

Arts Benicia
Re-imagining History

What if history was rewritten such that gender was a fluid construct and that individuals could be free to present as their authentic selves be it male, female and anything in-between. The multitude of issues created by a binary gender throughout history could be illuminated. Gender would not determine who could vote, have children, go to war, play sports, get jobs ... allow to exist.

I have painted a series of large portraits of transgender people, as they wish to be seen and heard. As a mother of a transgender child I would love to see history rewritten for the trans community, and what is being written today in some legislatures erased from history.

Nina Katz

Alex

I am Alex. I go by Alex U-Inn as my alternative persona. I am an artist and I call myself an “artist” because a lot of my strength comes from my activism and community. I'm in love with my community of people of color and especially African descent folks. I am committed to making sure that we are represented and seen and with ensuring that we have the services for people to feel themselves and be themselves. This is my life's work.

I knew I was different starting at seven years old, when kids start having more awareness of gender. But it wasn't until after my twenties that I started understanding what nonbinary was.

I have to educate so many people but I accept it as my journey, because if I go mute and when people have questions and we don't give them the right information, that's when they make up shit and when problems happen. And when people don't understand something, they make it up or they get fearful of it. Then they want to protect themselves and the way they protect themselves is they get violent or create policy that doesn't allow you to breathe. We gotta be one step ahead of everyone else. The biases are real and I want to be a voice in the bias.

Aza

I came out as bisexual in high school, and while I know that sexuality is different from gender, it's a part of my journey exploring those aspects of myself.

In college I was introduced to the concept of non-binary genders, gender fluidity and gender queerness and that just really described a thing that I'd been feeling for a long time but didn't have words for. Gender as described by our society just didn't feel right anymore.

Since womanhood and manhood could look many different ways, at the end of the day I felt that these boxes didn't make much sense and I didn't want to be a part of that. It felt really liberating to be completely outside of that. I can be gender queer. I can be this new thing that more accurately describes who I am and I don't experience dysphoria partially because we don't really have an idea of what a nonbinary gender body would even look like.

All identities are fluid throughout time. Everybody is constantly on a journey of understanding themselves and their sense of self is constantly evolving. Therefore, my concept of gender, just like my concept of who I am as a person, is going to constantly be changing.

Era

I have come out as trans in my early 20's. Since that time I've changed my name, started hormones, etc. and socially transitioned. There's ways that I am able to live and be now that feel so right but I'm also able to look back and feel there was lots of anxiety that was related to my gender, but I wasn't necessarily sure that that's what it was at the time. There wasn't a ton of awareness about what it was and I didn't really have the language for it.

I think that when the world sees trans people or thinks of trans people, I think the first image that comes to mind is a trans woman who's been glamorized in this like Hollywood kind of way - like Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, and the actresses that were on *Pose* - they're very glamorous and very intentional about how they're going to show themselves to the world. However, most trans people are like regular people - we have daily lives like any other person. We just want to fit into society in our own way.

Some people feel there is an explosion of trans people all of a sudden but trans people have existed all over the world for ever but have largely been suppressed in white European cultures. So seeing all of this energy coming back where people are more deeply connecting with their sense of gender is a great thing.

Lotus

My name is Don You Dao. My English name is Lotus. I didn't know I was transgender until my early twenties. My family are refugees from Vietnam. There's not a word for transgender in Vietnamese, and so I didn't even know it was a thing - I didn't know it existed.

When I started transitioning, it wasn't a goal of mine to be like a man. I just wanted to feel more comfortable in my body. I just knew that my body didn't feel right. It wasn't until I started being more androgynous and taking hormones that I felt, 'Oh, this is like a thing - that people can't really tell what I am.' And then I had to start really thinking about it.

Life now for me now, as someone who's had top surgery and that's on masculinizing hormones is so much easier. I really like my scars 'cause they're the same as my tattoos - a Phoenix and a Dragon. They have a meaning and symbolism to them. In Vietnamese culture, the Phoenix is a sacred animal and like my transition, it's a sign of rebirth. Additionally, in Vietnam the Phoenix is a Royal animal. Trans people, are not treated well in this country or in Vietnam, and so I wanted to put a symbol on my body that was usually reserved for Royal family.

The Vietnamese Dragon is a non-violent and protective dragon. They just kind of lay around Vietnam and make sure that everyone's okay. Similarly, I think that Trans men are a unique kind of man and that our purpose in life is to be able to use our masculinity and access to other men to hopefully change some of the violence that a lot of men help facilitate. As a trans masculine person, I see this as my responsibility.

Suzanne

When I was five, growing up in Kentucky, I was playing a game of tag where if a girl tagged you, you had to be a girl, and if a boy tagged a girl, then she had to be a boy. When a girl tagged me, I was so happy - , “I'm a girl!” As a five-year-old , I don't know how you know but I just knew that, oh my God, I should be a girl. However, when my mom later found me at a girl's house wearing barrettes and a dress and she was so angry. I was made to feel guilt and shame.

It wasn't until I was 48 when I came out as a woman. Before then, I had a whole life of being a married man, with children and a job but I had to come out publicly. I could've divorced, got a new job, left my son, and went to a new place. But in my case, that wasn't an option. The only way I could do it and to deal with that little ashamed kid inside me was to embrace it and be loud about it.

I fight so hard to make sure people know that to be transgender is not a choice. However, some people feel that if we say it's not a choice that we have to have surgery and to look a certain way. Not all trans people choose to do this. It's hard to make cis-gendered people (non-trans) understand that while being trans is not a choice - my real choice was whether I was going to be me. Once I decided I was going to be me, I didn't have a choice about if I was going to “pass”. Everybody can see I'm trans because I don't pass but I'm no longer scared, guilty or ashamed.