

The El train tracks and their shadows

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PREVIEW. Plenty of stories have been told about people from the wrong side of the tracks, but with his video blog "Shadow World," Philly multimedia artist David Kessler dug even deeper, uncovering stories about people dwelling under the tracks.

Beginning in early 2007, Kessler spent a year venturing out from his home at Front and Dauphin streets to conduct interviews with locals living in the shadows of the Kensington El tracks.

All 26 episodes are now posted on Kessler's blog, undertheel.blogspot.com. For the next month, they will also be part of an installation organized by local nonprofit arts network inLiquid. The episodes will be shown at International House alongside still photos and Kessler's paintings inspired by the experience.



A video still from David Kessler's video blog, "Shadow World."

Besides his relatively recent documentary work—which began with "If You Break the Skin, You Must Come In," following photographer Zoe Strauss' work with teens in foster care—Kessler is a painter and sculptor.

Though less hands-on than that work, "Shadow

World" granted him a more instant gratification. "I really wanted something that I could finish immediately, put out online, and be able to show to the world. Normally I work on something for a year, it sits in my studio, and maybe five people see it."

The form the project took came as a surprise, Kessler says.

"Because of the location, I thought that it was going to be more abstract. I really wanted to capture the mood under the El, the environment itself. But when I

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David Kessler

started talking to people, I was amazed at how open they were, and the people themselves became a much bigger part of the project than I originally imagined."

The surprise came not only because Kessler was approaching complete strangers in a neighborhood not exactly attuned to multi-media art projects, but because the artist himself wouldn't necessarily be inclined to participate in such a project. "It's strange to me," he says, "because if I see a camera, my first instinct is to get away from it. I'm not really an extroverted person; I don't normally go out and talk to strangers on the street. But I wanted to challenge myself."

Shadow World: Under the El, Year One

Opening reception tonight, 6-8 p.m.
exhibit through May 30
International House
3701 Chestnut St, free
215-387-5125

www.ihousephilly.org