

NEWS

A picture of indigenous freedom

Sven Carlsson

AN Opotiki-born woman who for many years struggled to understand where she belonged has made her multi-cultural indigenous background into a lifestyle of freedom.

"An indigenous photographer is someone who can tell stories and capture images without really having to tell the story in words, through the eyes of indigenous people," Alex King said.

Born in Opotiki, where she has plenty of family, Ms King grew up in Samoa, Rarotonga and New Zealand.

"I had struggled for many years to understand where I belonged and what my connection was to my tupuna," she said.

"This was part of my inspiration of where my work is today."

The self-taught photographer has been selected to take part in the Postcards From New Zealand exhibition for the Auckland Festival of Photography.

Festival spokesman Victor van Wetering said Ms King's work would be added to the Postcards from New Zealand series – an online project promoting photography and cultural identity on a specially-created YouTube channel – today.

"I am really grateful to be a part of the Postcards From New Zealand exhibition," Ms King said.

"I've chosen to exhibit a series called *Boys on the Water* that I documented during Covid here in Rarotonga."

Featuring eight men, including her partner John Young, the series shows his



PHOTOGRAPHIC NICHE: Opotiki-born Alex King has, during 10 years as a photographer, created a cultural and artistic home for her soul.

Photo supplied

passion for the moana and his fearlessness. "I realised how talented our Polynesian people are when it comes to the ocean," Ms King said.

"They were also brave enough to take part in my storytelling series that shows a side of them most people in our community don't get to see."

With the eight men coming from different backgrounds and upbringings, the freedom they feel of being out in the water was their commonality.

"It was about bringing forth a vision of our young men on the island, who live

daily in the water, and have a deep love and respect for the ocean – a place where they feel their very existence is met with adventure and risk," Ms King said.

Ms King is raising her seven-year-old daughter with her partner having moved back to Rarotonga six years ago.

"Life here in the islands is relaxing," she said.

"It keeps me present and grounded, and away from the materialistic ideals in the outside world."

Having picked up her first camera in 2011 when she was working a desk job in New

Zealand, Ms King specialises in portrait photography, photo documentary, ethical storytelling, and wedding photography.

"I have photographed more than 200 weddings and hundreds of portrait sessions with clients from around the world," she said.

"I have landed in a niche market, as an indigenous photographer, trying to make an impact on my audience and viewers, challenging the world view on our indigenous communities and our lifestyles," she said.

"I knew I was destined to be working in an environment where I had the freedom, the flexibility and the choice of taking it wherever I went in the world."

Projects Ms King has been involved with include documenting the adverse effects of the palm oil industry in Indonesia's Northern Sumatra.

"I documented the devastating environmental and social impact that industry is having through deforestation, division within indigenous communities and leaving endangered wildlife behind," she said.

She is working alongside Photographers Without Borders based in Canada and is on the Indigenous Advisory Council for PWB, Canada.

"I am the only Polynesian photographer that is part of this team, which is a huge success for me, and I have been featured in magazines, live talks and an exhibition in Toronto at the Contact Photography Festival."

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