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# Kids + camera = art

## Prairie's interactive project kicks off FOTOFOCUS photography festival

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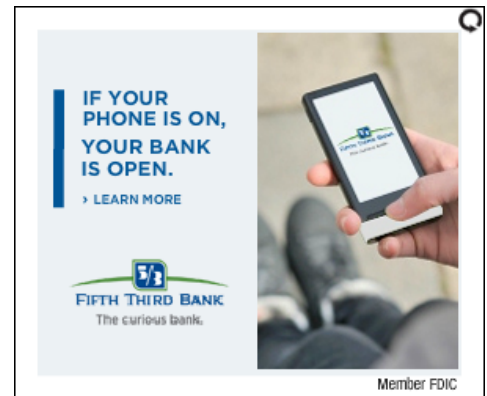
Artist David Rosenthal, center works on a camera obscura project with Kenzie Fox, 6, left, and Jada Tate, 5 both guest families at the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Greater Cincinnati. Photos by Jeff Swinger/The Enquirer / The Cincinnati Enquirer

Written by Karen Chambers Enquirer contributor

“Cool.”

Sarah Foster, education director of the LeBlond Boys & Girls Club in Over the Rhine, summed up the experience of making photo art with Prairie and the Project Obscura, one of the opening exhibits in FOTOFOCUS, a regional festival of photography that will be just about everywhere this fall.

Project Obscura, which is all about kids and community and making art, will run Sept. 9-Nov. 3, one of almost 70 photo-themed shows



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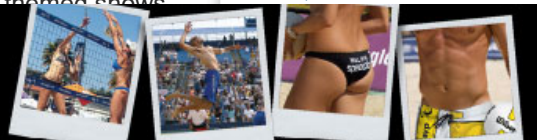
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LeBlond's staff and kids (3rd to 10th grade) "had a great time. (They were) smiling during the whole event, they kept saying how much fun they were having and how cool it was."

## IF YOU GO

**What:** FOTOFOCUS Project Obscura  
**When:** Sept. 9-Nov. 3: 10 a. m.-6 p. m.  
Tuesday-Friday. 10 a. m.-4 p. m., Saturday.  
**Where:** Prairie, 4035 Hamilton Ave., Northside  
**Information:** 513-582-9833 and [www.prairiecincinnati.com](http://www.prairiecincinnati.com)

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That's exactly what Prairie founder and executive director, David Rosenthal, wanted.

Rosenthal served on the FOTOFOCUS organizing committee and wanted to present an exhibition that reflects Prairie's mission – to involve the community in the arts, mainly through photography.

"We want to reach out to people who are on the fringes and don't have a voice, but have powerful things to say," Rosenthal said. "We're interested in the power of art to make change."

Rosenthal founded Prairie in the fall of 2008. Educational programs are 80 percent of its work; Prairie also sponsors a gallery in a second-floor space in Northside.

Last summer Prairie intern Ingrid Schmidt designed and helped build a portable 12 foot by 8 foot camera obscura, which is essentially a primitive camera. "It was an extension of a show we had in the gallery that had artists make work using the camera," Rosenthal explained.

"It dawned on me," Rosenthal said. "What if?"

What if he took the camera obscura on the road? Looking like "an inside-out tent," according to Rosenthal, it can be collapsed and towed on a trailer behind a car.

That fall, Prairie worked with the Avondale Youth Council to make large-scale – 3 foot by 6 foot to 3½ foot by 7 foot – photos using the camera.

Kids respond to the camera obscura, Rosenthal believes, because "as an art-making activity, it's really different from anything anyone – especially kids – would have done before.

"Constructing a large-scale mechanical device, integrating the artistic impulse, science – and muscle," Rosenthal laughed.

For FOTOFOCUS, Prairie again took its portable camera obscura to community organizations.

Nine signed on, including Faces without Places, which helps homeless children stay in school; the disabled artists of Thunder Sky; the Ronald McDonald House, which provides housing for families of children being treated at Children's and other area

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hospitals, and the School for the Creative and Performing Arts Summer YMCA Program.

Prairie even took its mobile camera obscura to the Madisonville Street Fest so fair goers could make their own photo.

With no age limitations (participants ranged from age four to adult) or photography experience needed, anyone who was interested could take part in the project.

They chose where to put up the camera obscura, determining the scene they would photograph. They put up the camera, the scene was projected on the back wall of the tent and Rosenthal photographed it in black and white. Then they broke down the camera.

From start to finish, the sessions took about two hours.

“When you can only make one image, you have to think about what’s important to you, what would best represent the group,” said Rosenthal, who holds an MFA in photography from the University of Cincinnati, graduating in 2001 and teaching there until 2009.

Fifteen children, ranging from four to 14, from Over-the Rhine Community Housing’s Children’s Creative Corner set up the camera in front of the Rothenberg School. Their photograph shows people walking past the school. But there were also children and adults inside the camera so they show up as silhouettes against the school in the background.

First- to 7th-graders from the Greater Price Hill Santa Maria Community Services spelled out the word “love” with their arms and legs. The rest made heart shapes with their hands and stood on either side of them.

The East Price Hill Rees E. Price Academy kids posed as superheroes.

The second part of the project was to decorate the photo, which had been printed out in 16-inch x 20-inch sections. The groups got together again, sometimes with new people joining in, to paint and draw on the photos or add pictures cut out of magazines. This made the photos even more personal.

The sections will be put together and shown in Prairie’s gallery. After the exhibit closes Nov. 3 they’ll all go back to the organizations for display.

Expect the exhibit to give us a very illuminating picture of our hometown.

What’s a Camera Obscura?

### **What's a Camera Obscura?**

A “camera obscura” is essentially a primitive camera. Its name is

Latin meaning “darkened room.” At its simplest, the camera obscura (also called a “pinhole camera”) is a light-tight box with a single opening. Light from outside shines through the hole, which acts as a lens, and the scene is projected onto the back wall. The scene is what is outside the box, but upside down.

The concept goes back to the 4th century B.C. Chinese philosopher Mozi and the 3rd century Greek philosopher Aristotle. By the 15th century, artists were tracing the scenes created with a camera obscura to use as the base for paintings.

In the early 19th century, photography pioneers in France invented light-sensitive solutions used to coat a surface, first metal and glass, then paper. They used the camera obscura to make the first photographs, preserving the scene outside the light-tight box, inventing a new medium.

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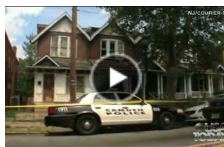
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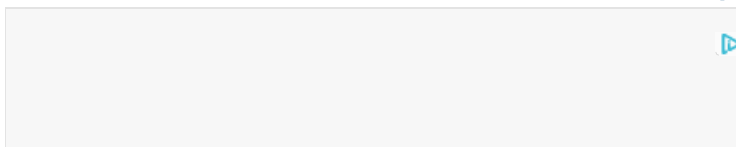
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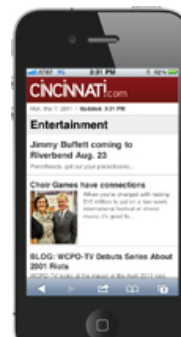
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