

Exhibit explores stories behind scars



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Alanna Jankov, seated, took three years to compile an array of fascinating subjects, such as 15-year-old Richard shown in the picture in the forefront, for her documentary series, Scar.

BY MARY MACKAY
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CHARLOTTETOWN — Behind every scar there is a story of how it became permanently etched in skin.

Now the stories of 21 people — some tragic, some triumphant — have been captured by Charlottetown photographer Alanna Jankov.

Her latest documentary series, Scar, which runs at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery until March 13, brings into the open what people for many reasons often choose to ignore.

"It's sort of like the elephant in the room. We all know it's there, so why not just ask?" says Jankov.

"I have a scar on the top of my foot which brings back a very interesting memory, so I just started exploring that idea — how many other people have scars that take them back to a specific spot in their life, whether it be good or bad. I don't think there was anybody that shied away."

This exhibit, which was curated by gallery curator Pan Wendt, features 21 people, most of whom are from P.E.I., who have scars resulting from accidents or surgeries to deliberate skin alterations such as tattoos or self-branding.

"A lot of these pictures kind of have two things going on. More than half of them have this quality where there's one part that's the scar and that is often disturbing, and then one part is the person posing in an attractive (way), a little bit done up, a little bit of presenting a different face . . ." Wendt says.

"(So) this is both like personal portrait photography in a way and documentary (photography), and often in the same picture . . ."

Scar was three years in the making, and Jankov truly never knew where her next subject would come from, especially since not all who were photographed have outwardly visible marks.

A case in point would be Kelly (all are identified by first name only), who through extreme perseverance lost nearly 140 pounds and subsequently had to have plastic surgery to remove her excess skin.

"I met her at the gym, but I talk to everybody. That's how I work because I'm so interested in people. Therefore, I might mention what I might be doing and then all of a sudden they tell me something about themselves or somebody else," Jankov says.

"There were a few instances where I just met



people on the street, went up and had a little chitchat and just asked about their scar. People were really responsive and really interested in sharing their stories.”

A casual acquaintance with Bill, who was a commissionaire in a building close to Jankov’s photography studio, led to his inclusion in the exhibit.

Well, that and the fact that he had no legs due to vascular problems which prompted their removal in the 1980s.

“I said (to him), ‘I want to photograph you for my Scar exhibit, but I want you to wear a pair of shorts for me.’ He said, ‘Yeah, sure, come on over;’” Jankov says of Bill who sadly died before he could see his photo in Scar.

Some scars are an external testament to a deep internal pain, such as one young woman’s marks of repeated self-mutilation.

However, in the case of Leif, who went the route of branding or scarification as his choice of body art, it was more a strong personal statement.

“He self-branded himself,” Jankov says.

“He was working in a kitchen in Montreal (in 2008). I think his line was that ‘it reminds him of the human skin he lives in.’”

Some scars are true stories of survival as in the case of Blaine, who had to have his larynx removed because of cancer.

“I think that he had a bit of a stubborn streak and the diagnosis that the doctors gave him was not what he wanted to hear and so he was able to change that, by whether it be self-motivation, whether it be the will to live . . . ” Jankov says.