Maria Mor's foot pursuits
FAU senior's photo display studies students' personalities through their shoes.

Somewhere between gathering the guts to ask random Florida Atlantic University students if she could snap pictures of their shoes and flat out chasing down her subjects in the same pursuit, Maria Mor became obsessed with her new photo project. And she has the wounds to prove it.

"I was running after a student with these aqua-beaded sandals, and I tripped and threw out my hands to move my camera so it wouldn't get crushed. I fell on my face instead," Mor says with a laugh, recalling her month-and-a-half-long "stalking" of subjects in the spring semester of 2012. "There was a huge cut on my face, and the student was like, 'Are you OK?' My friends were like, 'You always fall when I'm not there to record it.' I wish someone would send that off to 'America's Funniest Home Videos.'"

The 21-year-old, now an FAU senior, says a combination of sociology classes and people-watching sparked the crusade, which Mor cobbled into the exhibit "Souls of Our Shoes," now on display at the university's Wimberly Library. She decided to capture students' most-eccentric footwear choices and how they served as extensions of their personalities. That, of course, required her to strike up conversations about shoes with strangers.

"I saw how the students poised themselves. Some shoes were very loud and some bland. Some were weird. I realized the shoes had a lot to do with people's personalities," says Mor, whose photos are accompanied with testimonials from the shoes' owners. "The students were more uncomfortable than I was. Maybe their feet are ugly, and I'm asking to take pictures of something they weren't proud of."

But Mor's dogged inquiries paid off. Her photograph of Cassandra Alexis' bejeweled, hot-pink sandals, called "Best for Less" (the shoe wearers titled the photos), are shot just like the 17 other images on display: with close-up intimacy, an artistic vantage point Mor partly left to the discretion of her subjects. "Alexis mentioned she was 'shy,'" Mor says, and she suspects that the faux-bling, which here glints under direct sunlight, stands to compensate for the student's timidity.

Other footwear, Mor discovered, had sentimental value. In "Wanderer," Mor shoots Greg Rhinehart's tattered, gray Sanuks from behind, the frayed stitching spilling down the sides of the shoes. Rhinehart wore the slippers during a yearlong hiking trip in Peru, and the hardships he endured over the trip convinced him to keep wearing them.

Mor even shot her own footwear for a piece titled "Abuelitas." She bought the shamrock-green, polyester shoes in the small town of La Mesa, Colombia, where her aunt owns a farm. "Many people call them the leprechaun shoes. In the olden days, grandmothers would wear them," Mor says. "I play sports in them. I'm kind of a bohemian person. They're from one of my favorite places in the countryside, and they remind me of my 72 family members who live there."

Souls of Our Shoes
When: Through Sept. 27
Where: Florida Atlantic University's Wimberly Library, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton
Cost: Free
Contact: 561-297-3770 or Fau.edu/library