Philly Block Project Brings Free Workshops to South Kensington With “Art-A-Matic”

BY MEGAN MATUZAK | AUGUST 31, 2016

In early August, amateur and professional photographers came to The Resource Exchange (1701 N. 2nd St.) for a free class on pinhole photography. The workshop was part of Art-A-Matic, a series of workshops sponsored by the Philly Block Project and taught by South Kensington artists.
Throughout the seven-part series, participants learn screen printing, jewelry-making and photography. The workshops, held on the first Saturday of each month, began in May, and there is still time to sign up for the remaining two Art-A-Matic classes this fall.

“We wanted to make sure to include photography in some of the classes,” Lori Waselchuk, Philly Block Project Coordinator, said. “But as we met the creative people in our neighborhood, we wanted to support their work through the workshops.”

Alexandra Orgera, a seasoned photographer and teacher, felt like pinhole photography was the perfect project for an Art-A-Matic workshop because it doesn’t require a lot of materials. The teachers of these workshops, like Orgera, came from all walks of the art spectrum and in effect brought different pieces of South Kensington with them.

Pinhole photography is a simple process: You grab a box that can be sealed, put a piece of film in the back, poke a hole in it and cover the hole. The film is exposed when the hole is uncovered and covered back up after a period of time, usually 5–10 minutes.
“You don’t have to get the greatest DSLR with all of the most advanced lenses,” Orgera said, explaining the appeal of pinhole photography. “It doesn’t require a lot of technical knowledge, although you can get technical with it if you want.”

With beads of sweat decorating their foreheads, the participants of the workshop left The Resource Exchange and walked up and down the block to scout out their photos. The youngest participant, Grant Kane, a young student, took a sharp pictures of a nearby fence from ground level. Each participant became excited when they could see their image develop in the makeshift darkroom created in The Resource Exchange’s bathroom.

“The final judgement comes when you see your images. I think the amazement of seeing an image come from something you built and put a piece of paper into is where the magic happens,” Orgera said.

For Waselchuk, the Art-A-Matic workshops are a multi-generational approach to put visual art in the center of 19122 resident’s lives and see value in the art they already created.
“We would like to continue Art-A-Matic. We will try to make that happen,” Waschuck said. “We want to learn what our neighbors are interested in, as well as present some new opportunities for them.”

The next Art-A-Matic workshop is “Live-Action Silkscreen Printing” on October 1st at the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center. This workshop will actually connect with another aspect of the Philly Blocks Art Project: the South Kensington Community Photo Archive. It will be another opportunity to unite the neighborhood in art and shared experiences, which is the goal Philly Block Project strives to meet. For more info, check here.

“It’s really about creating opportunities for newcomers and current residents to interact and understand more about each other,” Waschuck said. “We are using art to do that.” •