

# All you need is love

**Taking a simple message worldwide, I Love You Project aims to spread peace and understanding**

By NAOMI KENAN

**I** LOVE You Project — it's a simple name for a multimedia arts event celebrating diversity, love and peace — a multifaceted art installation with a far-reaching mission: uniting people of differing cultures, religions, and economic levels, according to Brooklyn artist and creator Debbie T. Davies.

The show involves Davies and sound artist Julian Schön inviting visitors to say "I love you" into a digital microscope video camera in whatever language they choose. The results will be added to the 80 faces and voices previously recorded in other shows.

The I Love You Project began back in 2005 as Davies toyed with a digital microscope camera, taping herself saying "I love you" into the old-fashioned device.

"I was startled by how emotional I felt hearing my voice played back," she recalls.

Davies launched the project in March 2011 in Barcelona, and Schön soon joined her, adding faces and voices from shows in the German cities of Frankfurt, Giessen and Berlin over the next few years. The I Love You Project now includes 82 people speaking 32 different languages, an expression of both the diversity of those cities and their commonality in saying "I love you."

"We want to show that change begins through love and the courage to connect with strangers," says Davies.

The show was performed



Recordings of people saying "I Love You" in their native language is blended into a powerful montage.

last weekend at the Bushwick Open Studios arts festival in Brooklyn and is now about to head to Kiev in trouble-torn Ukraine.

The project, from July 3 to 5, takes place during a time of tension and conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and as political and military methods for easing tension bring little true peaceful connection between countrymen, Davies says.

"Through social art, we find a tool that is less forceful and reaches into the humanity of the residents of Ukraine, to connect people and encourage discussion of peace, tolerance, and inclusion," she adds.

The project hopes to not



Julius Schön

only record the Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking population of Kiev, but show the world the diversity that exists in the immigrant population of this city.

How can art accomplish this? Slowly... and in old-fashioned shades and photos.

The slow-moving videos and montage of small, blurry photographs combine to soften or erase racial and national differences. Davies creates the effect with a digital microscope video camera, a kind of high-tech, old-fashioned chem-lab gizmo. Rather than sharp images in bright, natural colors, the camera creates "unexpected images that play with skin tone, contrast, color and light,"

Davies says. "It puts color where there wasn't any and changes people's eye colors. You end up seeing the essence of what people look like, not individual aspects."

The montage's colors are mostly shades of gray with random patches of orange, green, blue and pink. As visitors gaze at the montage, the differences fade, and an almost startling effect takes place: The people begin to look alike, as in large family photographs.

However, the "I love you's" themselves may be the most moving part of the show. "Some people start to cry as they talk, saying more than those three words," Davies says. "Others laugh and

smile. But nearly everyone is surprised by how emotional they get."

"The camera captures that feeling," she adds. "It shows our connectedness, how alike we all really are."

Video, edited by Kendall Smith, Santina Amato and Davies, is projected onto screens and plays continuously. In addition to the large mosaic of photos, illuminated portraits cover the walls, while music and video added by Julian Schön heighten the impact and clarify the exhibit's overriding message: Our common humanity is more powerful and enduring than the ephemeral differences that vanish with slight blur or an off-color shot.

The Kiev installation

will also ask people to become part of the project, creating what Davies says is an immersive experience sharing the diverse faces and voices of the people who live and work in the city. Although Russian natives are already among the people featured in the exhibit, many more will be added in Kiev.

Davies hopes to bring the "I Love You Project" back to New York later this year, adding the "I love you's" of Brooklyn residents and reflecting the diversity of the neighborhood.

Davies and Schön also hope to continue to reproduce the interactive project in cities around the world, creating a global expression of love.