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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

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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 through photography, video, and writing. Their work has been widely exhibited and is in the permanent collections of over 45 museums throughout the United States. Their monographs include *Look at me like you love me* (2022), *To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Older Adults* (2018) and *Every Breath We Drew* (2015). They are the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, an ICP Infinity Award, and were selected by the Obama White House as an LGBT Artist Champion of Change.

Vanessa Fabbre, PhD, LCSW, is Associate Professor at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work 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. Her research explores the conditions under which queer and trans people experience wellness in later life and what queer and trans liberation means in an increasingly aging global society. She also seeks to promote critical and anti-oppressive perspectives on social work practice and rigorous interpretive methodology in the social sciences.

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 Photography 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/ 2023 (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

www.tosurviveonthisshore.com

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Press images



1_ Dee Dee Ngozi, 55, Atlanta, GA, 2016
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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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5_ Gloria, 70, Chicago, IL, 2016
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6_ SueZie, 51, and Cheryl, 55, Valrico, FL, 2015
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7_Jay, 59, New York, NY, 2015
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12_Sukie, 59, New York, NY, 2016
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