# You'll Love These Handmade Valentines for Women With HIV

February 9, 2016 By Trent Straube




A handmade valentine for Love Positive WomenCourtesy of Visual AIDS

This year, my Valentine's Day arrived on January 19. That's when POZ colleague Jennifer Morton and I walked over to Dieu Donné, a Midtown Manhattan art studio dedicated to the craft of making paper by hand. We joined a group of artists and activists for one of three Love Positive Women workshops to make valentines for women living with HIV.

Jessica Lynn Whitbread, an artist and member of Visual AIDS, started Love Positive Women in

2013, and as we got instructions on how to make paper--it's a very wet and sloppy process!--Jessica also told us how much the valentines have meant to the women who've received them in previous years, especially those dealing with isolation and stigma. As Jessica says: "Don't underestimate the value in something as simple as sending a valentine to a stranger."

I'm sure she's right, but as you can see in the following photos, the workshop was so much fun that I felt like I was the one who received a gift from Cupid!

More than 150 unique valentines were created in the workshops in a process that uses a sifted pulp-like watery gunk (yes, that's a technical art term), stencils and found material such as lace, photos and feathers. After the soaking-wet valentines were dried and pressed over a period of days, many of them were exhibited at Dieu Donné's gallery before the entire group was mailed out to women living with HIV across the globe.




Courtesy of Visual AIDS

Under the theme "Love Starts at Home 2016," the project was hosted by Love Positive Women, Visual AIDS, the Fire Island Artist Residency, Dieu Donné and the International Community of Women Living With HIV.

Love Positive Women describes itself as “an international series of grassroots events that uses Valentine’s Day as a backdrop, creating a platform for individuals and communities to engage in public and private acts of love and caring for women living with HIV. Working from a place of strength, LPW focuses on the idea of interconnectedness, relationship building, loving oneself and loving ones’ community.”

You can find out more at jessicawhitbread.com, and you can also follow #LovePositiveWomen on social media.

Below is a tiny selection of photos from the workshops and the resulting valentines. Unless otherwise noted, all images are courtesy of Visual AIDS (thanks, Alex!). If you want to view more, visit the Visual AIDS webpage about tthe exhibition as well as the Facebook pages of Visual AIDS and Love Positive Women (where you’ll also find a heartfelt speech from the event).

Hey, why not play cupid yourself: Copy and paste some images and send digital valentines out as a way to show love and support for HIV-positive women everywhere!

I hope your Valentine’s Day is as special as mine was on January 19!

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