

Breaking down gender norm through art

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Jess T. Dugan discusses the evolution of her photography, and how helping other people express their identities has helped “create art that has an emotional and psychological relation to the human figures you are looking at.” (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

[Jess T. Dugan](#), a pioneer of photography who focuses on transgender and gender-fluid subjects, discussed her groundbreaking work on Thursday (March 31) at Tulane University for the [Martha E. Custard Lecture](#), which brings speakers connected to the LGBTQ community to campus.

Dugan is a nationally recognized artist featured in prestigious news outlets including *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. Her work is regularly exhibited internationally and is in the permanent collections of several major museums.

She was originally inspired to photograph transgender and gender-fluid people through experiences in her own life.

“At the time when I started my work, I didn’t see many representations of people who look like me,” Dugan said. The photographer wanted to push back against gender-normative stereotypes through art.

Dugan saw a gap within the photography world with raw and vulnerable images: "I wanted pictures that spoke about human experiences, something very real and human."

Dugan's photos challenge people's perceptions of gender and challenge critics to look at the subjects of the photos as people first. Dugan discussed how many people waste time looking at the photos, trying to discern what the biological gender of the subject is. After a while, they will let go of this and just look at the people in the photos, their expressions and the emotions they express, Dugan said. This, to Dugan, is true success.

"With my projects, I am trying to get at the fluidity of gender and make people question why, when they look at these pictures, they need to know the gender specifics," Dugan said.

The [Newcomb College Institute](#) hosts the Custard Lecture.

Claire Davenport is a sophomore at Tulane University, majoring in English and political science.

"I'm interested in the identity process, the process of how we know who we are and have to get to that place."

Jess T. Dugan