

ART

# Page's turn

Portland lesbian photographer is searching for soul through imaging the body

BY TJ NORRIS

"I hate the word 'normal,'" breathes passionately from the lips of Portland photographer Page Jordan. "What normal is to me is everything coming together—not just someone's shape, color or what fits neatly into a box. It's everything... I want to expand the perception of that which is perceived as normal."

It is with such passion that she presents her first Portland solo exhibition, *Body & Soul*, on view through June 30 at the Jantzen Beach Barnes & Noble. Jordan herself is community relations manager of the store.

Begun in 1992, the series consists of nude and partially nude black-and-white portraits. The process of their creation has become a tool for Jordan's personal growth and healing around body image. Her goal in exhibiting and lecturing about this work, she says, is to celebrate the uniqueness of individuals.

A native of Richmond, Va., Jordan came to Portland four years ago with her partner in search of a change of scenery. She had long desired to live somewhere away from the confines of traditional Virginia.

Jordan has had a camera in her hand ever since she can recall, she remarks, and has worked in the field of photography for more than 20 years. Educated at University of Richmond, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and

Chicago's Winona School of Professional Photography, she also studied art history throughout Europe and the Mediterranean with the International Cultural Exchange Schools.

In her teens Jordan was an athlete, but, she shares, in college her body went through dramatic changes. As a result, she was never naked in front of anyone.

The work actually started when she asked a gay friend to photograph her nude. Though she was afraid and still struggling with her own sexual identity at the time, it proved to be a cathartic experience.

In turn, Jordan's friend became her first nude subject. After this experience she began photographing nudes of people from all walks of life. In 1995 a Richmond gallery offered her a solo show; she was both flattered and scared but decided to do it and include self-portraiture as an integral part of the series.

As she assembles some of the images for the upcoming exhibition, Jordan discusses a few works in detail. 1996's "She Feels Protected" depicts a 64-year-old woman who "blows my mind," she exclaims.

They met just before the photo shoot. The woman, a painter, chose the bedroom setting for an intensely personal reason: to regain control of her life. This was the place of her own rape by a man who broke into her home.

Her basset hound, Charlie, was not initially intended to be in the image, but once Jordan set up the shot he climbed atop the bed and made his presence focal. A ghostly painting in the background depicts the woman's deceased mother. In viewing the image she felt she was surrounded by protective spirits.

Jordan explains that her story, like those of many others, is significant to the work. The image in 1995's "Hidden Faces" is of a biracial lesbian couple who were afraid to show their faces to the camera. Their fear of public scrutiny made for a shadowy world of "twenty-something" women coming to terms with their sexuality. Even in a short 15-minute session, Jordan saw their struggle and compromised with light and shadow.

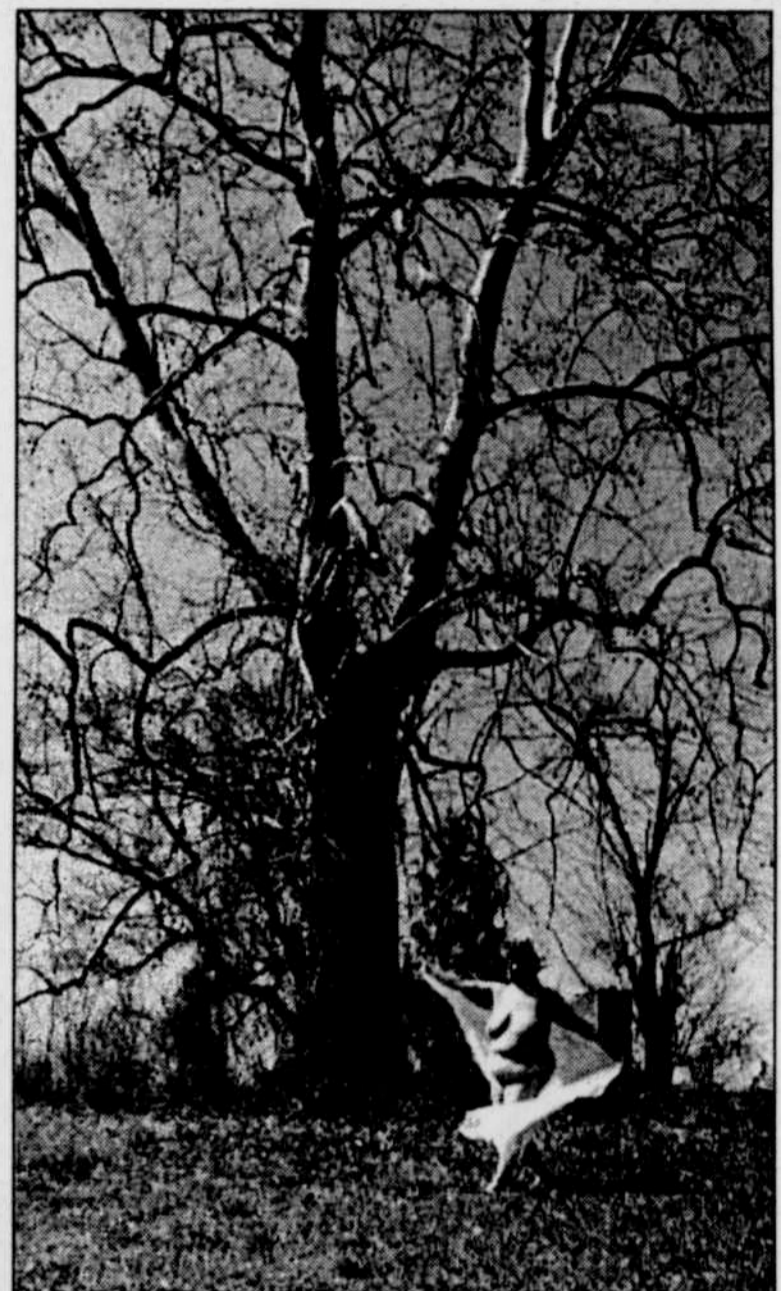
In 1994's "They Believe in Each Other" she photographed a dreadlocked male couple who were extremely open with their bodies. The men

were involved with the Radical Faerie movement, and the image is a sensitive depiction of their relationship.

In the 1997 self-portrait "Soulful Yearning" Jordan places herself in a sacred spot, her grandmother's attic. She sees herself reaching out beyond our dimension, in a spiritlike gesture. Her grandmother was an artist who studied at the Maryland Institute of the Arts circa 1910 and whose illustrative style lent to a great sense of musculature in line drawings of male studio models. This image, made at a farmhouse nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, has an immediate sense of domestic warmth.

"I am not a technical photographer," Jordan insists, believing it's the image that is all-important, not the f-stop or Grayscale system.

All of the *Body & Soul* images are 8-by-10 or smaller to enhance their intimacy. "No two images are the same size, as no two bodies are," Jordan says. Only part of the series will be shown at Barnes & Noble because of a policy against explicit nudity.



One of Page Jordan's self-portraits



"Contemplating the Moment" is one of Jordan's photos you will not be seeing at Barnes & Noble



"She Feels Protected" speaks for itself

The photographs were developed, Jordan explains, as a conduit for people to express themselves with their bodies. Locations and even poses were always chosen by the sub-

jects, allowing them to locate a comfort zone in their nudity.

The title of the series reflects Jordan's vision of the connection between the human body and the psyche. "The project is about the body," she says. "It is like peeling layers off of an onion.... Part of the project is having the courage to be seen with imperfections and all."

The work of Jordan, who cites Robert Mapplethorpe as an influence, reflects a dramatic sense of light and shadow, which enhances and even informs every body she shoots. "The images I make must move me emotionally," she says. "They may make me happy, sad or even pissed off." [E]

*BODY & SOUL* is on view through June 30 at the Jantzen Beach Barnes & Noble. A reception for the artist will be held 7 p.m. June 14. Contact Page Jordan at [tjphotoarts@cs.com](mailto:tjphotoarts@cs.com).

TJ NORRIS is a visual artist, writer and curator living in Portland. You can find his work at [www.tjnorris.net](http://www.tjnorris.net).

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