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The "Build Your Block" section of *Philadelphia Fortcoming*. Screenshot: Nigel Thompson/AL DÍA News.

LEA EN ESPAÑOL

'Philadelphia Fortcoming' dives into the architectural past and future of the City of Brotherly Love

The exhibit at this year's Da Vinci Fest Live uses machine learning to preserve some of Philly's most fragile stories.

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By Nigel Thompson

October 27, 2020

The story of *Philadelphia Fortcoming: The Endless Urban Portrait* — which plays an integral part as part of this year's **Da Vinci Fest Live** — starts for Lisa Marie Patzer three years ago with the discovery of a blue tin box at the consignment store, Jinxed, in Fishtown.

"Oh this is so interesting looking," Patzer remembered thinking.

When she opened the tin, inside were a number of eight-millimeter films. When played, their contents revealed a snapshot into life in South Philadelphia in the 1960s. The discovery sent Patzer on down a wormhole of research about archiving such footage and what manner would be most suitable.

"There are some movements now trying to preserve these pre-digital home movies," she said.

Eventually, Patzer began scanning the footage frame by frame and preserving it digitally.

For *Philadelphia Fortcoming*, she took the still images from that preservation process and ran them through a number of machine learning programs for a unique portrait of the interaction between past and present realities in the city and beyond.

Some are presented in the form of light boxes inspired by the "hours and hours" Patzer went through to select the images for display.

The other AI creation in the exhibit is a series of wallpaper recreations based on actual designs dated between 1930 and 1965.

The final and central part of the installation is the "Build Your Block" section, which features 55 creations from students, faculty and alumni from the Thomas Jefferson School of Architecture in collaboration with members of the Da Vinci Art Alliance.

It is a reflection of the City of Brotherly Love inspired by the original street plan laid out in Thomas Holme's *Portraiture of the City of Philadelphia*, which set the standard for building cities on a grid.

The creations also offer different snapshots, much like the archived footage rendered by machine learning, into the artsy, weird, structured and historical parts of Philadelphia.

All are parts of Philadelphia's architectural and larger story deserving of preservation in one way or another.

"Philadelphia itself is going through a lot of change right now and there are some different opinions about where the future of the city should go," said Patzer. "My contribution to that dialog and that conversation is I hope one of just appreciation for some of the more fragile stories and histories that have taken place."

Philadelphia Fortcoming: The Endless Urban Portrait will be available [online](#) until Oct. 29.

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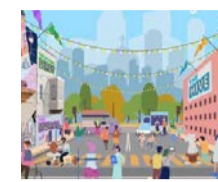
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