



Apr 25 Breakout Artists 2013: Chicago's Next Generation of Image Makers

## Jess Dugan



Jess Dugan creates deeply sensitive portrait photographs of trans-gender subjects in everyday, often intimate contexts. "People are curious about other people, and portraits allow them to gaze at someone else safely," says the artist. Ultimately, Dugan wants to show that we can take and look at portraits of trans-bodies without exploiting or fetishizing the community portrayed.

"I want to create beautiful images first," says Dugan, whose work isn't political, or, if it is, that's because bodies and genders in flux make political statements in our society. Instead, she hopes to highlight a universal aspect of the specific trans-experience: The tension between wanting to truly be oneself and be loved by others. Combined, the portraits point to a community in formation.

Dugan was raised in Mississippi and Boston. She considers herself to be part of the trans community and has had her breasts removed, but she says that settling on a masculine pronoun doesn't really matter much to her. In an intense and amazing series of photos, the artist and her mother are side-by-side and shirtless.

Dugan's work is on permanent display at the Kinsey Institute, the University of Arizona, and the Harvard Art Museum. Her next Chicago exhibition opens September 2 at the Arcade Gallery, Columbia College Chicago.  
[jessdugan.com](http://jessdugan.com).

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Meredith Wilson for  
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*Devotion*, 2012, Photograph by Jess T. Dugan