PRESS RELEASE

WRONGLY BODIED: Documenting Transition from Female to Male

Clarissa Sligh

Clarissa Sligh was looking for people to photograph for her masculinity project in 1996 when she met Deb who was in the process of becoming Jake. Working as staff support at a small woman's college in Denton, Texas and in the U.S. Army reserves, he had been a female soldier in "Operation Desert Storm" in 1991. Sligh, whose work wove together the personal and the political, was an unlikely candidate to take on a documentary project. However she and Jake worked together over four years to document his journey. After that time they went separate ways. Jake married a woman and returned to active service in the U.S. Army as a man. Sligh returned to New York and began to process her own experience of Jake's gender transition through writings and exhibitions of the photographs. What results is a book of photographs and texts that take us inside what became a highly transformative journey for the photographed and the photographer.

A recipient of multiple awards and fellowships including Anonymous Was a Woman (2001), the ICP Annual Infinity Award (1995), the National Endowment for the Arts (1988), The New York Foundation for the Arts in Photography (2001 and 1988) and in Artists Books (2005), Sligh's images are in public collections including The George Eastman International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona. She has also lectured and taught at institutions throughout the United States, including New York University, New York; University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester; The School of the International Center of Photography, New York; School of the Art Institute of Chicago; School of Visual Arts, New York; Southern Methodist University, Dallas; Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis; Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina.

Sligh was born in Washington, D.C., raised in Arlington, Virginia, and lived in Manhattan for 30 years. She received her BS from Hampton University in 1961, BFA from Howard University, 1972, MBA from the University of Pennsylvania, 1973, MFA from Howard University, 1999. A resident of Philadelphia, she currently travels back and forth between Philadelphia and Asheville, North Carolina. Clarissa Sligh is represented by the Ellen Sragow Gallery in New York City.

Acclaim for *Wrongly Bodied*

In emblematic photos and texts, Clarissa Sligh chronicles a transsexual experience that also transforms the artist's own sense of self. With a rare gift for empathy *Wrongly Bodied* narrates a female to male transition that acquires even greater poignancy when contextualized alongside reflections on cross-dressing and racial passing as necessary strategies for survival. Juxtaposed with an epic narrative of African-American self-fashioning, the textured portraits of Jake, his partners, and support group bring sharply into view the uses of embodiment in the quest for freedom and fulfillment.

— Israel Burshatin, Levin Professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature,
Haverford College

Clarissa Sligh thoughtfully examines this culture's greatest persistent taboos—gender, race, and identity. Highly personal, unflinchingly honest, and thoroughly evocative, the journey Sligh embarks upon with her most unlikely subject is a photographic treatise on the complexity of our shared humanity, and in the artist's deft hands the reader will find her or himself compelled along for this extraordinary ride. Throughout, Sligh creatively melds historic heroism with contemporary chutzpah, likening external enslavement with internal entrapment, all of it woven together by the fearless, singular vision of the artist as observer, participant, historian, skeptic, and sympathizer. In an era of teenaged transgendered persons detailing their transitions on YouTube with nary a batted eye, *Wrongly Bodied* is a long overdue critical and artistic investigation of self-determination, free will, identity politics, and defining the role of the artist.

— Carla Williams is currently the editor of *Exposure*, the Journal of the Society
of Photographic Education and co–author of *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* with Deborah Willis, published by Temple University Press
(2002).

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