“Coming Home: Portraits of Jewish Women” explores the intersections of Jewishness, transgender identity, and love. The project presents gender beyond the standard male/female binary and looks at the intersections between Jewishness and gender in women.

As an artist and a woman with a transgender history, I was and am looking for role models and other trans women to learn from. When I was growing up, there were no role models for me of Jewish women with a gender that was not binary. If I had someone to look up to or someone to ask questions, perhaps my own journey would have been easier. These images are of Jewish women who are also transgender and gender non-conforming.

Historically, photographers have taken many journeys seeking out the “other,” bringing home images of the other for entertainment value and as, as a result, perpetuating institutional oppression and discrimination. Two of my concerns in the project are inclusivity and visibility. In order not to “other” my subjects, I provide as much context as possible, often including family members, partners, and pets in the photographs. In this way, I depict the web of connections each person has rather than isolating individuals, thereby giving visibility without creating spectacle.

This project embodies more than one person’s perspective; it is bigger than one person and one opinion. Instead, it gives space so that the voices of many people can shine out. I believe that the wider a community’s base, the more stable the community is. Showing images of Jewish women who are, among many other things, transgender, sheds light on the fact that the Jewish community is richer than we expect. Presenting individuals in the context of relationships that are familiar to us is the first step toward creating a larger, more diverse Jewish community.

— Yishay Garbasz