

**On Christopher Street:  
Transgender Portraits  
by Mark Seliger**  
Large Print Labels

Christopher Street in New York City is an icon of trans and queer culture. The street and its nearby piers have been sites for Pride parades and protests, the main drag for drag queens, a zone for cruising and sex work, and a home for those who are questioning and exploring self-identity. More recently, the grit of Christopher Street has been sanitized by gentrification.

Between 2013 and 2016, photographer Mark Seliger (born 1959) made portraits on location featuring trans people with a connection to Christopher Street. This exhibition brings together 32 of those photographs alongside testimony from the subjects and insights from local trans and queer thinkers. Together, they present a kaleidoscope of perspectives on Seliger's project.

Isabella Stewart Gardner's social circles included friends who pushed against cultural norms of romance, attraction, and gender. Today, Seliger and other photographers make work that celebrates and affirms multifaceted LGBTQIA+ experiences across

the Museum. On this floor in Calderwood Hall, Seliger's accompanying film **Christopher Street Stories** includes interviews with many of those pictured in the exhibition. In the Historic Building's Fenway Gallery, **Portraits From Boston, With Love** features portraits by gender expansive Boston-area artists. Hakeem Adewumi's self-portrait graces the outdoor Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade.



Mark Seliger

**Tiq Milan**

2015

Gelatin silver print

“What I want people to know about me is that I’m a good person. I’m a good man. I’m a father; I have a 3 1/2 year old daughter. I had a mother who absolutely adored me. Me and my dad have a great relationship. And I have a good life. I want people, when they see my photo, and they see this exhibit, to know that some stories of being transgender are love stories. It’s not all about resilience, and it’s not all about the heartbreak, because my story of my transition is all love.”

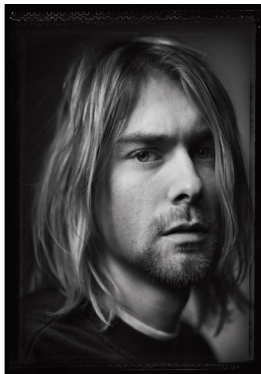
## Process in Focus

Mark Seliger is best known as a portrait photographer for **Rolling Stone**, **Vanity Fair**, and **GQ magazines** (see below). He also creates more personal work, including **On Christopher Street**. What began as documentation of his own gentrifying neighborhood soon focused on portraits and stories of trans experiences.

As a cisgender man, Seliger built rapport with the people he photographed. Occasionally his reputation as a celebrity photographer established trust, but primarily he relied on the networks of some of the portrait sitters. The experience of each subject varied. Many had never been in a professional photo shoot, and others were established public figures accustomed to requests for their portrait. In all instances, Seliger worked with a team of assistants to create highly polished photographs on film.

Egyptt LaBeija, whose portrait is nearby, crossed paths with Seliger after her drag

performance and knew how to work it in front of the camera. The contact sheets beside LaBeija's portrait give clues about her confident relationship with the camera. For Seliger, choosing the final image was not easy.



**Kurt Cobain**

Kalamazoo, MI,  
1993

(Shot for Rolling stone Magazine)



**Jennifer Aniston**

Los Angeles, CA,  
1995

(Shot for US Magazine)



**President Barack Obama**

Washington, DC,  
2010

(Shot for Rolling stone Magazine)



Mark Seliger  
**Egyptt LaBieja**  
2014  
Archival inkjet print

“I did a show and I came outside to get some air and [Mark] was walking up the block. With the crew. And he said, no, I’m not letting this chance go by. I want this picture right now. And they pulled out the fog machine and the lights and all that stuff and I’m like, but I just got off stage. I’m sweating. And he said, ‘I don’t care. You look wonderful.’...I’m always moving and going so fast. I guess that was the night I was supposed to take the picture. Just like that.”



Mark Seliger  
**Angelique Piwinski**  
2016  
Archival inkjet print

“Christopher Street was always the iconic safe space. I would go there just, I could feel like I’d be myself. You want to find a place where the environment is accepting, and you feel safe, as opposed to other places. But now everything is changing. And I think Mark’s point ... is because he saw the same thing happen on Christopher Street and surrounding streets. There used to be all these kind of funky boutique-y kind of places, and people could, you know, just express themselves. And now you have the big box stores, replacing little mom and pops, so that life is dying. I mean, sadly, and it’s kind of dispersing to the winds. I mean, it’s still there as a street. And to some extent, there’s still a few things there. But it’s, it’s rapidly changing.”



Mark Seliger  
**Victoria Beltran**  
2016  
Archival inkjet print

“[Mark’s] from Texas. I’m from Texas. I felt like right away, I met somebody who just understood the humbleness of the industry. Somebody who can take my photograph and I would feel comfortable and confident that he would portray me in a beautiful light...

It brought back so many memories, that photograph on the street. It brought back a time when I first arrived to New York at the age of 18. And the journey that I took to get there. It was a full circle moment for me ... Coming to New York, it gave me the opportunity to experience every outlet, which was modeling, acting, photography and meeting photographers and directors and writers, musicians, other trans and non-binary people. And I felt like it just made me feel at home and I finally felt like I had a place that I can call mine.”



Mark Seliger  
**Kayden Coleman**  
2016  
Archival inkjet print

“I had top surgery and in order to have top surgery I had to be off testosterone for six weeks prior to. Apparently in April 2013, I got pregnant but I didn’t actually know until September of 2013. So when I found out, I was already five and a half months pregnant. At first we were in total shock and then we just jumped into action. The staff at the hospital was nice enough—I’m sure their intentions were good—but it was horrible and traumatizing. They didn’t know how to handle me so they handled me like a woman. There was a line of people who kept coming in and out of my room like I was like a circus monkey.

I requested a C-section and they were fighting me on it and were really adamant about having a natural birth and finally I was like, I’m done and I had a nervous breakdown. I was like, you guys are going to cut this baby out of me and that’s what happened. And she’s amazing. As far as being a trans parent, maybe that will

be a thing when she's older, but right now we're just parents."



Mark Seliger

**Mia Mikowicz**

2016

Archival inkjet print

“I went over to my grandmother’s house one day at lunch, sat down with her at the table, and played a game of Scrabble, and I said, ‘Grandma, I have something I need to tell you.’ I told her that I was trans, and that I wanted to be a girl. She just looked up at me, in the eyes, and said:

‘Then I know one day soon I’m going to have a very beautiful granddaughter.’ That was all she said. And then she got up to use the bathroom. And I sat there and cried and cried. Then she came back and we had lunch.”



Mark Seliger

**Mona Kis**

2015

Archival inkjet print

“I encourage everyone to be creative with their transition and allow it to show you where it’s coming from. Stay out of trouble, focus on you: don’t focus on your appearance. Focus on your mind and your emotions, be healthy, be sane, and just be as happy as you can be. I know that a lot of people aren’t happy every day, but at least try to put a smile on your face before you leave your house. And when you leave your house, if you see someone looking at you, smile at them, because they might smile back.”



Mark Seliger  
**Jevon Martin**

2015

Archival inkjet print

“The only relationship my transition really affected was my relationship with my daughter. She always wanted a girly mother, and that wasn’t me. And she wanted me to dress more feminine. That wasn’t me, either. To this day, she still has several little qualms with the way I am. But

she has finally come to terms with the fact that I am male. And she calls me Pop. She calls me Jevon. She calls me J. But she won’t call me Dad because I’m not her father. She has a father, and I’m good with that.”



Mark Seliger

**Amos Mac**

2015

Archival inkjet print

“I am in a relationship. I have a boyfriend. His name is Sam. We’ve been together for almost three years. We live together in Brooklyn. We just adopted a dog.”



Mark Seliger  
**Ana Willis and Jennifer Love**  
2015  
Archival inkjet print

“We are normal human beings, just as anyone else, and we are people who happen to know who we are. We work—we are teachers, we are doctors, we are lawyers, we are entertainers ... we are parents, husbands, wives ... we are advocates fighting every day on the front lines. My purpose is to live, to be a productive human, to make this world a better place for our young ones.” —Jennifer Love Williams



Mark Seliger  
**Cayenne Doroshow**  
2014  
Archival inkjet print

“I am a parent, a grandparent, a mother, a community member, an ex-sex worker; I am you, and you are me. I used to frequent those streets as a teenager, as a child that was cast out because of my gender identity—that was my safe haven. That also was the place where trans girls work, where they did sex work, where they survived. Christopher Street means a lot to me. It means more to me today because then I was fighting just to be me, I was surviving just to be me ... it was also the place where I grew, where I learnt ... It has been gentrified like a hoot, but it is still ours. It is still the place where Black trans women stood and can still stand today.”



Mark Seliger  
**Laith A. De La Cruz**  
2016  
Archival inkjet print

## **Past and Always Present: LGBTQIA+ Life from the Archives**

This selection of photographs and letters illuminates the lives of gay people who welcomed Isabella Stewart Gardner into their fold. Gardner witnessed queer life as a trusted friend of those who challenged the norms of gender and sexuality at a time when such expressions were often criminalized.

Just as Mark Seliger's photographs of trans people commemorate Christopher Street as a place where queer and trans life has flourished, Isabella's archive preserves traces of gay communities in and around Boston from more than a century ago. The materials in this case remind us that queer life has flourished throughout history, even while it has been overlooked or marginalized by society.

Isabella's archive and Seliger's photography ask us to consider: who will preserve LGBTQIA+ histories into the future? Two Boston-based collections offer paths

forward:

Digital Transgender Archive



The History Project



## **A note on typography and trans history**

The large text panel titles in this exhibition use a typeface called Marsha. Its designer, Tré Seals, was inspired by a sign that once hung outside of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar on Christopher Street and the site of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising. Sparked by a police raid, the uprising galvanized the gay liberation movement on the East Coast.

The typeface is named after Marsha P. Johnson, a Black trans woman and fixture of Christopher Street. She was a leader of the Stonewall uprising and decades of activism that followed.



### **Stonewall Inn, 1969**

Photo by Diana Jo Davies  
Manuscripts and Archives Division,  
The New York Public Library



### **Marsha P. Johnson pickets Bellevue Hospital, 1968-75**

Photo by Diana Jo  
Manuscripts and Archives Division,  
The New York Public Library



Thomas E. Marr  
**A. Piatt Andrew and  
Isabella Stewart  
Gardner, Gloucester,  
Massachusetts**  
6 October 1910  
Gelatin silver print



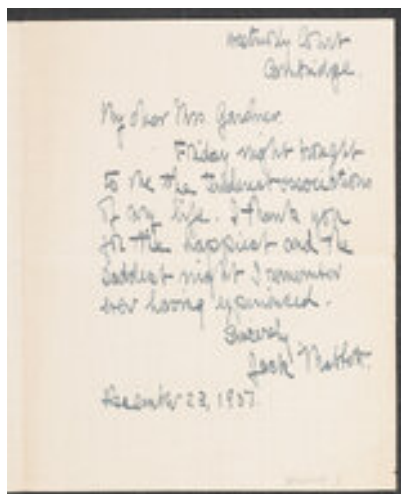
A. Piatt Andrew  
**Isabella Stewart Gardner  
at a Party at Red Roof,  
Gloucester,  
Massachusetts**

17 April 1909 - 18 April  
1909

Gelatin silver print

Isabella sits next to A. Piatt Andrew, an economist and politician who had long-term romantic relationships with men. Andrew was part of a group of artists and intellectuals, called Dabsville, who today might identify as gay or queer. They hosted parties at their private homes in Gloucester, creating fun and raucous space for self-expression.





James Fiske Mabbett  
**Letter to Isabella  
Stewart Gardner from  
Cambridge,  
Massachusetts**

23 December 1907

Ink on paper

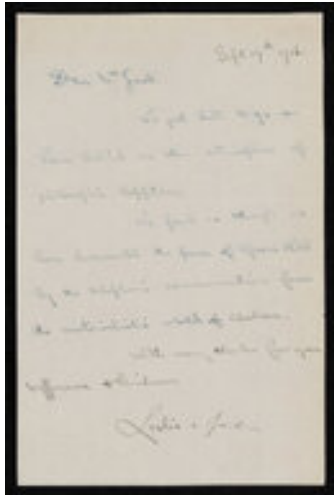
Between 1907 and 1908, A. Piatt Andrew and James “Jack” Fiske Mabbett (1883–1940), pictured here with Isabella, were in a relationship. Mabbett’s father did not approve—though whether he knew it was romantic is unknown. In these letters, Andrew and Mabbett each wrote to Isabella expressing gratitude for her support after Jack’s hospital stay in 1907.



Unknown  
**Leslie Buswell and A.  
Piatt Andrew in Paris**  
1915  
Gelatin silver print



Unknown  
**Leslie Buswell and A.  
Piatt Andrew in Paris**  
June 1915  
Gelatin silver print



Leslie Buswell  
**Letter to Isabella  
Stewart Gardner**  
17 September 1916  
Ink on paper

A. Piatt Andrew and Leslie Buswell (1890–1964) signed and sent these double portraits to Isabella when they served in the American Field Service, an ambulance service founded by Andrew, during World War I. Buswell, a British actor, and Andrew likely had a brief relationship. A year later, Buswell wrote this letter to Isabella with his boyfriend, Gloucester resident and inventor John “Jack” Hays Hammond, Jr. (1888–1965).

All photographs and letters from the collection of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

## Mind Your Ts and Qs

Our language describing complicated ideas like gender and sexuality is personal and constantly evolving. Here are a few ways of thinking about key terms in this exhibition:

**Trans/transgender** emerged as a term in the late 1900s to describe someone whose gender identity or expression differs from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may identify with any sexual orientation: straight, gay, bisexual, asexual, and beyond. Many trans people identify as women or men, while others identify as non-binary (neither/both female nor/and male). There is no right or wrong way to be trans.

**Queer** describes a spectrum of identities that expand or defy cultural norms for sexual attraction, romance, kinship, or gender. The term was used as a slur beginning in the 1890s, but in recent years it has been reclaimed in many LGBTQIA+ communities. "Queer" can include anything

that isn't straight or cisgender—though many trans people do not identify as queer. There is no right or wrong way to be queer.

**LGBTQIA+** is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. The plus sign acknowledges and includes an even wider diversity of gender and sexual identities.

## **A Glimpse into Endless Possibilities**

When I look at these photographs, I see a glimpse into the depth and vastness of transgender and nonbinary people. A glimpse into our strength and resiliency; our limitless capacity for innovation and reinvention; our tenderness and vulnerability; our fierceness and “mind your damn business” attitude; our pain and collective trauma; our deep care and love for our families and each other; our joy and freedom in being authentically and unapologetically ourselves. I see a glimpse into endless possibilities in the galaxy of humanness. It is not just about gender or transness, it is about the depth and vastness of people ... periodt!

—Tre’Andre Carmel Valentine (he/they),  
Executive Director of the Massachusetts  
Transgender Political Coalition



Mark Seliger  
**Tony Zosherafatain**  
2015  
Gelatin silver print

“I’m originally from Boston, Massachusetts, and now I live in New York City. I was raised Greek Orthodox and I remember the first time I felt different in my body—I was around 10, and my family and I were getting ready to go to church and I really did not want to wear a dress. I wanted to wear a suit. I really wanted to look like the Greek composer Yanni ...

I went to a transmasculine support group near Christopher Street, and that’s where all my trans male friends come from. So I can’t separate Christopher Street from my transition—they go hand in hand. When I didn’t have family for two years, my friends from the support group became my family.”



Mark Seliger

**Tay Tay**

2014

Gelatin silver print



Mark Seliger

**Bree Benz**

2016

Gelatin silver print

“I knew I was different, probably at 4 or 5 years old, but I didn’t do anything about it until last year. My wife and I decided to divorce, and we have two sons—one is 19 and one is 17—and obviously it has been difficult. But it was as if, once I became Bree, all my fears went away. It’s just been beautiful.”



Mark Seliger  
**Benjamin Melzer**  
2016  
Gelatin silver print

“I told my parents, and for me it was like, go hard or go home. I told myself, now you do this and you don’t care about what others say or think. You’re going to be a good guy. You’re going to look great, and you will do this.”



Mark Seliger  
**Adrian Torres and  
Carmen Carrera, Kids**  
2015  
Gelatin silver print

“I always try to come up with excuses for people who are not understanding or accepting. Like, is it their education? Is it because they haven’t been exposed to this? Are they really just old-fashioned? Maybe they’re intimidated or insecure? It could be a hundred different things. I try to give people the benefit of the doubt. I try to understand because I expect understanding of myself.

I’m still the same person my family raised, and they love me and respect the fact that I’ve made something of myself, but I have met so many people who don’t have that. On the pier and on Christopher Street—I’ve partied with them; I’ve slept on their floor—but I always had a home to go home to, and some of them didn’t.”  
—Carmen Carrera



Mark Seliger  
**Angel Castillo and Ally  
Castillo**  
2016  
Gelatin silver print

“...when I found out that it’s with Mark Seliger, obviously, I feel humbled and honored to be photographed by him. And especially it’s because it’s me and my sister together. And we are, we want to be visible to the community so that they can see that, you know, that the transgender people could be from different colors of life, different careers, and different backgrounds. And together as a sibling, on this picture, we are holding hands, which just actually kind of happened while we were taking the pictures, it wasn’t planned. And I think it symbolizes being together, together in the hard times and together in the triumphs.” —Angel Castillo



Mark Seliger  
**ShaGaysia Diamond**  
2015  
Gelatin silver print

“From very early on, I felt trapped. I was actually incarcerated for 10 years, and I can’t say that I have necessarily ever really felt freedom ... Being a trans woman and being incarcerated in a male’s institution was surreal. The guys knew I didn’t belong there, I knew I didn’t belong there, and the staff knew I didn’t belong there. ... Transitioning back into society after my release from prison was very difficult. I had been off the hormones I’d been on since I was 14, and the guards wanted to give me a little smack in the face after I was released, so they made me a new ID and put my old name on it, misgendering me. So when I went out to the bus terminal or I was trying to get food stamps or something, it was very difficult just to get the basic necessities because I had to go through this very long drawn-out story to explain who I was.”



Mark Seliger

**Seven King**

2015

Gelatin silver print

“My biggest breakthrough moment was not the hormones or the surgeries, or even when my father called me his son; it was when I got my name changed. I had this attorney bring me into a nice, savvy office, and I had to sign like eight different copies of government-document, name-change papers. That was a big realization of accomplishment and a very happy feeling for me.”

## **Introspective of Longtime NYC Residents**

We lived in New York City for over 20 and 50 years, respectively. We remember young people hanging out on the piers at the end of Christopher Street along the Westside Highway, mostly teenagers and young adults having a great time voguing, battling with each other, entertaining onlookers throughout the day and late into the night. We remember the bars, sex shops, cruising, and street dancing that were the backbone of Christopher Street. Christopher Street was not just about the people but more about the energy on the street, including the pier.

There's something familiar in the facial expressions of the people photographed here. Many have a look of loneliness, despair, abuse, and survival. Not capturing the backgrounds of the street simply depicts images that could be anywhere.

—Paul Glass & Charles D. Evans, LGBTQ+ Elders of Color



Mark Seliger  
**Hari Nef and Bailey Stiles**  
2014  
Gelatin silver print



Mark Seliger  
**Ni'Tee Spady**  
2015  
Gelatin silver print

“I think it’s important for me to be able to express myself authentically, free, and spreading love and light and healing is definitely something essential to me and my life. I find joy in uplifting others even on my bad day. I may come across someone and we uplift each other. They don’t even know they’re doing that for me as well. I’m a true believer of watering others while also watering yourself, and healing as well, others while healing yourself. I water you, you water me, we grow together.”



Mark Seliger  
**Gianni**  
2014  
Gelatin silver print



Mark Seliger  
**Tiny**  
2013  
Gelatin silver print

## **Queer Shades of Black and White**

Black and white. These portraits embrace transgender subjects, so why is our perspective limited to a harsh binary? If we narrow our gaze, we see a familiar spectrum as contrast blurs. Familiar patterns of grays elucidate facets of identity which intersect with sexuality: bodies, fashion, and kinship.

Seliger's work resonates through nostalgic aesthetics of portraits passed down through families, found in history books, or on the covers of vintage newspapers. He adds to a genealogy of black-and-white photography of queer subjects by the likes of Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–89), Hal Fischer (1950–), and Christian Walker (1953–2003). These photographers illuminated gendered and racialized intimacies between queer bodies in U.S. cities: on the streets, in bedrooms, and on both sides of the camera lens.

Seliger's form reminds us of LGBTQ+ resilience of the past. However, rather than

pressing petals into pages, this style reminds us to give queer and transgender people their flowers while they are still around to receive them.

—Jo Michael Rezes, Ph.D. Candidate, Tufts University & Curriculum Developer for The Theater Offensive

## **Take Me Home With You**

As I look around this room, I imagine the joy of people in the family finding this space, feeling at home, and reflecting on our experiences in a way that, until recently, has been rarely afforded to us.

But then my mind wanders ... I'm writing this on the first of the month, which reminds me of how many people, people like in these photos, cannot afford rent and food in cities that grow increasingly expensive—cities that are often our only safe haven from prejudice, our homes.

Presently, you have come to this place, from wherever you call home, to witness the resilience, grace, optimism, and humanity represented in these photos. Representation is important, but so is money, housing, food, and medical care. Not to mention relaxation, abundance, luxury, and peace, because survival is insufficient.

So ... what now? What will we all do when

we get home? What can we do next?

—Matisse DuPont



Mark Seliger  
**Geena Rocero**  
2016  
Gelatin silver print

“For close to a decade, I was modeling, and my agent didn’t know I was trans. I was living my dream, but at the same time I was in this constant state of paranoia and fear ... At the Stonewall last night, a trans woman was sexually assaulted. Even in the most accepting place you can imagine, as a trans person, it’s still dangerous. It’s important to know that we still have a ways to go.”



Mark Seliger  
**D'Jamel Young and  
Leiomy Maldonado**  
2015  
Gelatin silver print

“She’s a trans woman and I’m a trans man, so it actually makes us completely normal. I’m a man and she’s a woman, and that’s just as simple as it is.”

## **Right Turn on Christopher Street**

There used to be days we were deemed ungodly. Not allowed to dance to music that freed the soul. Have you ever been stopped on the street because someone screamed phobic slurs in your direction? I was afraid to walk with dignity and pride, truthfully in my authenticity. I remember the first time I walked up the stairs of the Christopher St Station—This is the point of no return! Being trans is an act of truth and with no hesitation I courageously walked out of the station singing—I'm Coming Out! Not everyone has a home, a safe haven or a place to feel welcomed. On Christopher St everyone belongs!

—Neon Calypso



Mark Seliger  
**Nikki Exotica**  
2016  
Gelatin silver print

“I am a recording artist and an actress and a model, and to be transgender and a musician, it’s been a very hard road for me. The world isn’t ready for it. I want to make it on the radio. I want to make it on the Billboard charts. I want to be on MTV. I want to be mainstream, I want to make an impact. Being trans, I have to work fifty times harder. And I know a lot of other trans artists can relate to this. I’m not doing it just for me; I’m doing it for the community.”



Mark Seliger  
**Mahayla McElroy**  
2015  
Gelatin silver print

“Whatever happens, it doesn’t matter if there’s a storm. It doesn’t matter if the world seems to be on your shoulder[s]. It’s not how you fight; it’s how you get up. And it’s about dancing through the storm, not falling down and giving up.”



Mark Seliger  
**Teddy Breceda**  
2016  
Gelatin silver print

“One wild weekend, I got this tattoo. That was how I felt at the time—invaluable, like, “Fuck Me.” But now it has a double entendre, which is kind of a metaphor for my life.”



Mark Seliger  
**Octavia McKinney**  
2015  
Gelatin silver print

“One thing that has always bothered me is when people are like, “You’re passable.” I always say, “Passable as what?” Guys will have sex with you but on DL [down low]. It’s like, no that’s not cool. Stop acting like I’m supposed to be hidden. It’s offensive and rude and stupid. I can’t stand the way we get treated ...

One of the greatest moments of my life was when Mario Testino [Peruvian fashion photographer] flew me to Paris. It’s one of those things that, as transgender, you think will never happen to you, that the industry is completely out of your world. It was beyond a fairy tale. I was in the trailer waiting, dressed head to toe in Gucci, feeling so glamorous and thinking to myself, thank God I’m a girl.”



Mark Seliger  
**Devin Lowe**  
2016  
Gelatin silver print

“Sometimes people would misgender me, long before I ever came out. And it made me so happy and I had no idea why. So when I finally found out about this community, and found out that transitioning was something that was actually possible—because I did not know—I automatically realized: this is what I need to do.”



Mark Seliger  
**M. David Soliven**  
2016  
Gelatin silver print

“I’ve always been a big fan of the Christopher Reeve Superman—sweet, approachable, caring, but at the same time strong and respected.”