Community Darkroom of Akron offers resources for aspiring and pro photographers
Reporting, writing and photos by Zaïré Talon Daniels

Photography has evolved dramatically since the invention of the camera in the 19th century. Cameras are now so important to us that they have been shrunk and placed in our cell phones so we can carry them in our pockets. Although we have seen great advances in camera technology, many people continue to explore and refine the traditional method: Film photography.

Founded in 2018 by Joe Dagostino, the Community Darkroom of Akron offers a space for local artists to develop their own film. Unlike digital photography, film photography needs to be done under special requirements to ensure that film will be exposed properly. Acquiring the materials to make your own darkroom can be costly.

Dagostino had this vision for a community darkroom two years ago.

"I had a career [in graphic design] and I wasn't too happy, so I decided to take the jump and try something different," Dagostino says. "I was doing a lot of art shows and talking with fellow artists, whether it was high school or college, they expressed their desire to return to the darkroom. So I said, 'Let's start one up!'"

Dagostino's first step was collecting enlargers and other equipment needed for darkroom film development. Much of the equipment came from local photographers in the Akron area who had darkrooms set up in their homes.

For those who are comfortable developing film, the Community Darkroom works as a studio where members can come in and work based on the posted times. The Community Darkroom of Akron also sells finished, loose, matted, and framed prints. Memberships start at $10 per month for students and $20 per month for nonstudents.

The Community Darkroom of Akron also serves as a classroom.

"If you've never picked up a camera, we start off with camera and shooting basics, [like] how to expose film properly," Dagostino says. "We go out and take photos. In week two we develop the film, week three we work with the enlargers and make contact sheets, and week four we make final prints."

This summer, the Community Darkroom was planning on inviting youth to summer camps to the darkroom to teach them about the art form of film photography. Because of COVID-19, the

Community Darkroom of Akron has reformulated their goals and now seeks to offer programming in partnership with Akron Public Schools.

"One of the goals I've always had for the Community Darkroom is to run a program with Akron [Public] Schools, a grant or a corporate sponsorship to supply everything for the kids so there is no out-of-pocket cost for them," Dagostino says.

As a photographer myself, working in film can perfect your skills with a camera. The hands-on atmosphere gives you more control than when developing images digitally. I recall my first time in the darkroom at the University of Akron: When you first dip your print into the chemicals and see the image appear, it's just like magic.

A detailed list of membership prices, the location of the darkroom, and print for sale can be found on their website at https://communitydarkroomofakron.com/.

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