

These photos of homeless men in the Byward Market by photo-artist Jesse Burke are part of the Festival X exhibition and will be on display at La Petite Mort Gallery.

# Disciples of the Street

A dozen street people are the stars in a striking gallery exhibition that is steps from the sidewalks where they spend their days.



PAUL GESSELL  
ART AND THE CITY

They have, fittingly, been nicknamed The 12 Disciples or The 12 Martyrs. The men stand shirtless against a plain black background. They are posed in photographs like figures from Renais-

sance paintings. For a moment, but only for a moment, they appear to be escapees from canvases by Caravaggio or Michelangelo.

The 12 men in the photographs have very contemporary tattoos and scars. Their faces look far more worn than anything painted four or five centuries ago in Italy.

They are Byward Market street people coping with homelessness, addictions, illness and other problems. Many of them spend their days hanging out near the Salvation Army and overnight shelters. A favourite corner is at Murray and Cumberland, the exact place where their portraits will hang beginning tomorrow in an art

gallery participating in the inaugural city-wide photo extravaganza called Festival X.

The photos were taken by American photo-artist Jesse Burke, who was commissioned by La Petite Mort Gallery, one of 19 Festival X venues. The gallery owner, Guy Bérubé, saw these men daily from the windows of his business. He wanted to create a body of work that would show these men as human beings and not as "garbage."

"They're all people with parents, families, brothers and sisters, and they're not garbage," Bérubé says.

"The people thrived in this short period of time of getting some attention, being

heard and getting photographed. One guy said, "The last time I was photographed was probably in the '70s. The only other shots of me are mug shots. I'd like to know that there is a photo of me. Even if it's me looking like I look now, I know that my family will have that if I disappear."

Bérubé said he paid the men a token fee, offered them coffee and condoms and had them sign model release forms indicating the body of work was to illustrate people with addictions.

Officially, this body of work is called *Low*.

# Homeless: Exploring world of inner demons

Continued from PAGE E1

"The work is an exploration into the world of inner demons and displaced persons," Burke writes in an artist's statement. The intention, he adds, "is to take people that one ignores or passes in the streets and place them on a pedestal to emphasize their individual beauty. In these images, these hardened souls become vulnerable icons, allowing the world to see a different side of being 'low.'"

All Festival X photo exhibitions have not yet opened, but *Low* will likely be one of, if not the most, impressive. And the competition is stiff. Most of the top photo-artists from the Ottawa area (or previously from this area) are involved. They include Tony Fohse, David Andrews, Pedro Isztin, Lynn Cohen, Alexandre Castonguay, Lorraine Gilbert, Geoffrey James, Adam Krwesky and many, many more.

Exhibition venues include the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa Art Gallery, Wurm Gallery, Dale Smith Gallery, Galerie St. Laurent-Hill and Ottawa City Hall Gallery.

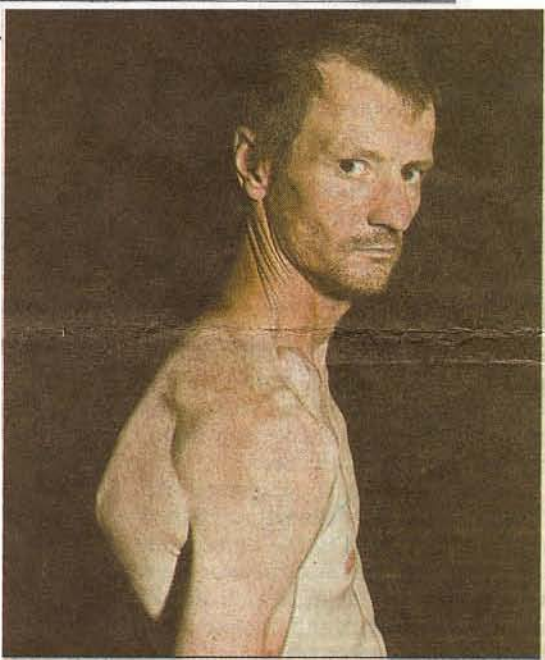
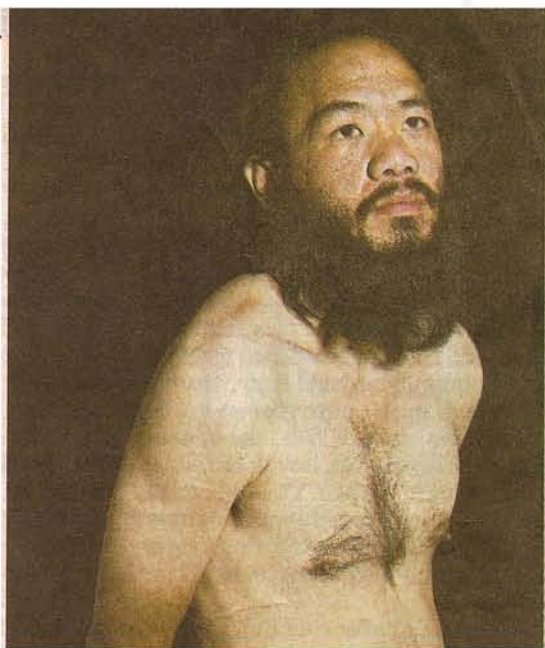
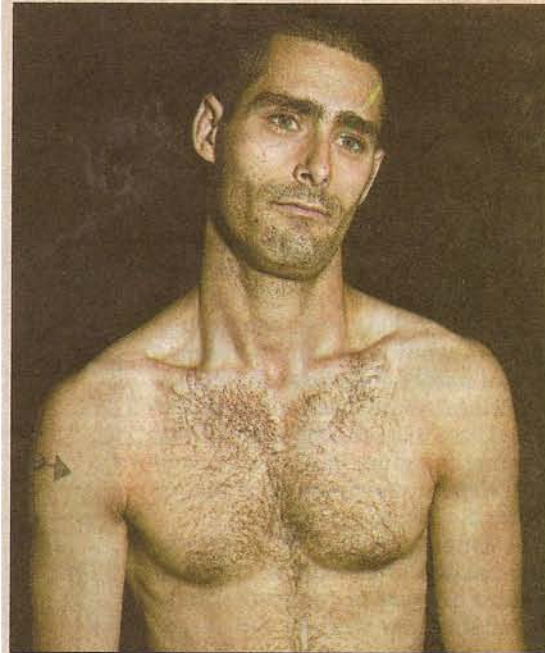
In addition to exhibitions, there are films and lectures. The School of the Photographic Arts: Ottawa is offering



Isabel Barsive's images of female bodybuilders are on display at the School of the Photographic Arts: Ottawa. Her show, dubbed *Female*, is part of Festival X, a festival of photographic arts celebrating its inaugural year.



Ottawa City Hall Gallery's contribution to Festival X is a show called *Aperture*, featuring a *Who's Who* of the Ottawa photo scene, past and present. Above is a detail from Kate McGregor's photographic study *Swimmer #1*.



The school also has an exhibition called *Female*. Check out Izabel Bar-sive's female bodybuilders.

The festival was cobbled together by volunteers with no government money, unlike the much glitzier, long-established annual photo festivals in Montreal and Toronto. And while there have been some glitches in Ottawa, it seems like a great start for a new annual event.

The dates for the Montreal festival, *Le mois de la photo*, overlap with Ottawa's Festival X. The Montreal festival offers dozens of photo-artist superstars from Canada and abroad, including the homegrown Sanchez Brothers, who simply cannot be beat for sheer brilliance and audacity.

Their show of dramatic staged photos is at Montreal's Parisian Laundry, a gallery in the St. Henri district. Some of the brothers' work showed up in the National Arts Centre's multidisciplinary arts festival, *Quebec Scene*, last spring courtesy of the Canada Council Art Bank and definitely stole the show.

Montreal's festival, awash in money, is indisputably better. But Ottawa has nothing to be ashamed of in this, its first, volunteer-effort debut.

Some highlights, beyond *La Petite Mort*, include:

- The Ottawa Art Gallery expands the concept of photography with the multi-artist *Media Povera*, an exhibition in which artworks jump around and make screeching noises. *Portapak* by Alexandre Castonguay features a video of a train trip between Ottawa and Montreal. Visitors can touch a screen monitor and change the direction of the train and do other fun stuff. And catch Castonguay's multiscreen video waterfall.

- The Ottawa City Hall Gallery is offering a superb group show called *Aperture*, exploring the moods of public spaces and involving a Who's Who of the Ottawa photo scene, past and present. Lynn Cohen, as always, stands out with her "found" locations. She has two offerings, including images of a bizarre work space called *Corporate Office* and a freakish scientific lab called *Laboratory*. Other memorable works include those by Tony Foughse, Lorraine Gilbert and Adam Krawesky.

- Galerie St. Laurent-Hill has a solo show by Toronto photo-artist Thrush Holmes. On view is a series of mixed media works in which old family photos and vintage found photos are blown up, cropped in imaginative ways and splashed with paint. The images are like barely remembered fragments of dreams.

- Dale Smith Gallery has a group show most memorable for the light boxes by Joy Kardish.