



3RD EDITION 2022

Jess T. Dugan & Vanessa Fabbre

## *To Survive on This Shore*

Photographs and Interviews with Transgender  
and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults

Photographs by Jess T. Dugan, Texts by Vanessa Fabbre  
With an interview with Jess T. Dugan and  
Vanessa Fabbre by Karen Irvine  
Designed by Kehrer Design (Anja Aronska)  
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### Nuanced view into the complexities of aging as a transgender person

Representations of older transgender people are nearly absent from our culture and those that do exist are often one-dimensional.

For over five years, photographer Jess T. Dugan and social worker Vanessa Fabbre traveled throughout the United States creating *To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults*. Seeking subjects whose lived experiences exist within the complex intersections of gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and geographic location, they traveled from coast to coast, to big cities and small towns, documenting the life stories of this important but largely underrepresented group of older adults. The featured individuals have a wide variety of life narratives spanning the last ninety years, offering an important historical record of transgender experience and activism in the United States.

The resulting monograph provides a nuanced view into the struggles and joys of growing older as a transgender person and offers a poignant reflection on what it means to live authentically despite seemingly insurmountable odds.

#### Excerpts from the book:

Gloria, 70, Chicago, IL, 2016

*I identify myself as a female. I've always identified myself as a female. From a little tot, I knew who I was then, you know? And people say, "How do you, at an early age, know who you are?" I've always felt that way so that's who I am. The men in my family, they were sort of apprehensive about me, but the women were strong. They wore the pants in my family. My mother would tell them, "This is your child, this is our baby, and you're going to love my baby because you love me." And that's the way it was.*

(...)

*I'm a senior citizen. I made it to seventy and a lot of them won't make it, they won't make it at all. Because most of them die from drugs, from sexual disease or they're murdered. They ask me questions like, "Well, Momma Gloria, how did you get through?" I say, "I got through with love from my family and the grace of God." That's how I got through. You have to have some stability and you have to have some kind of class, some charm about yourself. I never was in the closet. The only time I was in the closet was to go in there and pick out a dress and come out of the closet and put it on.*

Jay, 59, New York, NY

*I'm a pretty classic transgender man, as I see it, because from my earliest recollections as a tiny child I experienced myself as a boy in a girl's body. I felt that some dreadful mistake had been made and I didn't get the body I was supposed to. I prayed every night to God to make me wake up a boy the way I was supposed to be. And that orientation never changed throughout the whole trajectory of my life. That said, I was also a political activist, an LGBT activist. For a long time, society identified me as a lesbian and seemed to ignore my transgender status. Back then, in the 1950s and '60s, society wasn't really all that nuanced in how it looked at LGBT people. We were all sort of lumped into the same boat.*

**Jess T. Dugan** is an artist whose work explores issues of identity, gender, sexuality, and community.

She holds a BFA in Photography from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, a Master of Liberal Arts in Museum Studies from Harvard University, and an MFA in Photography from Columbia College Chicago. Her work has been widely exhibited at venues including the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the San Diego Museum of Art, the Aperture Foundation, New York, the Transformer Station, Cleveland, and the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago.

Her first monograph *Every Breath We Drew* was published in 2015 by Daylight Books. The same year, she was the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant and was selected by the White House as an LGBT artist Champion of Change. In 2018, she was an Artist-in-Residence at Light Work in Syracuse, NY. She is represented by the Catherine Edelman Gallery in Chicago, IL.

**Vanessa Fabbre**, PhD, LCSW, is an Assistant Professor at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, where she is also Affiliate Faculty in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and a Faculty Scholar at the Institute for Public Health.

She received her PhD from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. Her research explores the conditions under which gender and sexual minorities age well and what this means in the context of social forces such as heteronormativity, heterosexism, and transphobia. She is also interested in critical perspectives on social work practice and interpretive methodology in the social sciences. She is actively involved in the Gerontological Society of America, the American Society on Aging, and the Society for Social Work and Research. Her work has been published in *The Gerontologist*, the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, *Social Work*, the *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, the *Journal of Urban Health*, and the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

**Karen Irvine** is Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the MoCP, Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago. She has organized over fifty exhibitions of contemporary photography at the MoCP and other venues including the Hyde Park Art Center, the Rockford Art Museum, the Lishui International Photography Festival, China, the Daegu Photogra-

phy Biennale, South Korea, and the New York Photo Festival. Irvine has contributed texts to many publications including FOAM, *Art on Paper*, and Contemporary magazines and monographs including Ann Lislegaard: *Eyes Wide Open*, Paula McCartney: *Non-flights of Fancy*, Barbara Probst: *Exposures*, Christian Patterson: *Redheaded Peckerwood*, and Stefan Heyne: *Speak to Me*, among others. She holds a BA in French and International Relations from Tufts University, Medford, MA, an MFA in Photography from FAMU, Prague, Czech Republic, and an MA in Art History from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

#### Exhibitions of Jess T. Dugan's work 2022 (Selection)

*To Survive on This Shore*

SFO Museum at San Francisco International Airport  
Ruth S. Kadish Gallery, San Francisco, CA

December 2022 – June 2023

*Look at me like you love me*

Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS

November 2022-May 2023

*To Survive on This Shore*

Newcomb Art Museum at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA

16.08. – 10.12.2022

Artist Talk on 17.09.2022

*I want you to know my story*

University Galleries at Illinois State University, Normal, ILL

17.08. – 16.10.2022

*The Outwin 2022: American Portraiture Today* (Group show)

Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.

April 30, 2022-February 26, 2023

Websites: [jessdugan.com](http://jessdugan.com)

[www.tosurviveonthisshore.com](http://www.tosurviveonthisshore.com)

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Barbara Karpf, [barbara.karpf@kehrerverlag.com](mailto:barbara.karpf@kehrerverlag.com) or

[pr.assistance@kehrerverlag.com](mailto:pr.assistance@kehrerverlag.com)

Kehrer Verlag, Wieblinger Weg 21, 69123 Heidelberg, Germany

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## Press images



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2\_ Hank, 76, and Samm, 67, North Little Rock, AR, 2015  
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3\_ Sky, 64, Palm Springs, CA, 2016  
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4\_ Sky, 64, and Mike, 55, Palm Springs, CA, 2017  
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