

# PRESS

# HEN I BEX DAY

An exhibition curated by Sandrine Servent and co-curated by William Esdale

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## **SUMMARY**

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# British Journal of Photography



INTERVIEWS, PORTRAIT, PROJECTS

Published on 24 November 2016

## Bex Day photographs gender fluidity in the UK's older trans community

written by Charlotte Harding



Main image: Irene, Orpington. All images © Bex Day

Bex Day explores sexual identity and gender via those who dared to differ

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## Hen The Exhibition, by Bex Day

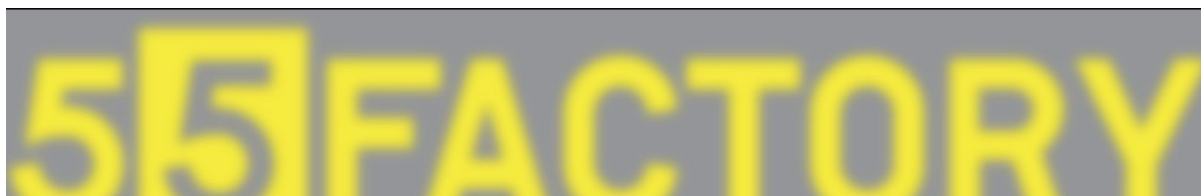
01.03.2019 | ART , BLOG , CULTURE | BY: JORDAN ANDERSON

British fashion and documentary photographer Bex Day in collaboration with producer curator Sandrine Servent and artist publisher William Esdale have recently joined forces in the conception of a campaign which seeks to raise awareness and visibility of the UK's older transgender community. The campaign titled 'Hen' is an initiative Day has been working on for the past three years, that aims to promote a better understanding of integration in and outside the transgender community through an exhibition, film, talks and workshops.

According to Day, "Hen is an anthropological study on gender fluidity and an exploration into the lasting impact societal restrictions concerning sexual identity and gender roles upon us. It examines how gender stereotypes have affected the older transgender community and questions how we define gender and if as a society we should, as well as exploring the inherent social and cultural problems within these alienating classifications." The exhibition is set to display a series of 30 photographic portraits in various sizes and a newly commissioned film featuring subjects over the age of 40 which with successful funding, will take place in London at the Herrick Gallery during the first week of April following Trans Day of Visibility day on March 31st.

Unfortunately , the campaign is sans funding and is in attempt of seeking financial sponsors to cover the expenses of the panel discussion, transport and installation of the artwork, equipment for the three workshops among other costs. The workshops will be hosted by the charity Stonewall Housing with whom the exhibition has partnered with to ensure that 50% of prints sales goes to the organization as one of the UK's LGBTQ+ and trans only supported accommodations. Twenty percent will also be contributed to partners Press For Change as one of the UK's leading campaign groups in focus of the rights and treatment of transgender people. To donate, visit [Hen The Exhibition](#), to learn how.

55 FACTORY - 14th March 2019



## HEN: AN EXHIBITION BY BEX DAY

14/3/2019

0 COMMENTS



PHOTOGRAPHS TO MAKE YOU THINK  
BY SARA DARLING

Look closely at these photographs and you might be surprised at the models. They could be people you know. British photographer, artist and documentary film maker, Bex Day has captured some of the UK's older transgender community in a moving exhibition, to raise awareness to the gender stereotypes which are often inflicted by society.

Choosing to call the show 'Hen', which translates into Swedish as the gender-neutral personal pronoun, 'they', the exhibition at London's Herrick Gallery explores how stagnant and narrow minded the art world actually is. Featuring 30 subjects over the age of forty, Hen tells the personal stories of those within the community, and the common themes that unite them.

Aiming to expose gender stereotypes, and explore how they have affected the older transgender community, the exhibition showcases real people and questions how we define gender and these alienating classifications.

*Curated by Sandrine Servent, Mina Raven and Co-Curated by William Esdale, and BKN, there is support from Stonewall Housing.*

*Check it out from April 1st - April 7th 2019 11- 18:30  
Herrick Gallery, 93 Picadilly, Mayfair, London, W1J 7NQ*

[HenExhibition.com](http://HenExhibition.com)



attitude I ♥ VES...



## HEN

A new art exhibition is shedding light on the lives of older members of the UK's transgender community. For her first solo outing, 26-year-old British photographer Bex Day decided to investigate how gender stereotypes have affected trans people, bringing into focus the stories of 40 subjects – all aged 40+ – from around the country. Hen, a Swedish word that translates as “they”, runs at Herrick Gallery, in London, from 2 until 7 April, to coincide with Trans Day of Visibility. The showcase, curated by Sandrine Servent and William Esdale, is being held in partnership with the charity Stonewall Housing.

[henexhibition.com](http://henexhibition.com)



IT'S NICE THAT - 26th March 2019

# Bex Day's new series looks to raise awareness for the older transgender community

Words by Matt Alagiah, Tuesday 26 March 2019

The editors of the Swedish Academy, the body tasked with overseeing the country's official language, received worldwide praise in 2015 when it decided to add a new pronoun to the dictionary. "Hen" in Swedish is the gender-neutral pronoun that has found a place alongside "han" (he) and "hon" (she) in the official lexicon.

"Hen" was also the apt word for photographer Bex Day to choose as the title for her latest series, which, as she puts it, "examines how gender stereotypes have affected the older transgender community and which questions how we define gender and if, as a society, we even should". Bex has been working on it for three years, in between other editorial and commercial projects, and is now looking to [exhibit](#) 30 portraits from the series for the first time.

Over the years, we've covered many of Bex's projects, from a [series](#) of portraits celebrating the transgender community for Adobe Stock, to a [personal project](#) focused on Berlin's bodybuilding community. One thread that runs consistently through much of her work is an eagerness to tell stories that are often neglected by mainstream media, even by more progressive platforms.

*Hen*, which depicts transgender people above the age of 40, is just the latest example in her portfolio. "I noticed there was a lack of older transgender individuals in the media," Bex explains, "and wanted to give them a voice and a legacy." She believes that generally there isn't enough awareness of "the struggles that the older transgender community had to go through at a time when it was far less accepted to be transgender. There is nowhere near enough recognition of their stories and past."

The project has taken Bex all over the country, from the cliffs above England's south coast to the heart of the Wanstead Flats. But before she could begin shooting she had to first find subjects who were willing to take part. That process started with logging on to online forums and getting the message out. "The most difficult part was at the beginning as I was only existing as a forum post on the internet," she says. Gradually, though, word spread "as I photographed more people and the project expanded, as did the trust."



Building that sense of trust with each individual has been absolutely vital. Once they had agreed to be involved, Bex would meet each person for a coffee to talk about the project and “see what we both wanted from the photos to avoid any miscommunication”, she says. Then, for the shoot, she would spend a day at their house or a weekend, depending on where in the UK they were based. “It was always a surprise staying at someone’s house I didn’t know very well, but it was always fun in the end. I put a lot of trust into each person and I suppose that was reciprocated, and you can hopefully see that in the photos.”

You certainly can. The portraits display Bex’s uncanny ability to capture a person’s character, often in an apparent moment of repose. Many of the shoots took place in more domestic settings, inside the houses of Bex’s subjects – her portraits of Sameer and Irene (below) are examples that feel intimate and personal. For others, the setting is the natural world, sometimes expansive and sublime (as in the image of Zoe, at top) and sometimes softer (as in the portrait of Dan Jones, below). For these shoots outside the domestic sphere, Bex would ask her subjects to take her to a “meaningful place that they visit regularly”. It was for this reason that Dan took Bex to the Wanstead Flats, to a quiet glade covered in a carpet of green moss.



Bex Day: Han (Dan)



Bex Day: Hen (Irene)

One image Bex has chosen for the exhibition shows Dan lying on his back on the forest floor looking calmly down the lens with his head tilted towards the viewer. “It was January, so a bit cold,” Dan recalls with a chuckle. The whole scene conveys a sense of stillness, something Dan puts down to an inner peace he has managed to find in recent years. “It’s the first time I’ve ever done a photo shoot. I think it’s about where I am in my life at the moment,” he says. He transitioned when he was 19, over 20 years ago now. “I always thought I would reach a point when the part of my life before I transitioned would cease to be important. But actually I’ve realised it’s still really important. To ignore that part of my history is to cut myself off from celebrating the richness of my life experiences.”

The project also provides an interesting contrast between what Dan refers to as “chronological age and transitioning age”. As he puts it, “It strikes me there are two different stories: one about people who transitioned some time ago and understanding society’s response; and another story about people who transitioned later in life. Bex’s project touches both.”

Irene Heath, another of the subjects in *Hen*, transitioned later in life and has therefore had a particular experience. “I was brought up in an era when being trans meant that something must be wrong with me,” she says. “I didn’t even know other trans people existed until the internet came into existence. So I had a lot of fear in me when I decided to come out after I retired, and it took me several years to get rid of it.”

As someone who transitioned over two decades ago, Dan has witnessed significant shifts in both legislation and attitudes. When he was starting his career as a mental health social worker, for instance, he was told: “Don’t be out. You’ll never be allowed to work with vulnerable people.” Consequently, he didn’t come out for a long time. He even had to field questions from colleagues about what they should do if they were presented with a transgender client. “It was so othering, that experience,” he says, “hearing people make statements like that and not feeling I could say, ‘I’m one of those.’”



Bex Day: Hen [Sameer]

Since then, legislative changes have meant that trans people are more protected, not only when it comes to access to services but also in employment. But there is still much more to be done. “Legislative changes have outstripped social changes,” says Dan. Just one example he cites is the fact that an anti-trans group was allowed to lead London’s Pride march last year.

For Bex, there is an added geographic dimension to this. “I feel that a lot of progress has been made in terms of education and awareness regarding the transgender community. However, there is always more to be done,” she says. “I think cities such as London have slightly more access to resources, and it’s smaller towns and villages that could benefit from a wider understanding.” It’s for this reason that she’s hoping to tour the show around the UK, after its opening week in London.

*Hen* the exhibition, which is curated by Sandrine Servent at Mina Raven and William Esdale, will take place at the Herrick Gallery for one week from 1 April, following Trans Day of Visibility on 31 March. To coincide with the exhibition, Bex has also co-directed a film with Luke Sullivan to raise more awareness about the series and its subject matter. “The film allowed me to give a voice to some of the participants involved and show their talents and create a deeper sense of intimacy and understanding about the participants,” she says. Bex also hopes her project will in turn benefit the younger transgender community. “I’ve heard from a great deal of participants that they rarely interact with younger transgender people and it’s a real shame because I think they could learn a lot from one another.”

That’s chiefly what the project as a whole attempts to do – to give a voice to people who are left out of the mainstream discourse, and through giving them a voice, encourage understanding. Asked what she feels the message of *Hen* is, Irene puts it simply: “The message I want to convey is that there is nothing wrong with being trans, and being trans can lead to a new and wonderful world, where I can explore my femininity openly, without any fear.”

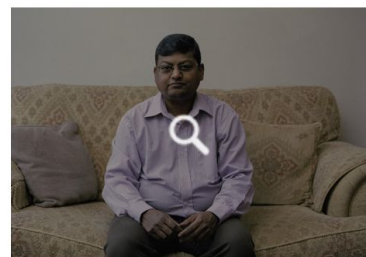


27 Mar  
2019

PICTURE GALLERY

# Life Over Forty for Non-Binary and Transgender Communities

Photographer and filmmaker Bex Day spent years documenting the UK's older transgender and non-binary community in a series of thirty portraits that together tell a story about how changing attitudes on gender and identity are passed from one generation to the next. Words by Charlotte Jansen



“I’ve always known that I was uncomfortable with my gender but it’s only been in the past two years I’ve had words to describe how I feel,” says Zoe, forty-two. Zoe identifies as non-binary, and growing up in rural Wales in the eighties and nineties, there was little understanding of gender fluidity. Zoe now lives as part of a small community of queer families not far from where they grew up, and works for the NHS. They hope to retrain in counselling to be able to help gender and sexual minorities in the future.

Photographer and filmmaker Bex Day, whose background is in journalism, has shot campaigns for major fashion brands including Stella McCartney and Topshop. She took Zoe’s portrait at the White Cliffs of Dover, an iconic British location that was symbolic for Zoe. Being there, they explain “made me reflect on the journey I’ve taken in terms of my identity and self acceptance and how far I’ve come”.

“When we arrived, the last bits of melted snow had made the chalk soil heavy, clinging to my boots in huge sods. We had to improvise to get the clumps off so I looked presentable, but in the photo, I hope a little bit is visible if you look closely, as evidence of the effort I’d made to get there.”

The portrait is one of thirty Day took across the UK of the older transgender and non-binary community for her latest project, *Hen*, which will be presented at Herrick Gallery from April 1 to 7 (in a show curated by Sandrine Servent, Mina Raven and co-curated by William Esdale, BKN), alongside a film Day co-directed with Luke Sullivan. In Day’s unprecedented document, she focuses on those over forty. “I noticed there were far more youth focused news stories about transgender individuals and a lack of older transgender people in the media and I wanted to give them a voice and a legacy,” Day explains. “It was clear to me that there is nowhere near enough recognition of their stories and past, which in turn, I think, will help to benefit the younger transgender community and hopefully provide a safe space for them to interact.”

Day's own experiences growing up, and her battle to overcome OCD, informed her interest in gender and identity that have been persistent topics throughout her work to date, leading her to research binary language, and the discussion of gender in the writings of the likes of Judith Butler to Foucault. The title of the series highlights the Swedish gender neutral pronoun, for which there is no equivalent in English.

Irene, now seventy-three, is one of the oldest subjects Day photographed, in her living room at home in Orpington. She came out ten years ago, after she'd retired, and is now writing her own psychoanalysis. "There is no specific formula to live as an 'individual' whether you are transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, we are all the same. If we accept that as people and as a society we are equal, we will certainly improve our tolerance and acceptance of others and ourselves." Day reflects. "I think gender inequality in itself creates more emphasis on gender binaries; once equality comes then I believe gender will have far less weight," she adds. "Action and transformation is key, and hopefully Hen helps to encourage this."

REFINERY29 - 28th March 2019

# Intimate Portraits Of The Over 40s In The Transgender Community

JAZMIN KOPOTSHA  
28 MARCH 2019, 06:30





The Swedish have a dedicated gender-neutral personal pronoun: 'hen'. *Hen* is also the title of 26-year-old artist [Bex Day's exciting new exhibition](#), which tells the personal stories of members of transgender and non-binary communities.

Featuring 30 subjects over the age of 40, the exhibition will showcase striking portraits of the people Bex met over the three years that it took to put the project together. "There was not – and still isn't – enough visibility of the older transgender community in the media," Bex tells Refinery29. "I could see that everyone involved had fascinating stories to tell, particularly educators such as Stephen Whittle (OBE) who cofounded the trans activist group Press For Change, who we have partnered with for *Hen*."



*Irene, 2015*

A short film accompanies her photography, which Bex says allowed her and co-director Luke Sullivan to delve a little deeper into the stories that are so rarely acknowledged outside their own communities, and create a greater sense of intimacy via interviews and simply being let inside some of the participants' homes. But wider awareness and understanding seems to be on the horizon. "When interviewing people throughout the project, it was clear that there is beginning to be far less focus on being gendered/transgendered, and rather more of a focus on the person's identity. This is what we set out to show in the *Hen* film," Bex explains.

*Hen* opens on 1st April – one day after the International Transgender Day of Visibility – and runs for a week, with a portion of print sales from the exhibition donated to its partner charities, Stonewall Housing and Press For Change. Refinery29 spoke to Bex who, between [crowdfunding](#) the show and preparing to unveil her work, filled us in on the story behind *Hen* – the big picture, the important conversations and the wonderful people she gave voice to in the process.



*Matt, 2018*

**You mentioned that you’ve been working on *Hen* for three years. What prompted you to get started in the first place?**

I noticed there was a lack of older transgender people in the media and I wanted to give them a voice and a legacy. I focused on those identifying as transgender and non-binary who are all over 40.

I grew up with few gender stereotypes in my childhood, often people thought I was a boy and my brother a girl; I was never really interested in Barbies or the colour pink. I questioned why a woman should not have some masculine traits and vice versa. Of course, this is very different to identifying as transgender but it was the starting point for my interest in the transgender community. This black and white thinking that dominates so much of society as a whole forces narrow-mindedness upon many individuals and is something I really wanted to eliminate through this project.

**Have you felt a tangible shift in the conversation around gender in recent years? There's a way to go but do you think the steps society is taking are enough?**

I think there has been an improvement, yes, but it's important to take further action which is also why I wanted to do the project. Laurie Penny has been a big influence to me in this respect. In her book *Bitch Doctrine*, she writes: "Perhaps the generation being born today will grow up with different assumptions, not just women should be equal to men but that gender might not be the most important part of your identity. That's an uncomfortable idea for a great many people." What I am trying to understand, and what so much of my work is about, is why we really need labels like male and female when everyone should be treated equally. We all deserve respect and that's the bottom line.

**Why did you choose to focus on the 40+ community?**

There is nowhere near enough recognition of their stories and past which, in turn, will help to benefit the younger transgender community and hopefully provide a safe space for them to interact. I've heard from a great deal of participants that they rarely interact with younger transgender people and it's a real shame because I think that is important in terms of expansion of knowledge of the transgender community and enhancing education in terms of intergenerational feedback and support.

**Was there a standout thing that you learned, or were told, on your journey with *Hen* that really resonated with you?**

Some highlights were Irene, who was one of the first people I photographed for *Hen* in 2015, and a big inspiration to me as she conducts her own psychoanalysis and I am very interested in psychology. Steph taught me a lot as he transitioned to being female and then transitioned back due to complications with his daughter and ex-partner. He is truly inspirational as he nearly lost everything and then came back full circle.

There was definitely not enough gender support or open conversations about identity or mental health in most of their childhoods. Most people felt extremely alienated growing up so they turned to studying. Dan, who graduated from Oxford, for instance, describes himself as being a bit of "a brain in a vat" before he transitioned; he felt alienated from his body and focused on studying. He didn't know how to name what was going on for him because there weren't any online communities available to him.



*Zoe, 2018*

Stephen Whittle used to go to the library while at school and read all the medical books available. He said: "When I was 15 I read the description of a butch lesbian and I remember thinking *I don't feel like that's who I am...* It was difficult to understand where I fit... We used to go to my grandmother's every Sunday and she used to get newspapers like *News of the World*, which had all the stories about people who had sex changes. So I used to pick it up and hide it inside the *Daily Express* and try and read it so it didn't look like I was reading these stories. My mother told me years later that she knew exactly what I was reading."

I would say due to working with the older community, it helped me to value where we are at in the world – we are so fortunate that we have access to such a wide range of mental health facilities, how we are able to use the internet to accompany or enhance our understanding of certain topics. I feel we are far freer to understand our identities and truly express this nowadays, there are safer spaces for people to communicate about their issues, which wasn't the case for a lot of the people I photographed when they were growing up, sadly.

***Hen is showing at Herrick Gallery, London from 1st-7th April, 11am-6.30pm, with workshops on intergeneration, safe spaces and wellbeing available to attend.***



PHOTOGRAPHY

## Hen

DI VOGUE  
28 MARZO 2019

Hen is an anthropological study on the fluidity of gender by Bex Day



Hen is an exploration into the lasting impact societal restrictions concerning sexual identity and gender roles have upon us.

**Bex Day investigates how gender stereotypes have affected the transgender community** and asks if the modern day feminist movement has had a resonating impact on how we define gender - and if as a society we should.

Hen translates in Swedish as the gender neutral personal pronoun, the equivalent to 'they' in English. Transgender is an umbrella term and includes those who have transitioned from male to female, female to male, and those who identify as non-binary which is explored within the works.

**Featuring 40 subjects over the age of forty**, Hen tells the personal stories of those within the community, and the common themes of loss and discovery that unite them throughout their journey.

An all-encompassing, empowering study of individuals within a social group on the fringes of society, the exhibition shows both the light-hearted and the disquieting moments they experience.

Universal, relatable moments of isolation, self-acceptance and the resilience of the human spirit are told through personal stories and intimate photographs.

**Given a platform, the subjects find a voice, a sense of pride, and for some, the motivation to come out to family and friends.**

When viewed in the context of the individual the notion of gender becomes difficult to define, and it is through this ambiguity that Hen essentially questions how we as a society define gender, sexuality, and the inherent problems in these alienating classifications.

Powerful, enlightening, and at times bittersweet, Hen serves as a monograph for the older generation of the UK's trans community.

*Hen is sponsored by Chan Photographic Imaging and Old Blue Last beer and have partnered with Stonewall Housing, an LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall Housing provides the only specialist housing advice, advocacy and support service for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT+) people of all ages. They work to ensure lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans\* people live in safer homes, free from fear, and where the community can celebrate identity and support each other to achieve full potential.*

*Herrick Gallery, London*

*Curated by Sandrine Servent, Mina*

*Raven and Co-Curated by William*

*Esdale, BKN*

*April 1st - April 7th 2019*

AnOther

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# Captivating Portraits Celebrating Britain's Over-40 Trans Community

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY / CULTURE TALKS



Irene, Orpington, 2015 © Bex Day

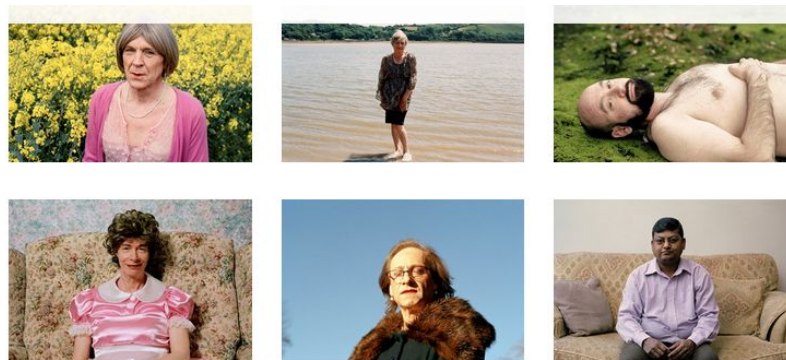
**Coinciding with Trans Visibility Day this weekend, Bex Day's new exhibition, Hen, is the result of travelling the UK and meeting a different generation of trans and non-binary people**

MARCH 29, 2019

TEXT Daphne Milner

In 2015, the editors of the Swedish Academy included the gender-neutral pronoun “hen” – alongside “han” (he) and “hon” (she) – in the country’s official dictionary. The decision reflected an increasing public awareness of the role language plays in carving out new gender categories. *Hen* is now also the title of photographer **Bex Day**’s latest series, which focuses on the UK’s older transgender and non-binary communities. Over the past three years, Day has travelled across the country to meet with, speak to and photograph genderqueer individuals over the age of 40 in order to celebrate and elevate alternative identities.

A critical examination of linguistic gender biases was Day’s starting point. “My first port of call for *Hen* was language,” she recalls. “I was initially interested in phallogocentric language, which is essentially male-dominated language – for example: mankind rather than humankind – and how this impacts women.” With *Hen*, Day wanted to challenge this reductive and repressive binary way of thinking: “The people involved in *Hen* are presenting us with their true identities. By bringing about new modes of articulation, they challenge society’s rigid gender stereotypes. There is no specific formula to living as an individual, whether you are transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.”



GALLERY / 7 IMAGES

### Hen by Bex Day

Storytelling and self-expression is central to *Hen*: each of Day’s 30 portraits is paired with a biographical text authored by the person in the picture. “It was clear to me that there is nowhere near enough recognition of the older transgender community’s stories or histories,” Day tells AnOther. “I’ve heard from a great deal of *Hen* participants that they rarely interact with younger transgender individuals. Yet, the intergenerational passing on of personal narratives is an important part of fostering solidarity within the transgender community.” A large part of the motivation behind *Hen* was precisely to highlight the power of such intergenerational social dynamics, which have the potential to unify a diverse range of experiences and challenges.

Solidarity should, however, not be confined to within the transgender community, which makes up 0.2 per cent of the UK’s population. “Being a better ally to the trans community means listening rather than talking,” says Zoe, a non-binary person who was photographed for *Hen*. “Trans people don’t need you to speak for them; instead you should listen, believe what you hear even if you don’t understand it, and direct people to trans voices if they ask you to have opinions on being trans.”





Zoe, Dover, 2018 © Bex Day

For Melody, a trans woman featured in *Hen*, it is important that cis-gender people “be proud to be seen with and be friends with trans women, as our integration in society depends on it. Always remember that trans women are women, as this answers pretty much every argument against transgender rights.” Angela, another trans woman photographed by Day, agrees and adds: “If you see a trans person when you are out and about just remember that we are ordinary humans just like everyone else you know. Don’t stare, don’t comment, don’t discriminate, and if you do hear someone denigrating trans people just remind them we are the same as them, with mothers and fathers, sons and daughters.”

*Hen*, curated by Sandrine Servent, Mina Raven and co-curated by William Esdale, will be on display at Herrick Gallery, London, from April 1 - 7, 2019, alongside [a film](#) Day has co-directed with Luke Sullivan.

# BuzzFeed News

## 10 Photo Stories That Will Challenge Your View Of The World

Here are some of the most interesting and powerful photo stories from across the internet.



**Gabriel H. Sanchez**  
BuzzFeed News Photo Essay Editor



**Kate Bubacz**  
BuzzFeed News Deputy Photo Director

Posted on March 30, 2019, at 12:19 p.m. ET



This week, we highlight photo stories that delve into the curious and the unknown. Profiles on Vincent Fournier's new book *Space Utopia* and Lisa Elmaleh's tintype photographs explore the exciting possibilities on opposite ends of the technological spectrum, while galleries on Life magazine photographer Margaret Bourke-White and the women of NASA celebrate those who have smashed boundaries and paved the way for the next generation.

Photographers Mel D. Cole and Bex Day capture striking and unique perspectives from the communities they hail from, as with Habiba Nowrose's haunting portraits of concealed women. For a quick smile, we've included BuzzFeed News' gallery of how baseball's opening day has evolved since the early 1900s, as well as the Smithsonian's scientific explanation for one of the most curious sights of Lake Michigan to be captured on camera.

These are some of the photo stories from across the internet that caught our eye and kept us thinking.

"Intimate Portraits of the Over 40s in the Transgender Community" — Refinery29



# BBC NEWS - 31st March 2019

## NEWS

**NOW PLAYING** **UP NEXT**

▶ 3:31 'I haven't got to pretend to anyone' 31 Mar

▶ 2:22 'I reported journalist over transgender tweets' 20 Mar

▶ 1:27 'I'm in a little safe trans bubble' 15 Mar

▶ 1:15 Trans vicar: 'People relate to people' 15 Mar

▶ 1:08 Playing for a women's team 'didn't seem possible' 04 Mar

▶ 1:00 'Being transgender isn't easy in Colombia' 27 Feb

▶ 3:00 Julia Grant discusses transitioning in 1979 03 Jan



### 'I haven't got to pretend to anyone'

It's ten years since the first International Transgender Day of Visibility, which takes place each year on 31 March.

Three transgender people, from three different generations, have been telling BBC LGBT Correspondent Ben Hunte about their own personal journeys.

31 Mar 2019

f t e Share

**ARTS** MONDAY 1ST APRIL | BY DINO BONACIC

## TEN'S TO SEE: 'HEN' BY BEX DAY AT THE HERRICK GALLERY



When she coined the term “gender performativity” in 1990, philosopher Judith Butler clearly anticipated the move towards understanding the social conditioning of sex. At the time, the focus was on feminism and the way women’s roles in our society were crafted out of some old-fashioned ideas about what it means to be female. Today, that same phrase expands in its meaning, as the binary limitations of genders (finally) move on to something a bit more understanding of the colourful world we live in. But how did the past understanding influence the future? That’s where Bex Day comes in. The 26-year-old self-taught fashion and documentary photographer has looked at the ways the trans and non-binary communities have been affected by the modern-day feminism and gender stereotypes.

As part of her project *Hen* (a gender-neutral pronoun in Swedish), Day captured 40 subjects over the age of 40, all members of the community, in a visual study of individuals and their stories. Intimate photographs of people in their own world are an opportunity for these people to express their unique voices along with a sense of pride. Without growing up with social media and an instant way of expressing themselves, this is a community that is so often bumped to the fringe by trying to be fitted into the alienating classifications of our society. Opening today, an exhibition carrying the name of the project is launching at the Herrick Gallery in London for a seven day run. Reflecting the real narratives of her subjects, the photographs and the documentary on show are not just stories of beauty and happiness. There are bittersweet moments, ones that enlighten the audience into understanding the world further than what is on show. Inspirational and emotionally moving, this exhibition is a take on of the world we live you don't always get to see. Marking yesterday's International Transgender day of Visibility as both a privilege and a necessity, *Hen* is your obligatory literature – don't miss out.

*'Hen' by Bex Day is on show until April 7 at the Herrick Gallery in London, W1J 7NQ. The project is still raising money for the exhibition – you can support it via [Indiegogo](#). The exhibition's partners are Stonewall Housing and Press For Change charities, Puck Studio, Chan Photographic Imaging, Old Blue Last Beer, Art Rabbit and Ray's Glass and Frames. 'Hen' is curated and produced by Sandrine Servent at Mina Raven and William Esdale.*

[henexhibition.com](http://henexhibition.com)



"Irene" (2015) Photography Bex Day

## The photography exhibition giving a voice to Britain's older trans people

Photographer Bex Day spent the last three years taking moving portraits of the older trans community, and hearing about their life experiences

### Bex Day's Hen

6 IMAGES



Old age comes with a lot of accompanying inevitabilities: everything from finding lines around your eyes, to various ailments and illnesses. Vulnerability is one that we don't talk about enough. In the UK, millions of people over 65 either live alone or say that they experience loneliness. Many are receiving care, while others who need it don't have access. A majority of old people survive off tiny state pensions, and a large number live in poverty. But for older transgender people, these complications can be more serious. Discrimination heightens your feelings of isolation. You can feel at once invisible and exposed.

It's with this in mind that documentary and fashion photographer Bex Day has spent the last three years taking portraits of Britain's older trans community, and talking to her subjects about their lives. This week, the photos will be on show with a film at a Bex's London portrait exhibition, Hen – named after the Swedish gender neutral pronoun (a comment on the fact that we still don't have one, says Bex).

In her regular work shooting for *Dazed*, *Vogue Italia*, Burberry, Topshop, and editing *Pyrot* magazine, Day says a lot of her images are about empowerment, equality and freedom of choice: "I like to question what is considered 'normal'. I'm keen to change how people think and diminish black and white thinking through my photographs. When I started, I felt there was not (and still isn't) enough visibility of the older transgender community in the media."

**"I didn't meet another trans person until I was in my 20s. But these young people online, they have each other" – Dan**

Day cast her dozens of subjects by going to meet-ups and posting in forums. On one, a trans social and dating site, she met Irene Heath, a 74-year-old trans woman who lives in Orpington on the edge of south London. "I identify as transgender. By this, I mean that I'm fully confident going out in public dressed as a woman. However I'm not full time as a girl," Irene tells me over email, where she is most comfortable speaking. "Sometimes I go out as a woman and sometimes as a guy," she says, before explaining that it was nerve-wracking to be in Bex's photos because she was only used to having her photo taken by her trans friends.

In Irene's experience, a lot of older trans people still do not feel able to "come out" publicly as trans because they were raised in a time when it was less acceptable – a time before trans and nonbinary celebrities and models proliferated the media and fashion. She says that a lot of trans people she's met are living in secret, some are even married, with their husband or wife not knowing that they are trans. "Will she support him, or will she want a divorce?" says Irene. "The husband doesn't want to break up the marriage, and yet he feels a heavy weight of guilt about deceiving the wife." Bex found this to be a common story too: "A lot of people could not participate in the project due to them hiding their identity in some form," she explains, and someone else she photographed transitioned to female and then transitioned back to male due to complications with his family. Irene suggests that free or inexpensive gender counselling for families could help here. "Then the wife can discuss her problems freely in a non-judgemental setting."



"Sameer" (2018) Photography Bex Day

The biggest change in the lives of trans people since Irene grew up is the advent of the internet. "Before the internet, each solitary trans person usually thought that they were the only one in the world who had these strange desires. The internet allowed trans people to connect together via various web forums and dating sites," Irene explains. For younger trans people, social media can be life-changing: "They can get instant psychological support from their friends, and social media allows them to tell their story to the world."

Daniel, a social worker in his 40s and another person who features in Bex's exhibition, agrees that the internet has been a game changer. He used to be involved with trans community groups, but then he stopped talking to other trans people or talking about being trans – partly because colleagues told him that if he let people know that he was trans he wouldn't be able to work with children.

Recently, he realised that he has lived more than half of his life as a man. It was a wake up call: "I expected there to be a point where my past that was gendered as a woman ceased to be important, but I haven't really found that, so it felt important to find kinship." This is when Daniel met Bex – after he joined a closed Facebook group for other trans men. "I guess I was also interested to know what it was like for guys transitioning now, and whether I could offer support."



Daniel found that the landscape is starkly different for younger men today. "When I transitioned I was 19. I'd heard the odd media story which seemed to relate to trans women but I didn't know of any trans men. I didn't know really what was possible." Day says Daniel told her that, because of this, he couldn't even find the language to articulate that he was trans. "I had a huge sense of my own ridiculousness," he continues. "I didn't meet another trans person until I was in my 20s. But these young people online, they have each other."



"Melody" (2018) Photograph by Bex Day

The other improvements Daniel noticed in the Facebook groups were a greater understanding of the intersection between sexuality and gender – "in the past, if you were trans and gay-identified it was difficult to find a place as a 'real man' within groups of trans men," he says – and a greater understanding that the process of transition might be different for different people. "When I was younger I saw the 'trans' part of transgender as the journey from female to male, whereas now I think we see it more as a transcendence of gender, and that's a liberating idea. It showed me that the way I choose to present myself is up to me. I don't *have* to adopt any particular characteristics of masculinity."

As an older trans man, Daniel explains that he thinks he is still carrying a lot of the lingering trauma of growing up trans in a time with so little visibility and so much stigma (although he acknowledges that these problems haven't disappeared). "The internalised transphobia can be difficult to combat and even now I find there are situations where I feel very pathologised, and that makes me feel very powerless. Part of that's about my earlier experience and a much more medicalised view of transitioning or what it means to be a trans person back then."

He is also worried about the future: "In social work there's this idea of 'coming out' and 'coming out again'. It relates to being visible as a trans person, which is quite important when you consider social services for older people because you could suddenly find yourself in receipt of personal care from people that are not ready to give it to a trans person. I suppose that's depressing."



"Dan" (2018) Photography Bex Day

Day hopes that *Hen* will create a dialogue between older and younger trans people about these issues, and is even specifically holding an intergenerational workshop in the space. "There is nowhere near enough recognition of the people's stories and past, which in turn, I think, will help to benefit the younger transgender community. I've heard from a great deal of participants from *Hen* that they rarely interact with younger transgender individuals, and it's a real shame because I think that is important in terms of expansion of knowledge of the transgender community and enhancing education in terms of intergenerational feedback."

Day also thinks the exhibition is a good moment to take stock of positive change: "Shooting *Hen* helped me to value where we are at in the world – we are so fortunate that we have access to such a wide range of mental health facilities, how we are able to use the internet to accompany or enhance our understanding of certain topics (of course it has its downsides too), I feel we are far freer to understand our identities and truly express this nowadays, there are safer spaces for people to communicate about their issues, which sadly wasn't the case for a lot of the people I photographed when they were growing up." *Hen*, she says, is a chance to celebrate these people as "the unique, beautiful individuals that they are".

*Hen opens today (April 1) and runs until April 7 at Herrick Gallery. A portion of print sales will be donated to Stonewall Housing and Press For Change. Hen the Film is co-directed by Bex Day and Luke Sullivan*



PHOTOGRAPHY | By [Ryan White](#) | 01 April 2019, 11:51 am

## telling the story of britain's elderly trans community

Over the last five years, photographer Bex Day has worked on 'Hen', a sensitive document of what it means to be trans and elderly in Britain.

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Photographer [Bex Day](#) wants the lasting impression of her new show, *Hen*, to be a complete "detachment from judgement". The exhibition, with an accompanying film and zine, is a photographic, anthropological study of gender; taking its name from the Swedish gender-neutral personal pronoun, the closest equivalent being 'they' in English. Working on it for the last five years, Bex has developed relationships with elderly trans and non-binary-identifying individuals, photographing over 40 subjects all over the age of 40.

"I noticed there were far more youth-focused news stories about transgender individuals and a lack of older transgender people in the media, and I wanted to give them a voice and a legacy," she explains, a few days before the show opens to the public. "There is nowhere near enough recognition of their stories and past, [so having more representation] will in turn, I think, help to benefit the younger transgender community and hopefully provide a safe space for them to interact."

The UK is currently in the midst of unnerving debate around [LGBTQ inclusivity and equality](#). Sparked by the decision of a Birmingham school to reverse their policy on the teaching of gay relationships in lessons after an outcry from some parents, the question "Should LGBTQ lessons be taught in schools?" is now appearing with galling repetition across British media outlets. It's an attempt to seem partisan, that actually turns the clock back to 2003 – the year [Section 28](#) was finally repealed. Of the LGBTQ spectrum, trans rights and matters of the gender binary are rarely handled respectfully, with transphobic rhetoric constantly platformed at the highest level of our national media and political institutions, transgender individuals are often forced to defend their identity against bigoted political pundits on TV.



Steph G, London, 2018

“There was not (and still isn’t) enough visibility of the older transgender community in the media,” Bex says. “I could see that everyone involved had fascinating stories to tell, particularly educators such as Stephen Whittle (OBE), who co-founded the trans-activist group Press for Change.” The resulting show is a poignant story of a generation who grew up with even less acceptance and support, yet made powerful, meaningful change to Britain. “I’ve heard from a great deal of participants in *Hen* that they rarely interact with younger transgender individuals, and it’s a real shame because I think that is important in terms of expansion of knowledge of the transgender community and enhancing education in terms of intergenerational feedback.”

“Binary language, and gender binarism really intrigue me. I grew up with few gender stereotypes in my childhood, often people thought I was a boy and my brother a girl,” Bex finishes with. “This black-and-white thinking that dominates so much of society as a whole forces narrow mindedness upon many individuals and is something I really wanted to eliminate through this project.”



## These Photos Bridge the Gap Between Generations of Trans People

We spoke to photographer Bex Day about her photo series 'Hen'.



All photos by Bex Day.

British photographer Bex Day's *Hen* photo series focuses on the older generation of the UK's trans community. If you're wondering what the name is about: "Hen", the Swedish genderneutral personal pronoun – equivalent to "they" in English – is an umbrella term for those who identify as transgender and non-binary.

Since starting the project in 2015, Bex has photographed 40 transgender people who are all over the age of 40. The portraits are shot in her subjects' homes, or with them surrounded by lush greenery – which, for Day, symbolises unity. "We are all one; we are like nature in the respect that we will continue to grow and flourish," she says.

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I caught up with Bex over email on the opening day of her new exhibition to talk about what the inspiration behind the project was, and how working on the series has been a learning curve for her.

**VICE: Hi, Bex. What made you want to focus solely on older subjects with this project?**

**Bex Day:** I noticed there was a lack of older transgender individuals in the media, and, as an ally, I wanted to give them the space to share their experiences, and also hopefully encourage more intergenerational talking points. A large amount of individuals in *Hen* said they rarely interact with younger transgender individuals, and I thought it was a shame because it could encourage learning on both parts.





**Was everyone shot in or around their homes?**

I tried to shoot people in their homes as much as possible – however, sometimes access wasn't possible due to their family or partners not knowing about them being transgender. If homes weren't possible we'd go to their meaningful place. It would depend on where they lived and whether they were up for driving around. Sometimes we went on mini road trips. Me and Julie rode around Essex in her car. Annabelle kindly let me stay with her in Wales for a few days, so we had the luxury of shooting her in various locations in Carmarthen and in her house. Irene's living room was so beautiful, I had to photograph her there.

**What have you taken away from shooting this project?**

The entirety of the project was a huge learning curve and allowed me to progress in terms of my understanding towards the transgender community and the difficulties they faced and continue to face. It taught me to value where we're at in the world – we're so fortunate that we have access to such a wide range of mental health facilities and how we are able to use the internet to enhance our understanding of certain topics. I feel we're far freer to understand our identities and truly express this nowadays; there are safer spaces for people to communicate their issues, which sadly wasn't the case for a lot of the people I photographed when they were growing up.



There was definitely not enough gender support or open conversations about identity or mental health in most of their childhoods. It's great that children are learning about being transgender in schools, too, because it discourages the sense of alienation that so many people I photographed mentioned they felt growing up.

Overall, the generosity of each person involved really resonated with me. Everyone has been so kind and munificent because they truly want to make a difference with this project as well. Without their involvement and their positivity it wouldn't have been such a strong project. I really can't thank everyone enough for all the time and effort they've put into *Hen*.



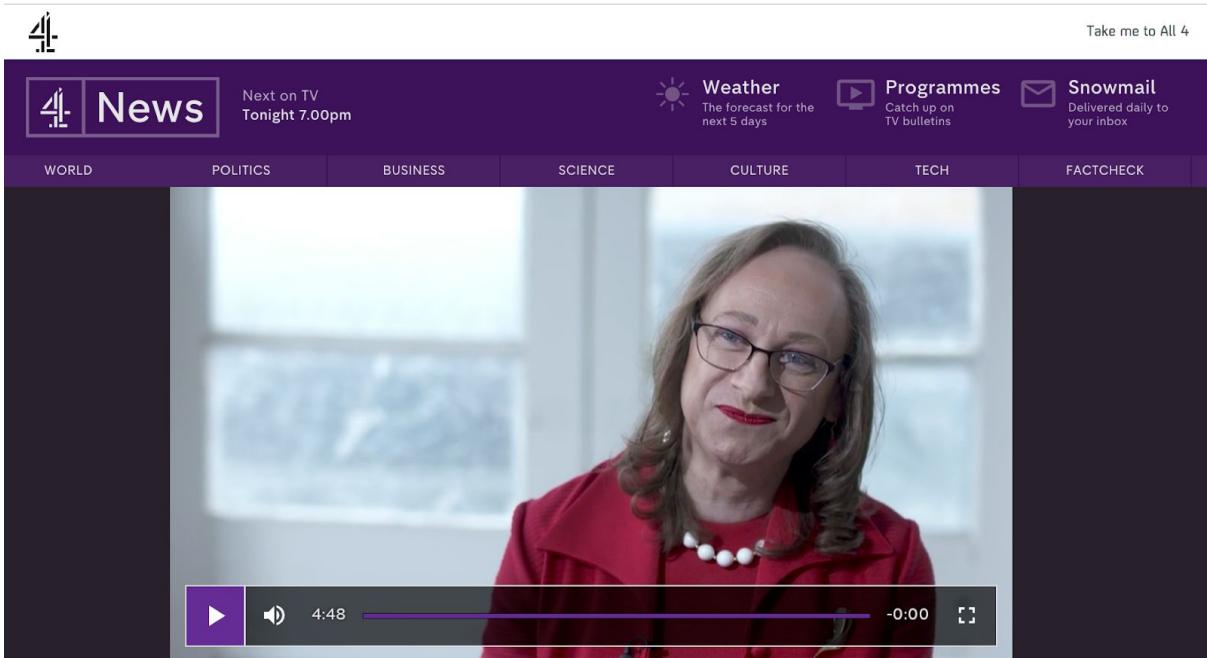
**What do you want people to see when they look at these photographs?**

I wanted to create imagery that is both genuine to the individual and thought-provoking. I wasn't keen to brush over the fact that each person has had a difficult time. I wanted to merge this with a more positive message that things can change. I wanted the images to express this in a manner that isn't negative but challenges understanding and hopefully facilitates a deeper understanding of this concept. Life can be shit sometimes, but that doesn't necessarily detract from the way in which it can make you grow. By taking people outside of their homes and contrasting some images of people at home, it creates this sense of stepping out of your comfort zone paired with intimacy.

I wanted the lasting impression to allow individuals to detach from judgment and recognise that we are all equal.

**Thanks, Bex.**

*Hen runs until the 7th of April at Herrick Gallery, London. Alongside the exhibition, Bex has created **a film** to accompany Hen and will be hosting workshops throughout the exhibition week (April 1 - April 7) with Stonewall Housing (70 percent of print sales will go to them.) There will also be a workshop to tackle intergenerational issues with Press For Change One.*



The header features the Channel 4 logo on the left and the text "Take me to All 4" on the right. Below the logo is a "News" section with the text "Next on TV Tonight 7.00pm". To the right are links for "Weather" (The forecast for the next 5 days), "Programmes" (Catch up on TV bulletins), and "Snowmail" (Delivered daily to your inbox). A navigation menu includes categories: WORLD, POLITICS, BUSINESS, SCIENCE, CULTURE, TECH, and FACTCHECK. The main content area shows a video player with a woman in a red jacket and glasses. The video player controls show a play button, a volume icon, a progress bar at 4:48, and a full screen icon.

5 May 2019

## We speak to some of the UK's older trans community

While transgender visibility is much more prominent than it was 50 years ago, it's often younger voices that are heard in the media. A new exhibition which will tour the UK concentrates on older people, aged between 40 and 80, who have transitioned or are considering it.

Photographer Bex Day has taken more than 40 portraits, documenting the daily lives of trans people who grew up questioning their identity in the pre-internet era.

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