

Beautiful burns

Image by Joanne de Nobriga. Does your work lend itself to a striking image? E-mail ideas for 'Big picture' to jon.sutton@bps.org.uk.

You are looking at the chest and hand of Hemani Modasia, aged 24, who sustained a serious burn injury when she was 18 months old. The image was taken by professional photographer Joanne de Nobriga as part of a collaboration with psychologists at the Centre for Appearance Research (CAR) at the University of the West of England, Bristol (see www.uwe.ac.uk/hls/research/appearance-research).

The project, Perspectives, aims to challenge stereotypes about disfigurement and promote acceptance of diversity of appearance. Professor Nichola Rumsey, co-director of CAR, says 'Society's increasing focus on appearance can be especially challenging for people who, for whatever reason, look different or unusual. We're constantly looking for new ways to engage the public and challenge the views they may have about disfigurement'.

Professor Diana Harcourt, co-director of CAR, adds 'Images in the media typically focus on beauty, whilst people with disfigurements

tend to be depicted in a negative light. We hope that this series of photos and the accompanying biographies that were written by the participants themselves will encourage people to see disfigurement in a different way'.

Joanne explains: 'This project portrays people with visible differences in two ways - as people first, who just happen to have an appearance that is in some way different to "the norm", doing everyday and normal things and then in close-up to showcase the beauty of difference. I want to invite people to look beyond, to see the essence of the person photographed and hopefully to leave with a different perspective. I worked closely with each model to create a series of images that they were happy with.'

On seeing her own photos, Hemani commented 'my favourite is the one of my hands on my chest because up until that moment I have never thought of my burns as being beautiful or having nice patterns.... I'd quite like people to say my burns are pretty. That would make me happy'.