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## 'Transfigurations' Transfixes Bookshop Santa Cruz Audience

Celebration of a new book educates on the lives of transgender people

By [Beth Pittenger](#) [Email the author](#) | October 13, 2011

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A transfiged audience packed Bookshop Santa Cruz Credit [Beth Pittenger](#)

Laughter, tears, deep sighs, and applause filled a packed Bookshop Santa Cruz Thursday night in celebration of the new book of Jana Marcus's documentary photography of transgender people, *Transfigurations*. Marcus shared the stage with transgender activist and writer Jamison Green, who read from his own provocative book, *Becoming a Visible Man*.

The award-winning photography featured in *Transfigurations* toured for six years, with constant questions by observers and academics about when it would reach book form. However, getting the work published was no easy task. Marcus used pledges and donations to essentially self-publish after a year and a half of trying publishers—testimony to the still present fears and ignorance that transgender people face.

On the Internet service [kickstarter.com](#), she raised \$20,000 in 10 days to produce 2,000 copies of the book.

While Marcus read the words of the transgendered subjects she worked with, sleek black-bordered photographs were held up to the audience. Marcus described the work of a documentary photographer as “capturing the natural essence” of the subject, which she achieved by long, audio taped interviews prior to studio work. She chose the studio over other settings because “it gives permission to stare” because what is at stake is people being seen.

Marcus said she wanted to “normalize the community” and her theme of the night was the recognition of who you really are.

Jamison Green, who began the transition from female to male in 1988, showed how powerfully that lack of normalization impacted him.

“My god, I was sitting next to it!” Jamison said he's heard from audience members at other engagements, when they didn't realize they were sitting next to the guest speaker.

During his transition, Jamison joined a men's group, holding his secret for more than a year. And when he finally did let it out, a group leader surprised him with praise. The group proved to him that “masculinity did not depend on a male body.” But Jamison emphasized that people often lack the language to grapple with the complexities of gender identification.

An audience member, Thomas Kennard, who made his transition later in life at age 47, brought laughter to the audience when he asked what survey people mean when they ask whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, male, female, or transgendered.

“What do these questions mean?” Kennard said with ironic frustration.

And what those questions mean is exactly what was raised by the presentations of both Marcus and Green for the whole audience, whether transgender or not.

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