

Crossdressers convene at photo show

By HAMILTON KAHN
STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — As a girls' night out, this was a little out of the ordinary.

The guests at the opening Friday night of an exhibit of photographs titled "The Feminine Mystique: Males Exploring Gender Boundaries" at the Berta Walker Gallery included all nine of the show's subjects, as well as dozens of crossdressers in Provincetown this week for the 19th annual Fantasia Fair.

It was no slight to Provincetown-based photographer Helen Strong that this eye-catching collection of elegantly outfitted men was getting at least as much attention as her portraits.

There was "Lisa," a youthful-looking grandfather from New Jersey with a rail-thin physique in a bright red dress.

There was also "Carole," just in from Washington D.C., who hadn't had time to dress before the opening. "I'm out of uniform," she said.

"I've never worked with a group that I enjoyed as much," Ms. Strong said, who spent two years traveling around the country photographing her subjects. "They're so humorous, so pleasant."

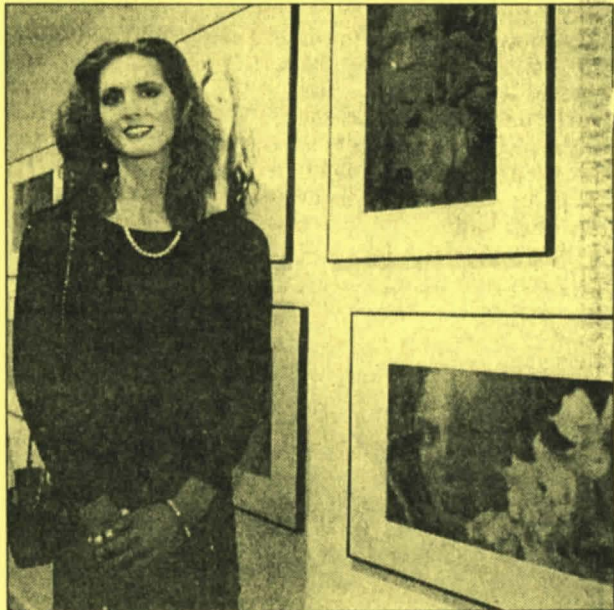
One of them, "Christine," a 48-year-old advertising salesperson from Cleveland, said she has been living full-time as a woman for three years and is planning to have a sex-change operation. She said her life began anew five years ago at the Fantasia Fair.

"It's where I was born," Christine said. "I know how salmon feel — I just have to come back here."

But other crossdressers live dual lives, keeping their practice a secret from all but their most intimate friends and family.

"A number of people I know, know, and some don't," said "Joanne," a heavy-set accountant from Pennsylvania with a great pair of legs. "Don't you have something in your closet? Everybody does."

Ariadne Kane, founder of The Human Achievement and Outreach Institute, which sponsors the Fantasia



Times Photo by VINCE DeWITT

■ Crossdresser "Diane" next to photos of herself taken by Helen Strong.

Fair, said approximately 120 people are attending this year's event, which runs through next Sunday.

Kane said that the increased interest and cultural acceptance of crossdressing — as evidenced by the popularity of singer RuPaul and the movie, "The Crying Game" — has been enormously gratifying.

"I've always been confident that our time would come, because I have an inner belief that what I do is right — not just for me but for other people," Kane said.

The photo exhibit continues through Oct. 27 at the Berta Walker Gallery, 208 Bradford St., Provincetown.

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