



Edison, Laurie Toby (b. 1942)

by Tee A. Corinne

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Laurie Toby Edison is best known for three collections of photographic work featuring, respectively, fat nude women, nude men, and women in Japan. Each collection is characterized by the diversity of individuals pictured. Identifying as a bisexual, she has been active with queer activist organizations, including Queer Nation, and queer history groups.

Born on March 5, 1942 into an upper-middle-class Jewish family in New York City, she grew up in Manhattan and Queens. During her childhood, her father was a businessman, her mother a dress designer, and her grandmother a Greenwich Village jeweler.

Edison grew up among people who had concentration camp numbers tattooed on their arms and remembers being deeply affected by newspaper and magazine photographs of the piled-up naked bodies of Holocaust dead.

In her teens, Edison was influenced by her involvement in the beat world in New York City, by Abstract Expressionist art, and by jazz music. She attended Wellesley college for one year (1958-1959).

Edison married twice and has a daughter from each marriage. During the 1960s, Edison co-owned The Waverly Shops in Provincetown and Sarasota, selling hand-crafted jewelry. Since 1969, she has concentrated on crafting sculptural jewelry (for example, tide pools of precious stones surrounded by tiny ocean creatures). This work is especially prized by science fiction aficionados and continues to be her primary source of income.

Edison became involved in feminism in the 1970s and moved to San Francisco in 1980. Self-taught as a photographer, she chose this medium as a way to produce work that would combine art and social activism.

In 1989, inspired by her involvement in the Fat Acceptance/Size movement, she began making black and white photographs of unclothed fat women. This series circulated in slide shows and exhibitions and was self-published in 1994 as *Women En Large: Images of Fat Nudes*.

In 1996, Edison began working on photographs for an exhibition and book of male nudes entitled *Familiar Men*, which was published in 2003. Her images of nude men have a comfortable naturalness reminiscent of Diane Arbus's photos of nudists, but with a lyrical quality instead of the biting negativity of Arbus's work.

Edison's nudes need to be seen in the context of her early reaction to the images of the Holocaust dead. She attempts to transform those images into work that honors the living body. All of Edison's nudes are intimate, informative, and sensual without being sexual.

Text--in the form of commentary and narrative by the photographic subjects--is an integral part of both series of nudes.



A photograph of Laurie Toby Edison by Carol Squires. Courtesy Laurie Toby Edison.

In 1996, Edison's participation in "Gender: Beyond Memory" at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography led to one-person exhibits in Japan and to another project, *Women of Japan*--a photographic essay of Japanese women from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures.

Interviews with and essays about Edison's work have appeared in publications in the United States, Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Her photographs are discussed in three Canadian and U.S. video documentaries and have been featured in exhibits in New York City, San Francisco, Seattle, Canada, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Japan. In 2001, her photographs were the subject of a solo exhibition at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan.

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About the Author

Tee A. Corinne was a photographer and writer. Her articles about lesbian art and artists appeared in numerous journals and encyclopedias. Her books include *The Cunt Coloring Book*, *Yantras of Womanlove*, *Dreams of the Woman Who Loved Sex*, *Courting Pleasure*, and *Intimacies*. She was the editor of *FABB: The Feminist Art Books Bulletin*, co-editor of the *Queer Caucus for Art Newsletter*, and member of the editorial advisory board of www.glbtq.com.