Love Makes the World Go Around

Artists and activists come together to create handmade paper valentines for women living with HIV around the world.

January 31, 2018 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Last week, I attended a workshop for Love Positive Women 2018 at the Dieu Donné papermaking studio in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Hosted by Visual AIDS, the Fire Island Artist Residency, the International Community of Women Living with HIV and Dieu Donné, the event brought together artists, activists and HIV-positive women to create hundreds of handmade paper valentines that will be mailed out to women living with HIV around the world.

Love Positive Women is an ongoing project created by Jessica Whitbread in 2013. Using Valentine's Day as a backdrop, Love Positive Women creates a platform for individuals and communities to engage in public and private acts of love and caring for women living with HIV. As Jessica puts it, "Why not do something nice for the women most forgotten about?"

I was invited to attend the workshop by POZ's managing editor, Jennifer Morton, who is on the board of Visual AIDS. To be honest, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. After donning our "Love Positive Women" T-shirts and watching a brief video introduction by Jessica about the history of the project, we moved into the studio space and learned how to make paper by hand. The process involves dipping a mould (a rectangular wooden frame covered with a screen) into a vat of pulp and gently shaking it to remove the excess water. The pulp is then transferred from the mould onto a felt sheet, where it remains until it is pressed into paper and removed for drying.

You can watch a video of the entire process here:

I discovered that making paper is extremely wet—but easy. Once the paper was placed on the felt and before it was pressed, I was free to decorate it with a plethora of supplied materials, including

fabric, lace and paper hearts, and to add personal messages of love, inspiration and support. As I embellished my valentines, I could feel the love in the room and was overwhelmed by the creativity of my fellow papermakers.

At the end of the workshop, we left our newly created valentines with the Dieu Donné staff so they could finish pressing and drying them. The valentines will be displayed at a pop-up exhibition at

the Abrons Arts Center on Thursday, February 1, and then will be distributed to HIV-positive women around the world.

I’m grateful to have taken part in the workshop and to have had the opportunity to spread messages of love and support to HIV-positive women. After all, a little love can go a long way—all around the world, in fact.

Click below to read more about Love Positive Women:

https://www.poz.com/blog/love-around

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

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

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