Love Is All Around

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By Jennifer Morton (Managing Editor)

As a single woman, you'd think I would dread Valentine's Day. But for the past several years, as a board member of Visual AIDS, I've been fortunate to participate in a project that emphasizes the true meaning of the holiday—one that's not wrapped up in overpriced chocolates or pink flowers.

Love Positive Women (LPW) was created in 2013 by HIV-positive artist Jessica Lynn Whitbread. Using Valentine's Day as a backdrop, LPW is a series of grassroots events that encourages individuals and communities to engage in public and private acts of love and caring for women living with HIV.

For the past three years, Visual AIDS has partnered with Fire Island Artist Residency, Dieu Donné and the International Community of Women Living With HIV (ICW) to create hundreds of unique handmade paper valentines at Dieu Donné's papermaking studio. A selection of the valentines made by artists, activists and HIV-positive women were displayed at the Love Positive Women Valentine Pop-up Exhibition at The Bureau of General Services—Queer Division from January 26 to 29. Immediately following the exhibition, the handmade valentines were mailed around the world to women living with HIV so they would arrive in time for Valentine's Day.

At the opening reception, several HIV-positive women, including Visual AIDS artist member Joyce McDonald, shared moving stories about what it meant to receive a valentine as well as how it felt to participate in the papermaking workshop and create valentines for other women.

Listening to the women's stories and witnessing all the love in the room that night reminded me that Valentine's Day isn't about finding Mr. Right or getting a box of chocolate-dipped strawberries on February 14. It's about spreading love—to everyone who needs it.



Amazing team behind Love Positive Women 2017Courtesy of Visual AIDS/Jonathan Bouknight

Click below to read about previous Love Positive Women events:

https://www.poz.com/blog/handmade-valentines-for-love-positive-women

https://www.poz.com/blog/let-there-be-love

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