TEACHING & LEARNING THROUGH

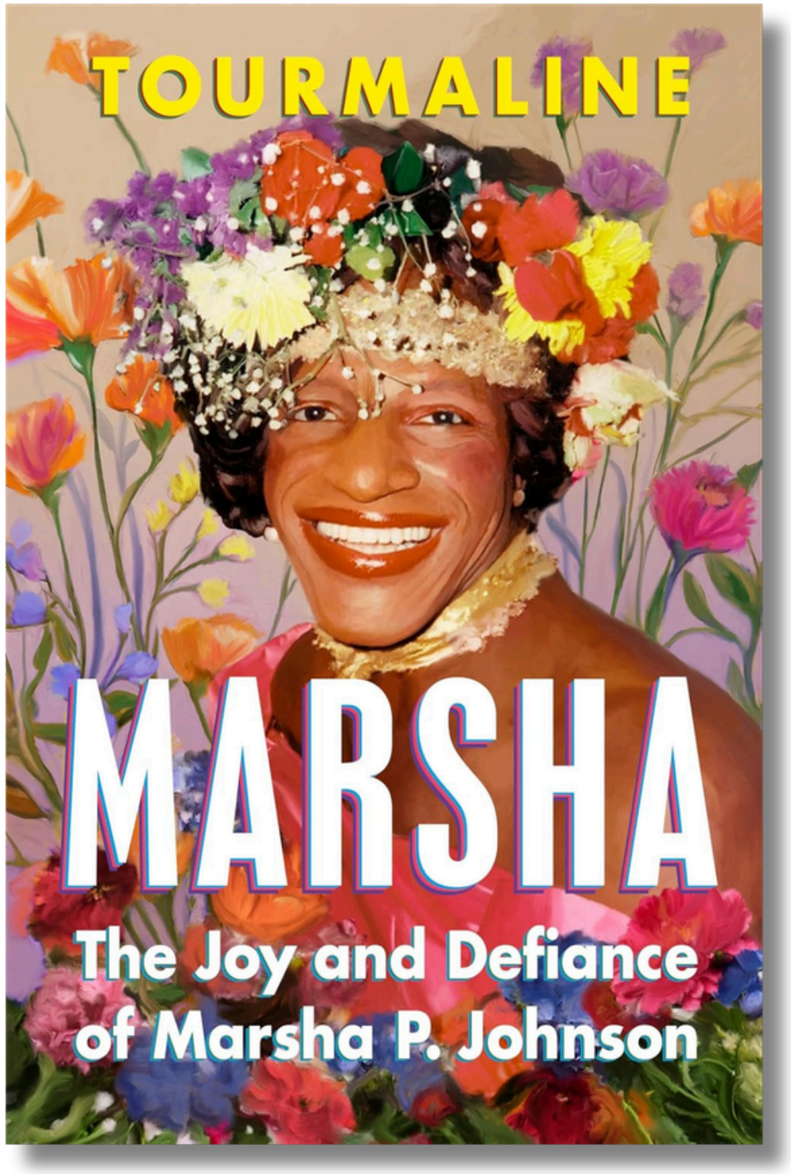
THE BLOCK'S COLLECTION

Northwestern | THE BLOCK museum of art

The Northwestern University Women's Center book club selection, *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, written by visual and performing artist Tourmaline, was chosen in conjunction with this year's theme celebrating the Women Center's 40th anniversary, "Legacies of Living Free." As a trans activist, a care worker, a sex worker, a performance artist, and a living icon in her community, Marsha P. Johnson contributed to the lives of so many during and after her own. As written on their website, the Women's Center staff "decided this was the book we wanted to read with you because we believe that by taking the time to mark one life as sacred, we will be practicing a vital skill: how to honor one another in the full breadth of our existence." [1]

This selection of artworks from the collection of The Block Museum of Art adds to conversations at Northwestern on Tourmaline's book by highlighting artists whose work engages with themes of gender identity, trans and nonbinary communities, and the bravery it takes to live as one's true self. We invite members of the Northwestern community and beyond to use these works to connect to themes in *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, whether for private contemplation or as a springboard in discussion with others.

You can schedule a class visit to discuss these works in person in The Block's study center **block_classroom@northwestern.edu**



Mikki Ferrill
Untitled, Chicago, IL
ca. 1965, printed before 1980
Gelatin silver print
9 1/2 × 5 1/2 in.
Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University,
Irwin and Andra S. Press Collection Endowment Fund purchase,
2021.15

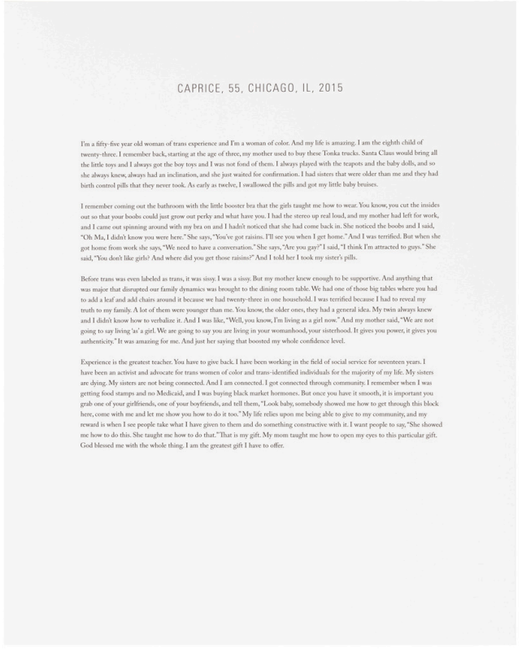
In 1960s Chicago, the Black, gay, and trans communities held a ball every Halloween at the Trianon Ballroom, located in the Woodlawn neighborhood. Photographer Mikki Ferrill visited the Trianon for the first time in 1965, where she took this captivating photograph of two women reflected in the bathroom mirror. Asked what is happening in *Untitled*, Ferrill remarked, "I thought it was obvious. Actually, the one straightening her tie is making a move on the one powdering her face... it was a flirtations situation." The Trianon Ballroom opened in Chicago in 1922. The first owners, Bill and Andrew Karzas, marketed their speakeasy to the city's white lower-middle and working-class populations, using racial codes to ban jazz music and staffing police at the entrance. The Trianon opened to integrated crowds in 1954, and it was demolished in 1967, not long after Ferrill took this image. Ferrill's photograph documented Black lesbians flirting in a building originally designed to uphold whiteness and heteronormativity, and which had been occupied and transformed by Black gay and trans Chicagoans.

In *Marsha*, author Tourmaline shows how Marsha P. Johnson and her broader community of trans women of color in New York struggled for space and respect in gay nightlife leading up to the 1969 Stonewall uprising. In the 1960s—the same timeframe as Mikki Ferrill photographed two Black women flirting in a Chicago ballroom bathroom—police were arresting hundreds of New Yorkers a week for "homosexual solicitation." The NYPD harassed queer bar-goers under the guise of the "three articles" (Section 240.35, section 4 of the penal code), which required people to wear three articles of clothing conforming to their assigned sex at birth. In New York's Greenwich Village, Marsha found some refuge in gay bars like the Stonewall Inn, even though they excluded trans and gender nonconforming people. Tourmaline notes that patrons of the Stonewall Inn were segregated between the back room and the front bar, with white patrons spending most of their time in the front, separate from the more diverse clientele in the back. While Stonewall primarily marketed itself to wealthy white men, lesbians, people of color, and trans people made communal space in its back room, explaining one impetus for the strong resistance of gender-deviant people inside Stonewall on June 28, 1969.

Bev Grant
Women's demonstration at the court house, Free Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale Protest, New Haven, Connecticut, November 22, 1969
1969, printed 2023
Inkjet print
16 × 24 in.
Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Irwin and Andra S. Press Collection Endowment Fund purchase, 2023.4.15

In the late 1960s, activist and musician Bev Grant began taking her camera to anti-war protests and women's liberation demonstrations mainly in New York City. Grant wanted to participate as a feminist and joined groups including NewsReel and New York Radical Women, taking shots that circulated in the underground press. As a self-taught photographer, Grant was interested in using photographs to convey the points of view of protest participants. In 1969 Grant attended a protest in New Haven, Connecticut, demanding the release of Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale, leaders of the Black Panther Party. Of the event Grant wrote, "What is notable when I look at my photographs from the demonstration in Connecticut is the intersectionality of the protesters. There are pictures of women from the Black Panther Party, women from the Young Lords, white women, ...so many women, seemingly so interconnected, carrying each other's signs and shouting each other's slogans." [2]

In 1970 Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera founded the collective Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), which was deeply informed by this intersectional approach to activism and protest. As members of the Gay Liberation Front, Marsha and Sylvia had organized alongside the Black Panther Party. Sylvia was also a member of the Young Lords, where she recalled feeling respected as herself. As Tourmaline writes, the Young Lords and the Black Panthers influenced the work of the STAR. According to Ericka Huggins, the Black Panthers regularly provided clothes, food, and shelter to their community, even when members of the party did not have enough for themselves. Marsha and the members of STAR raised money for the collective's housing by hosting dances, later launching a bail fund for incarcerated community members. The Black Panther's ten-point plan for the liberation of Black people called for autonomy, free health care, decent housing, and the end of police brutality, among other aims. Likewise, the members of STAR called for the right to self-determination over their bodies; the end to job discrimination against trans people and gay street people; trans and gay people to be released from prisons; and free education, health care, and housing. The first protest STAR took part in was at New York University in 1970, protesting NYU's refusal to hold gay dances. Later they protested to end mistreatment of homosexual students and of patients at Bellevue psychiatric hospital.



CAPRICE, 55, CHICAGO, IL, 2015

I'm a fifty-five year old woman of trans experience and I'm a woman of color. And my life is amazing. I am the eighth child of twenty-three. I remember back, starting at the age of three, my mother used to buy these Tonka trucks. Santa Claus would bring all the little toys and I always got the boy toys and I was not fond of them. I always played with the teapots and the baby dolls, and so she always knew, always had an inclination, and she just waited for confirmation. I had sisters that were older than me and they had birth control pills that they never took. As early as twelve, I swallowed the pills and got my little baby bruises.

I remember coming out the bathroom with the little booster bra that the girls taught me how to wear. You know, you cut the insides out so that your boobs could just grow out perky and what have you. I had the stereo up real loud, and my mother had left for work, and I came out spinning around with my bra on and I hadn't noticed that she had come back in. She noticed the boobs and I said, "Oh Ma, I didn't know you were here." She says, "You've got raisins. I'll see you when I get home." And I was terrified. But when she got home from work she says, "We need to have a conversation." She says, "Are you gay?" I said, "I think I'm attracted to guys." She said, "You don't like girls? And where did you get those raisins?" And I told her I took my sister's pills.

Before trans was even labeled as trans, it was sissy. I was a sissy. But my mother knew enough to be supportive. And anything that was major that disrupted our family dynamics was brought to the dining room table. We had one of those big tables where you had to add a leaf and add chairs around it because we had twenty-three in one household. I was terrified because I had to reveal my truth to my family. A lot of them were younger than me. You know, the older ones, they had a general idea. My twin always knew and I didn't know how to verbalize it. And I was like, "Well, you know, I'm living as a girl now." And my mother said, "We are not going to say living 'as' a girl. We are going to say you are living in your womanhood, your sisterhood. It gives you power, it gives you authenticity." It was amazing for me. And just her saying that boosted my whole confidence level.

Experience is the greatest teacher. You have to give back. I have been working in the field of social service for seventeen years. I have been an activist and advocate for trans women of color and trans-identified individuals for the majority of my life. My sisters are dying. My sisters are not being connected. And I am connected. I get connected through community. I remember when I was getting food stamps and no Medicaid, and I was buying black market hormones. But once you have it smooth, it is important you grab one of your girlfriends, one of your boyfriends, and tell them, "Look baby, somebody showed me how to get through this block here, come with me and let me show you how to do it too." My life relies upon me being able to give to my community, and my reward is when I see people take what I have given to them and do something constructive with it. I want people to say, "She showed me how to do this. She taught me how to do that." That is my gift. My mom taught me how to open my eyes to this particular gift. God blessed me with the whole thing. I am the greatest gift I have to offer.

Jess T. Dugan, Vanessa Fabbre
Caprice, 55, Chicago, IL, 2015, from the portfolio ***To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults***
Inkjet print on paper
20 x 16 in.
Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, The Block Friends of Art Fund purchase, 2019.2.1q-r

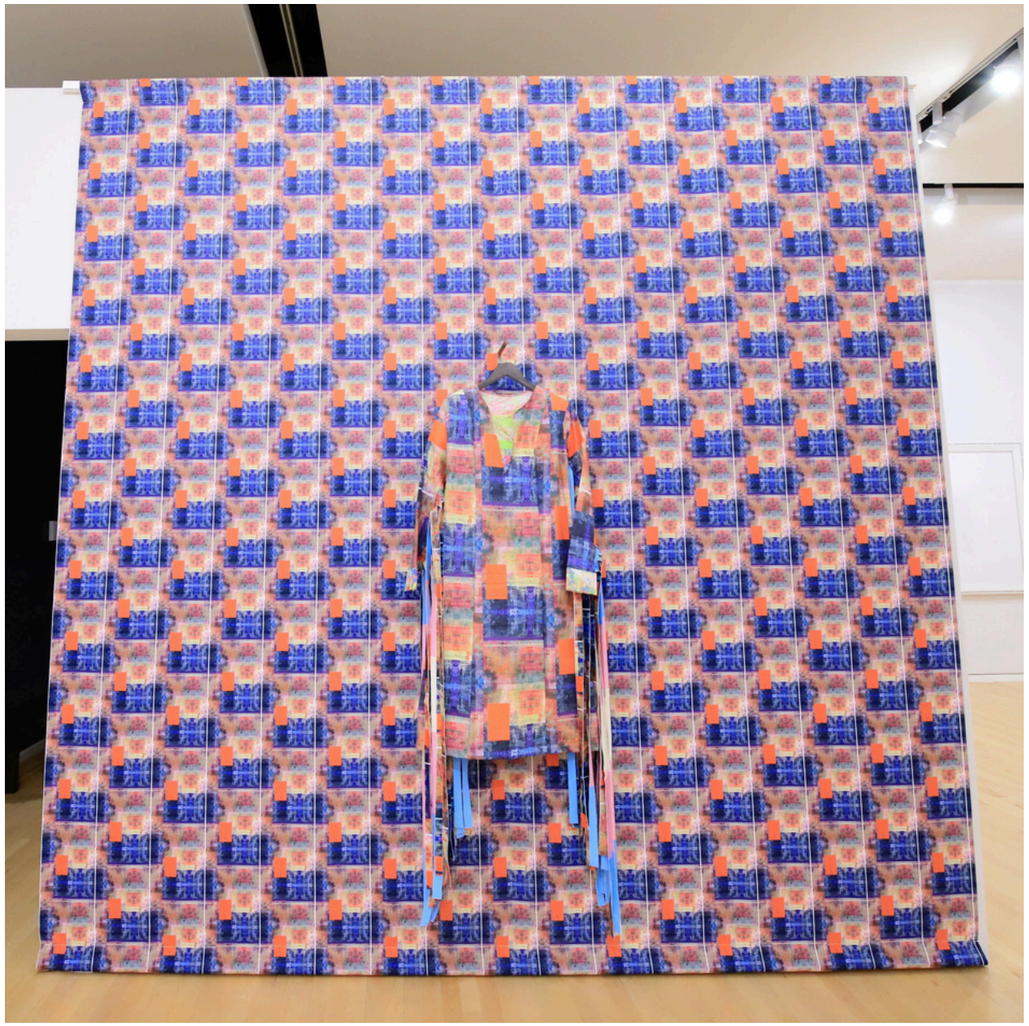
Caprice, 55, Chicago, IL, 2015 is part of Jess T. Dugan's portfolio *To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults.* The portfolio includes twelve portraits and interviews telling the stories of trans people in their fifties to eighties. Dugan created the series as a collaboration with their partner, social work professor Vanessa Fabbre, to fill a gap in photographs of older trans adults. Over five years, Fabbre and Dugan traveled across the United States to capture photographs of transgender people in their homes, representing individuals across a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds in cities and rural communities. In the interviews that accompany the portraits, many of the sitters talk about the impact a lack of access to health care or community has had on them. Caprice describes how her career as a social worker for seventeen years has given her the ability to provide for her community. "I remember when I was getting food stamps and no Medicaid, and I was buying black market hormones. But once you have it smooth, it is important you grab one of your girlfriends, one of your boyfriends, and tell them [...] I want people to say, 'She showed me how to do this. She taught me how to do that.' That is my gift. [...] I am the greatest gift I have to offer."

Dugan's series draws attention to the specific needs of trans people as they age. Among the aims of Marsha P. Johnson's Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) collective was to end discrimination against trans people by doctors and psychiatrists, which they pursued in their protests outside Bellevue Hospital. Their activism highlighted the stigmatization of and discrimination against trans and gender non-conforming people at Bellevue, where Marsha had previously been confined against her will. Marsha and her STAR co-founder, Sylvia Rivera, interviewed gay and trans people who had faced similar discrimination there, including being denied any feminine personal items. As Tourmaline writes, one of the most iconic photographs of Marsha is at Bellevue: she holds a poster with a slogan from the Black Panther Party, reading "Power to the People." Marsha cared for many of her friends who were diagnosed with AIDS from 1982 to 1992 and performed at AIDS dance-a-thons to fundraise, as well as entertaining at hospitals and AIDS hospices with her political theater company, the Hot Peaches. She suffered from chronic pain and trauma after surviving an attempt on her life in 1980, as well as mourning the loss of her partner, Candy, and of many friends who died during the AIDS crisis. Marsha's neurodivergence relating to her trauma in particular impacted her ability to tour with the Hot Peaches, and sometimes to care for herself. Yet, like Caprice, Marsha continued to support her friends and chosen family where and when she could. Tourmaline quotes disability activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, who notes that Marsha's neurodivergence was not only a challenge within her life; it was also "the source of some of their gifts." [3]

Andy Warhol
Ladies and Gentlemen (Broadway)
1974
Polaroid
3 3/4 x 3 in.
Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2008.1.97

Ladies and Gentlemen (Broadway) depicts a person in three-quarter view, face turned toward the viewer, a light smile on her face, and coiffed black hair just touching the collar of a soft multicolor floral garment. She is identified as Broadway by her signature on the back of the image, and she sits in the studio of artist Andy Warhol, who photographed Broadway and thirteen other drag queens and trans women, including Marsha P. Johnson, for the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series. Warhol used the portraits as studies for multicolor silkscreen prints in his iconic pop-art style. Commissioned by the art dealer Luciano Anselmino following the death of his friend, trans actor Candy Darling, the series has a troubling history. Anselmino requested that Warhol create "impersonal and anonymous" portraits to capture "the transvestite."[4] The series title is a play on words, mocking their performance of femininity. Already a successful artist, Warhol exploited the women and queens who posed for the series, paying them approximately $50 each for a commission from which he would generate over one million dollars in income. Marsha commented to the *Village Voice* in 1979 on the irony of walking past her portrait on sale in a gallery while she could not afford to pay rent.[5]

Curator Jessica Beck adds to the nuance around Warhol's perspective as the white gay creator of the series, stating that *Ladies and Gentlemen* "is about drag culture, which was led by African American and Latina transwomen, though the story comes out as very white."[6] Writer Elizabeth Hoover reads Marsha's pose in Warhol's Polaroids as making "a joke about the artificiality of white beauty standards."[7] Artist Glenn Ligon seconds this, writing that he interprets Marsha's outfit as a purposeful dress-up for Marsha in her blond bouffant Judy Garland/Etta James wig, red lipstick and rhinestones. He writes, "the Polaroids showcase Marsha's joy, her negro sunshine, and her broad theatricality."[8] This theatricality was a part of Marsha's everyday life as a theater performer for twenty years both in the Angels of Light, a New York spin-off of the San Francisco theater troupe the Cockettes, and in the New York-based Hot Peaches, founded in 1972 by Jimmy Camicia. Tourmaline writes that Andy Warhol admired Marsha's performance in The Hot Peaches' recreation of *The Wizard of Oz*, "The Wonderful Wizard of the U.S." Marsha proudly recalled sitting for Warhol, noting that one of Warhol's silkscreen prints featuring her image sold for five thousand dollars and was displayed in a Christopher Street gallery. Warhol took several photographs of Marsha throughout the years. Although Marsha never had a gallery or an agent, Tourmaline describes that Marsha asserted agency as a performance artist by making opportunities for herself to perform as muse to Warhol and other artists.



Molly Jae Vaughan
Lateisha "Teish" Green, 400 Block of Seymour Street, Syracuse, from the series ***Project 42***
2021
Inkjet and silkscreen on fabric
Overall: 121 3/4 × 120 in.; Garment: 36 x 40 x 3 in.
Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, gift of the artist, 2022.13

The installation artwork *Lateisha "Teish" Green, 400 Block of Seymour Street, Syracuse* includes a multicolor knee-length dress with long, thin tassles on its sleeves in the colors of the trans flag. This dress is hung against a wall-length backdrop carrying the same multicolor, patterned motif as the dress, leading them to blend together as though the dress has merged with its environment. The work honors Lateisha Green, a trans woman who was met with love and acceptance from her family when she came out. The motif that is repeated across the garment and backdrop is an aerial image of the 400 Block of Seymour Street in Syracuse, New York, where Green was murdered outside of a house party in 2009. At the conclusion of the trial seeking justice for Green, a person was convicted of a hate crime for murdering a transgender woman for only the second time in United States history and for the first in New York State.[9] However, a mistrial was later declared and the accused was released after serving four years in prison. Although the perpetrator of Green's murder has not been identified, New York State has refused to reopen Green's case. Green's mother, Roxann Green, told reporters after the acquittal, "I miss her everyday. Every day of my life I miss her. (...)[S]he's been fighting for her whole life, up to the day she was killed, for who she was, who she wanted to be, and that's just not fair."[10]

Begun in 2012, Vaughan's series *Project 42* memorializes the lives of missing and murdered transgender women. She handmakes garments, flags, and backdrops from custom fabrics whose abstract kaleidoscopic patterns repeat Google Earth images of the locations where a trans woman was murdered. Vaughan's choice of garments is deliberate. She said, "Clothing is very important to my community. A single garment can be an affirmation of our true selves, a salvation. And a single garment can also be a reason that somebody wishes for us to be silenced."[11] Vaughan works with performance artists of color such as Randy Ford and Deja Jones to activate the dresses, giving them full agency in how they want to interact with audiences based on the stories of the women whose spirits they are performing for. The title *Project 42* is based on the life expectancy of transgender people living in the United States in 2012, when the project began.

On July 6, 1992, Marsha P. Johnson was found in the Hudson River just weeks before her forty-seventh birthday. Police declared her death a suicide without investigation and only officially revisited her case in 2012, after decades of community activism.[12] Like Green's family, Marsha's friend Randy Wicker and her brother Bob Michaels put pressure on the New York Police Department to investigate Marsha's death, forming the Justice for Marsha campaign in 1992. Although police reopened the case, in her book Tourmaline pushes for a more community-focused, long-lasting understanding of justice, writing, "In this spirit, justice for Marsha happens when people work tirelessly to address the root causes of violence on ideological, institutional, and interpersonal levels. (...) Justice for Marsha means remembering we are not just valuable but invaluable, as in non-disposable and of incalculable worth, a value that exceeds even the measure of value itself."[13] Advocates of the Justice for Marsha campaign continue to recognize that society must address the root causes that led to the deaths of both Marsha P. Johnson and Lateisha Green, in order for justice to be served.

In *Rahliek, Age 20, Virginia*, Jesse Freidin photographs a young man sitting on a wooden chair. His matching outfit includes light brown sneakers, a black durag, orange shorts and a T-shirt with the image of an angelic putto that reads 'Forever Young.' Rahliek sits with his hands folded in his lap, his expression calm, gazing steadily at the camera. Three figures and two children, pictured from their shoulders down, are gathered behind him in casual clothing, one person's hand resting on his shoulder. One figure stands on a wood block, and two hold up the children, so that all five figures' heads are out of the shot and only Rahliek's face is visible. These formulaic aspects—a child or young adult seated on a wooden chair, supportive figures whose faces are not in the photographs frame, and an unremarkable background—are all part of Freidin's photographic series *Are You OK?* A queer and trans photographer, Freidin's series is an archive and social ethnographic study that is personal to him. Freidin wrote, "Participating in the creation of this work is dangerous—we meet in hiding behind buildings with extreme discretion in states that want us dead—yet the process of acknowledging each other offers a kind of healing within the frame. I have anonymized the parents to infer that the only way to have a living trans child is to support them." [14]

Freidin worked on *Are You OK?* for over two years, taking over one-hundred fifty portraits of transgender youth across America. The series also includes audio recordings of interviews with each sitter and their families. In Rahliek's recording, his mom stresses the importance of representation: "I also feel a great responsibility to advocate for the community that Rahliek represents racially and through his experience living as a transgender man." [15] Freidin's like-minded goal was to create the kind of portrait he never saw, of trans people "standing in their power, their support networks flanking them, unconditional love filling the frame and a brief moment where the sitter can breathe without fear of violence and without the burden of stigma." [16] Throughout *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, author Tourmaline repeatedly invokes the importance of Marsha's life and her story. She writes, "Decades ago, I dedicated myself to sharing Marsha's legacy and history, in large part because I needed a hero like her. I didn't do it selflessly. I needed to know that there were people like me who lived loudly and proudly and beautifully long before I came along. I needed to know the people who paved the way for every opportunity I've had to shine in my own life. I need Marsha for my own joyful survival." [17] Just as Tourmaline needed to see herself in Marsha, Freidin's *Are You OK?* series seeks to support the continual survival of everyday trans youth across America, by showing them the resilience of their trans brothers and sisters. As long as trans and nonbinary people continue to fight for our right to exist, and as long as our family and friends are standing behind us—as long as our stories are treated with importance, documented, and shared, we will continue Marsha's legacy.

Jesse Freidin
Rahliek, Age 20, Virginia, from the series ***Are You OK?***
2022, printed 2024
Inkjet print and sound
20 x 16 in, Duration: 1minute, 29 seconds
Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University,
Block Art and Community Fund purchase, 2024.10.8

About the Author

Tourmaline is an award-winning artist, filmmaker, writer, and activist whose work is dedicated to Black trans joy and freedom. She is a TIME 100 Most Influential Person in the World awardee and a Guggenheim Fellow. She has frequently appeared on ABC News, as well as in the New York Times and Vogue. Her art is in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Tate, and the Getty Museum. She created the critically acclaimed film Happy Birthday, Marsha!, and she has directed Pride campaigns for Dove, Marc Jacobs, and Reebok. She previously worked with Queers for Economic Justice and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. She lives in Miami, Florida.

via: penguinrandomhouse.com

Texts contributed by Llewyn Blossfeld, Curatorial Associate. Resource presented by The Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, in partnership with Northwestern Women's Center. Program support provided in part by the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Footnotes:

1. The Women's Center at Northwestern University. 2025. "2025-26 Theme: Legacies of Living Free: Women's Center - Northwestern University." Northwestern.edu, 2025. https://www.northwestern.edu/womenscenter/support-scholarship/our-annual-theme/.
2. Bev Grant, *Bev Grant: Photography 1968-1972* (OSMOS Books, 2021), 172.
3. Tourmaline, *The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson* (Tiny Reparations Books, 2025), 155.
4. Elizabeth Hoover, "Andy Warhol's Trans Subjects Finally Get Named," *Paper Mag*, August 24, 2018, https://www.papermag.com/andy-warhol-drag-queen-portraits#rebelltitem5.
5. "Andy Warhol – Ladies and Gentlemen," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/761235.
6. Quoted in Hoover, "Andy Warhol's Trans Subjects Finally Get Named."
7. Ibid.
8. Glenn Ligon, "Pay It No Mind," in *Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*. Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018.
9. Associated Press, "US man convicted of hate crime for killing transgender woman," *The Guardian*, July 17, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/17/transgender-hate-crime-murder.
10. Dora Scheidell, "Family of transgender woman speaks out after killer released on technicality," *CNY Central*, November 25, 2014. https://cnycentral.com/news/local/family-of-transgender-woman-speaks-out-after-killer-released-on-technicality.
11. Molly Jae Vaughan, host. Memorializing transgender murder victims through art and performance. Ted Talk, January 13, 2019. Video, 16 min, 1 sec. 6:09-6:25. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ix8XpSWqsro.
12. Tourmaline, 217.
13. Tourmaline, 240.
14. Jesse Freidin, "Are You OK? The Disappearing Faces of America's Trans Youth," Vermont Center for Photography, November 4, 2023, https://vcphoto.org/jesse-freidin-are-you-ok-the-disappearing-faces-of-americas-trans-youth/.
15. Jesse Freidin, "Rahliek, Age 20, Virginia," interview with Rahliek and family, 2022, https://soundcloud.com/user-251454390/audio_rahliekage20virginia/s-XulpuImWsPy?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing&si=81219fb7653943739afdb761c3b5a16a.
16. Brandi Numedahl, "Are You OK? A Trans Survival Project by Jesse Freidin," May 2024, https://thedairy.org/are-you-ok/.
17. Tourmaline, 257.

The Block Museum of Art
Northwestern University
40 Arts Circle Drive
Evanston, IL 60201

blockmuseum.northwestern.edu
@nublockmuseum
847. 491. 4100

Cover Detail & Back Image: Jess T. Dugan, Vanessa Fabbre, *Caprice, 55, Chicago, IL, 2015,* from the portfolio *To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults,* Inkjet print on paper, 20 x 16 in. Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, The Block Friends of Art Fund purchase, 2019.2.1q-r.

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