

ABOUT BEAUTIFUL FACES

In this series I investigate and challenge the perception of beauty.

Judgments are made quickly and may even be unavoidable. Is it even possible to look without judgment? Are not our imprints so deeply ingrained that we have difficulty contemplating another human being without specific thoughts?

Do television, social media, magazines really reflect the diversity of humanity? To what extent have we been indoctrinated with ideas of what true beauty should look like?

With these portraits I offer a mirror. A mirror that challenges you to question your thoughts and (re)define beauty. It's not a hard mirror. It's a gentle invitation. By choosing a simple composition and lighting, I give space to let the theme speak. It is important to me that the person being portrayed is seen first, the facial difference only afterwards.

The subjects, or in the case of young children their parent, wrote a text about themselves and their appearance. These are stories of the heart. Stories that touch and move.

The structure of this series is simple in nature. The depth is in the transference and the inner processes that this brings about.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER



For Iris Valentina, making a soulful portrait is a golden find. The deeper connection is what drives her. As a self-taught photographer she is constantly developing, carrying out personal projects, portrait sessions and various commercial assignments. In her portraits she seeks connection with heart and soul. Thereby she is influenced by the work of Joyce Tenneson, including she also studied.

Her free work is characterized by explorations of social and psychological themes. Seeing the person behind the mask and pulled up walls has her interest. A portrait becomes a means of exposing issues. Its mission is to bring people closer together.

In her latest series Beautiful Faces she invites the viewer to judge and to question the perception of beauty.

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The Latin name for port-wine stain is *navvaeus flammeus*. I don't think there is a better name for it. I haven't always looked at it that way. The relationship with my port-wine stain is unruly. A love/hate relationship.

Although I was never bullied, I felt different. And I didn't want that at all. I didn't want to stand out. From my early teens I started wearing camouflage makeup. For years it has been an automatic act, the beginning of every day. It went mindlessly. Until a few years ago I felt the need to look at my port-wine stain with a positive view.

My immediate environment has always responded well to my port-wine stain - the sweetest sentence is: "I don't even see it, it belongs to you" . Outsiders react differently. In the media I think it can be different. Often enough I read in literature and see in films that people with facial deformities are portrayed as the bad guy or dirty, hairy, and unkempt. Stereotyping is disastrous. Reason for me to scrub off the make-up and participate in this beautiful series by Iris.

Because that's how I really started to feel. My stain makes me who I am. And we need to redefine beauty. Now I see a small heart in the open area. Watching clouds. You can also see the universe in it.



I don't know any better.

Sometimes I feel a bit tense when I go to someone I don't know because I don't know how they react. People who know me don't pay attention, but the people I don't know look at me a bit strange.

If I am being bullied, I would like to have my hemangioma removed, but otherwise not because it is part of me.

I am who I am and how I act.

My message is that everyone is who they are and that everyone should be proud of themselves even if you are not perfect.



Everybody is different. I'm different because I was born with a fumbled ear. As a result, I was often stared at and whispered about. Sometimes I was asked why I had my ear cut off. I never liked that. That's why I traveled to America and had two surgeries for my new ear. I can't hear with it. That's what I have my hearing aid for. Now I don't get stares very often, but I am still a bit different. My head is a bit crooked and when I smile, my mouth is crooked too. I think everyone should be a little different! I want to show that with this photo.



As her mother, I think Romy is beautiful. The shape of her eyes, her full mouth with the drooping corners. Little hands and little feet.

People around Romy react differently. There are many falsehoods and prejudices about Down syndrome. The people who get to know Romy love her, but she's still stared at a lot on the street. Also, by adults.

I wouldn't change anything about her myself. But I would like to change a lot about the prejudices surrounding Down syndrome.

What we would like to convey is that people look at possibilities and not at the limitations of people. Romy has no filter and no prejudices towards people. She doesn't care if you're rich, poor, fat, thin, white, yellow, or black. Romy looks at the human being itself.

Sometimes I wonder if they or we have the disability. Because I know one thing for sure: if there were more people like Romy, the world would be a bit more beautiful.
(Written by Romy's mother)



I enjoy life to the fullest, I don't really care much about my port-wine stain. But I also have my difficult moments. For example, if my port-wine stain stands out in a photo, I can find that confronting. But even when people ask again, gosh, you're burned, you have to protect yourself. Then I joke that I have indeed been lying in the sun on my left side all day, sometimes with confused faces as a result. In addition, during puberty I was especially unsure whether boys would be interested in me. Why would they choose me when there are also a lot of girls without port-wine stain?

I had my port-wine stain covered with makeup once. I didn't recognize myself in the mirror and in the photos I later saw. That's when I decided that my port-wine stain belongs to me.

I consider myself lucky with my life and with all the support I have had from friends, girlfriends, and family from an early age. And I would like to pass on this tip from my parents to everyone who sometimes gets a special comment: such a comment says more about the other person than it does about you.



How I look at my own appearance is sometimes positive, other times negative. I often feel insecure when I get to know new people and then think that they don't like me or don't like me because of my eyes, because they look different from "normal" eyes. My head is a bit crooked. This also has to do with my visual impairment.

People often judge when they don't know what is behind someone. If someone asks me, what do you have or why do you look like that, I will respond positively and explain what I can see.

If I could change my "facial difference" it would be that I would like to see well, my eyes to be straight and my head to be straight. This is because I think I will be less insecure about myself and especially what others will think of me.

My message to other people would be that you should not judge what others look like but look inside. Even if someone has a "different face", look at the inner face.



When Noud was born I immediately thought he was beautiful. His cleft lip has never been an issue for me. I did have a lot of nasty and weird reactions and people sometimes stare after him. He had surgery when he was six months old. I still miss his wide smile. Noud is now four and increasingly aware that his mouth looks slightly different. He is increasingly being asked what he has with his mouth and teeth and there was a child at school who teased him about it. And sometimes he just freaks out. That he has to go to the doctor, dentist or speech therapy again, that eating ice cream sometimes feels annoying, that food or drink comes through his nose or that eating hard things sometimes makes it difficult because of his jaw cleft and crooked teeth. And he can be upset about that too. But as a mother I hope that he will never be disappointed with his appearance and that he will always continue to see how beautiful he is.

I wouldn't change anything about Noud per se. He is beautiful the way he is and believe he will come out of this stronger. I would have liked to have spared him the discomfort and pain of the operations and later the orthodontic process.

I believe Noud chose us as parents. We can handle this as a family and our job is to teach him that everyone is beautiful just the way he or she is.

You are your own unique self.



My name is Chantal, and I am 23 years old. I was born with Treacher Collins syndrome, a facial condition. I used to consider my appearance a burden. People laugh at me, call after me, or stare at me for a long time. As a teenager I sometimes became insecure about that, but I never felt that I was less than other people. It was often thought that I was also mentally behind and therefore I often had to prove myself. Despite my past and all the people who have hurt or humiliated me, I am extremely proud of myself. Sometimes I wish there was an opportunity to become completely healthy. To get rid of all the hassle and operations. But at the same time, I know that I am, who I am now. My illness has shaped me. It has made me the Chantal that I am today. And I love her!

Everyone deserves a place in this world, regardless of gender, age, skin color, faith or appearance. We have one earth that we share with each other must keep it running. Each of us is unique and loved!



From the age of 3 she sometimes started to look long and hard at people. We didn't understand this but later realized that maybe it was because she thought it was normal. Most people looked at her that way.

At the age of 4 she asked a lot of questions and found it unpleasant that people kept looking at her.

Now she's 5, looking at the world with big, discovering eyes. She enjoys life and sees herself as 'that's just how I was born'.

It is the world that sometimes finds it so difficult to deal with 'different'. But if you dare to look further, you will discover how special every person is. Wonderfully made. We don't believe there was a "mistake," but that God has molded her, every part of who she is, made wonderfully and deeply loved.

And we, although the world doesn't always make it easy, we are grateful that it has been entrusted to us. Her radiant eyes go out to that world, and she will always be loved.

(Written by Jael's mother)



During the pregnancy we did not know that Floris had Down syndrome, so that was a big switch. But time and again he beats our uncertain expectations in a positive way. He is a cheerful and inquisitive boy. His gaze radiates wonder and purity, the world is a magical place for him that must be discovered. We notice that he touches people because he makes contact so easily. It's disarming: just a pat over the hair, laying his head against someone's chest. He hugs therefore with everyone and has completely skipped the phase of clinginess. That produces beautiful and sometimes unexpected encounters with people.

He teaches us as parents to live with the day, and to enjoy of what is there. The little things: a beautiful song that goes by comes on the radio where he immediately starts swinging, a sunbeam on the floor he tries to grab, the joy of getting to eat a very nice sandwich, crawling over the green grass, and feeling the blades, laughing uncontrollably at the crazy jokes from his brother and sister. It's something we want the world to know precisely beneath his vulnerability, he shows such a zest for life. It's so good that he is here.



When Lian-Hao realized she had something in her face that others don't, we named it her WOW. At home and in our social environment it is never a topic, but on holiday in a playground or swimming pool there are always children or parents who stare. 9 out of 10 times, Lian-Hao doesn't realize that at all and depending on my mood that day, I respond with "are you curious what it is, you can just ask"? or I ignore it. But when Lian-Hao is asked if she even realizes that people are staring, she points at it and says WOW. She was also always very clear that she didn't want to have it removed, it's mine, wow. But lately, she's been looking at the surgery photos a lot from last time, asking a lot of questions about it, and it's obviously on her mind. Does she want it or not? Perhaps the experience of the photoshoot and the result is a part of her process, which helps her in making a choice. She takes at least 20 selfies a day with her iPad, which she then edits completely, but really as a creation not to hide anything. And every choice is ultimately a good one, although I personally hope she wants to keep it, because I just think it looks great on her. But it's her body and her face, and despite her limitations, she's proven to me often enough that she ultimately knows very well what she does and doesn't want.

(Written by Lian-Hao's mother)



Somehow, I always knew I was different. I couldn't explain it, couldn't name it, but that changed with a doctor's diagnosis. I have something called Waardenburg syndrome type 4. This affects my appearance in the way my eyes are set and my natural gray hair.

I struggled with myself for years because I looked different, but completely changed in recent years. I'm proud of my eyes, I'm proud of my hair, I'm proud of being unique.

Besides that, I have noticed a change in my own self-image, I also notice a difference in how people react to it. Today I get almost exclusively positive reactions to the uniqueness in my face, and it is mainly seen as something beautiful and special.

I would never want to change my characteristics. They make me who I am, who I want to be and stay. You should and never want to change the special and special about yourself. So, embrace all that is special and unique about you and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.



In primary school I skipped grade 4 so I've always been a lot younger and smaller than my classmates. I was bullied a lot at school because of this. At the beginning of grade 6 I was pushed over during the break, and I fell open-mouthed on a garbage can. There was a big hook on this that ripped open my cheek. I was lucky that a plastic surgeon had just arrived at the local hospital who put all layers of cheek back together with hundreds of stitches. Because all nerves were cut, I had no feeling in my cheek for the first few years and it was very large and swollen. Fortunately, with many treatments, this has recovered.

I used to be often asked about how I got my scar. Once even in the supermarket by the cashier: "Can I ask something? We've been wondering for a while how you got your scar?". I notice that less now, but I also notice that people dare to ask less.

The scar does give a tough feeling. If you must have a scar, it's better in a place that everyone can see it!

The scar has now really become a part of me.



I was born with my port-wine stain and know no better than that this is my face. Of course, I realized at a young age that my appearance was slightly different from that of the people around me. But I was raised very open, and my appearance was never an issue. I am happy with my port-wine stain, it makes me unique and recognizable. Of course, people look at it when I step into a public space. I am used to it and because of my blindness in my right eye I can only see half of it myself. I understand that people watch, staring is something else of course. And when people ask about it, I often explain what it is. I wouldn't be so quick to change my face. I had many laser treatments when I was very young, one of which went wrong. I wouldn't laser so fast anymore. My port-wine stain is so much a part of me, I would be sorry if I didn't have it anymore.

I think it's important to raise awareness in the world about diversity in appearance. I coach women towards a more inclusive body image and speak a lot about this during conferences. My mission is to make everyone look more deeply and with more awareness at their own body and that of others.



Håkon Grønning

This is exactly the greatest moments. Through photography you can connect with people you would not else have met and experience profound trust and connection. Such moments are treasures even bigger than the work produced ❤️

Mariah Sánchez Pastrana

Beautiful ❤️

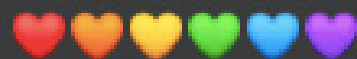
Sylvia de Vries-Saelman

She is such a sweet girl, so pure and full of love

Felicia Schuette

I was amazed by her eyes and then read your text, remarkable, beautiful woman and soul.

Arianne de Nood



Mikaela Morgan

Beautiful work as always Iris ❤️

Jackie O'Brien

Yes, her eyes, wow!! Captured the photo beautifully as usual ❤️❤️

Kerri Woolheater Biddle

Her eyes! ❤️❤️

Anne Helene Gjelstad

Tell him he is a beautiful soul 🧡

Anne Helene Gjelstad

Such a wonderful, strong image 🖤

Joyce Heere

Love it ❤️❤️

Edith Wiersma-Arts

Beautiful woman indeed, well done Iris. Beautiful picture!!!

Anne Helene Gjelstad

Lovely image 🧡

Angélique Kettenis

Beautiful how he owns it 🙏❤️

Inger Anne Overå

She looks so precious ❤️

Inger Anne Overå

So true! And a beautiful capture of her💕 We have all so much to learn from each other, if only our hearts were open to it💕

jamie.nease Love love love!! So beautiful!!!

stinevanderloe Oh Iris! This is so Heartfelt and beautiful! You continue to inspire me! ❤️❤️❤️

humancanvas232 This series is so beautiful and heartwarming! I love it! ❤️

j.michaelimagery I so love your work! It's so consistent and the light quality is always excellent. Beautiful image!

roger_garrett_london Beautiful lady inside and out well done to you both, a lovely portrait.

sashamortimorephotography So stunning. Brilliant ❤️👏

renatevanbeynum Authentic Beauty

jennyreesphotography Beautiful 🌿

souad_hadba_ Beauty is what we feel what we think what we say and what we do ... absolutely beautiful

_____angelah_____ Elegant and lovely. Keep your chin high 💜

walterbeaton children are lovely in different ways. unfortunately many adults are shortsighted. 💜

windowlightstudios beautiful little light ✨

stephormin One of my favorite images ever. The DOF, the tonality, the simplicity. Just beautiful.

gt.lazyeye Wonderful project 🙌
Ironical that 'beauty' photography is so often soulless. Yet your portraits radiate beauty and are full of soul 😍

monaoeino What an expression...

alyce.chaya.sarah Stunning portrait ❤️

stinevanderloe I feel this deep in my heart! Love this work ❤️❤️❤️

monicadartphotography
Incredible, gentle eyes!

annehelenegjelstad_fineart I love this series so much Iris 🧡soulful, important, beautiful work!

walterbeaton straight forward and engaging. ⭐⭐⭐

iris.rose.devries Unique Face ❤️

yanametz Can hardly keep my tears away! But I believe there is a beautiful soul behind!!!! And damaged! Great photo showing the special fragile beauty! 💖

orkarinfotografie You are beautiful in every single way! ❤️

gol_den232 What a wise and beautiful woman! Really love this work dear Iris! ❤️❤️❤️

stinevanderloe Just wonderful Iris! Thank you for sharing your warm and beautiful art! 💖💖

tra.dimitrova Amazing, like a painting ❤️

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