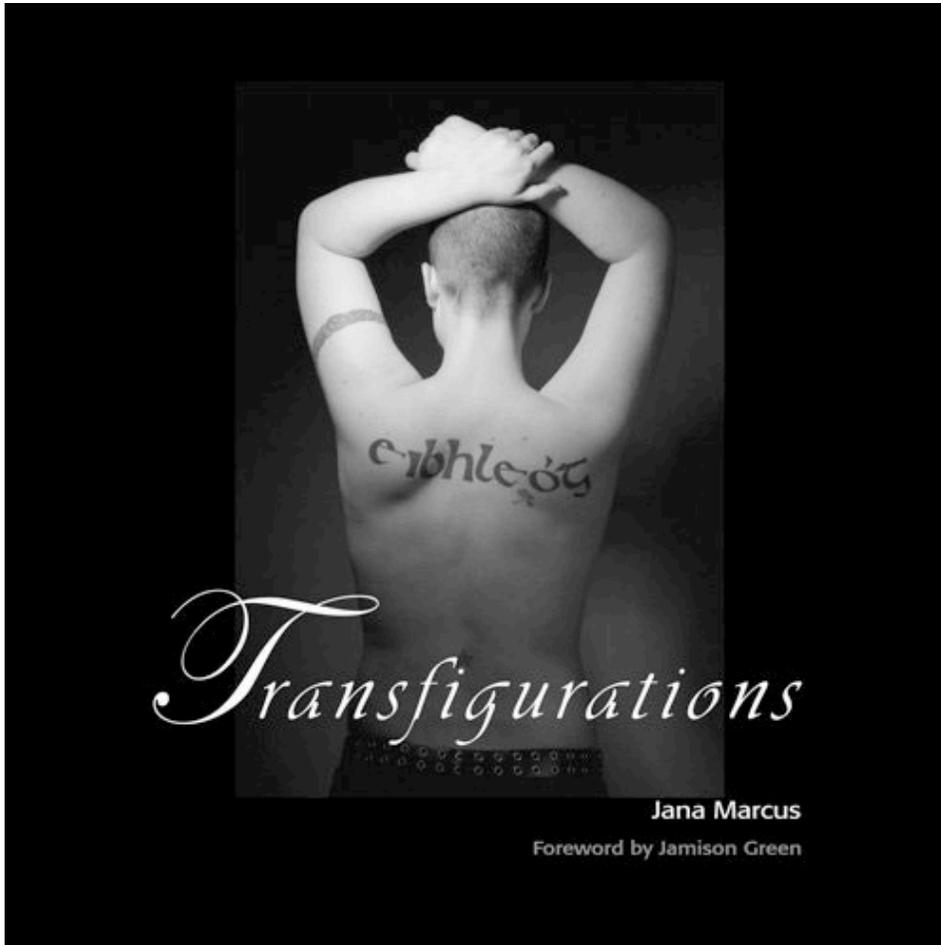


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Jana Marcus

Transfigurations

Reviewed by: Rick Kleffel © 2011

7 Angels Press
US Hardcover First Edition
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144 Pages; \$35
Date Reviewed: 10-26-2011

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Ultimately, as readers, it is people we care about: the characters we meet in the

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Ultimately, as readers, it is people we care about, the characters we meet in the books we read. Mostly, these are created in words, in fiction and non-fiction. Our minds do the visual work. Jana Marcus flips the switch in more than one way, in 'Transfigurations.' Yes, it is book of photographs of transgender people, in all states. In that sense, the people switch we generally think of as being pretty stable is upended.

But this book also upends our idea of how we encounter character in books. Usually we encounter characters slowly. We get to know them through the words (sometimes "their" words, with the visual image often indistinct, trailing gently away in our imagination. The portraits in 'Transfigurations' knock us upside the head. We are transfixed by the image, and we know the person in that photo immediately. Afterwards, we read their words. It's a complete reversal of how we usually encounter character. But without a doubt, the people you meet here will be in your life for along, long time.

Based on a museum exhibit that has been traveling the country for years, 'Transfigurations' is really a pretty simply out-together book. Incredible, rich, detailed black and white portraits of men who were once women, women who were once men, and people in mid-surgery who are between gender take the reader into a world where our assumptions are undermined. Marcus interviewed the subjects and offers readers a well-edited portion of interview with the portraits, so we do get a fix, in language, in words for each person we meet. The stories are powerful statements of personal bravery, often at odds with the casual, everyday-seeming appearance of the subjects. To read this book is to change your vision of those around you and who they can be.

A book of photography requires more than incredible subjects, though Marcus certainly manages that with ease. The photographs themselves are rich, and have a timeless quality about them. The men and women and those in-between are captured in such a way that their individuality seems to strike out. It's almost reminiscent of what Charles Dickens does with names; these are characters you simply cannot forget.

The production values of such a book are critical, and 'Transfigurations' is crisp and pristine. Funded by a Kickstarter project, this book is more than worth the relatively modest cover price. The paper is heavy, the contrast is amazing, and the book is clearly built to last. It's something you can hand down to those who come after you, and it feels right to do so. This is a book that invites you to join a family, the human family. Welcome to your life.

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