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Artist Brian C. Moss with his huge sculpture that doubles as a pinhole camera.

That thing can take pictures?

Artist looks to get some exposure for a unique sculpture

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Staff Writer

At first glance, some may say it looks like an outhouse on wheels. Others may view the giant potpourri of discarded red, yellow and white metal signs, tires and sheet metal as a hunk of junk.

But not Brian C. Moss — an artist who sees the 10-foot structure in a different light.

After all, Moss is the creator of this sculpture that doubles as a functioning pinhole camera — a piece of art with more to it than meets the eye.

"When I was building this sculpture, people from everywhere were coming up to me to see what I was doing," Moss recalled, laughing. "I never met so many people in my life."

"Everyone wanted to know what 'it' was. They were surprised to learn that 'it' was a giant pinhole camera, and that the sculpture would eventually take ten-foot photographs."

Moss, who now lives in Los Angeles but maintains a home in Frankford, is on a hiatus from his studies toward a master's degree at the California Institute of the Arts. He will resume his studies in California later this month.

A former carpenter, Moss spent five months — from last November to early February of this year — building the unique structure on the curbside of his Frankford home. Today, the giant pinhole camera sits in the driveway of the Somerton home of his mother, Ida. The

sculpture makes its debut this week in a special exhibit, *What Helps Dodge Helps You!* (more on that title, later) at the Painted Bride Art Center, 230 Vine St. The exhibit runs through Sept. 16.

Moss built his pinhole camera using remnants he found on the former property of Dodge Steel Castings, Inc., on State Road next to the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge. The plant shut down in 1986.

"See these panels here?" Moss asked, pointing to a huge side of the sculpture. "They're actually tractor-trailer doors that were dumped at Dodge Steel. I cut them down and put them to a better use. I then cut up tires and put them on this side, and then put pieces of hard hats on the corners."

However, Moss said his favorite side of the pinhole camera is the one neatly plastered with metal signs he scrounged up at the Dodge Steel site, now frequented by illegal dumpers.

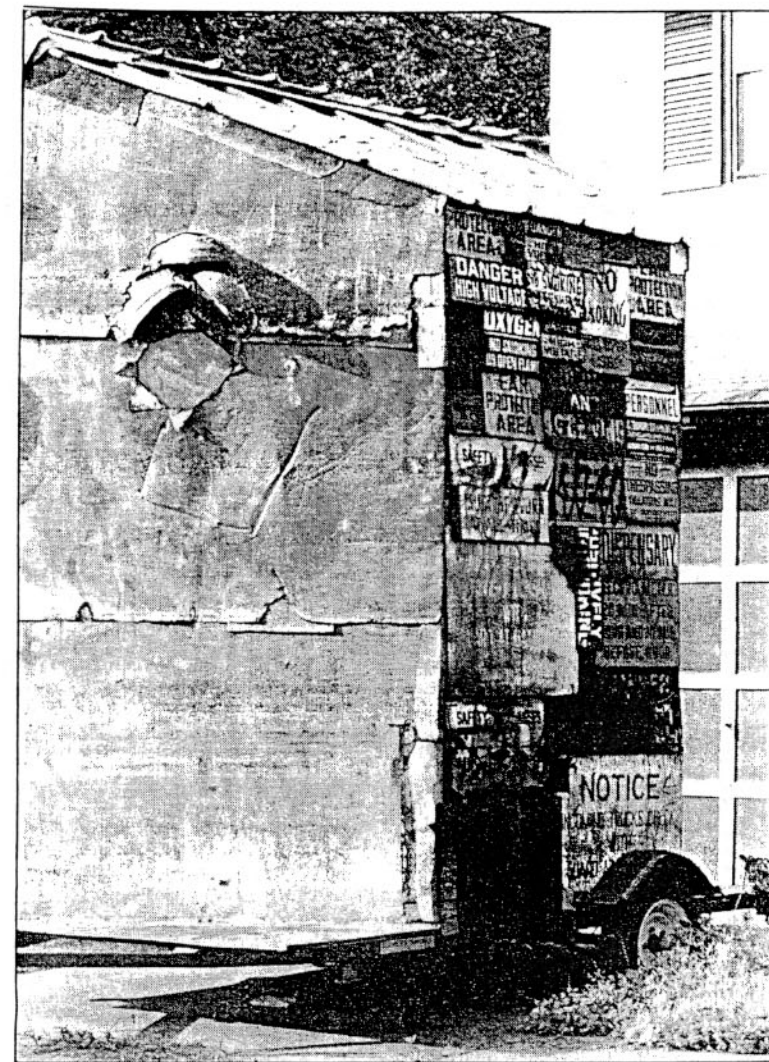
Signs with obsolete messages warn, "No Trespassing — Violators will be prosecuted" and "Danger — High Voltage." But the one that really caught his eye read: "Jobs depend on sales. Sales depend on prices. Prices depend on costs. We must depend on you. What helps Dodge helps you."

"I borrowed the last line of the Dodge Steel sign and incorporated it into the title of my exhibit," Moss said.

The 31-year-old Moss seems to have spent a lifetime recycling discarded scraps into art forms.

"As long as I can remember, even back in high school, I've been collecting discarded odds and ends and making it into art," Moss said. "I've also been drawn to photographing abandoned homes and vacant lots."

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Mistaken for many things, including an outhouse, a full view of pinhole camera.

Sculpture

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"I can't put it into words. I'm just attracted to empty space or things that are abandoned. I'm intrigued with the idea that I can capture stuff that's not there anymore. It amazes me that someone was there and used the facility. All that's left are pieces of the giant puzzle."

It was only natural for Moss to gravitate toward the gutted building that housed Dodge Steel, once a flourishing plant that manufactured steel castings for the shipping, rail and petroleum industries.

"I have fond childhood memories of that place," Moss said. "I vividly recall being impressed as a child with the animated ladle that poured metal into a vat. It was a spectacular sight."

Moss' childhood memories came crashing down when as an adult he returned to the site, after living out of state for a time, to discover the building had turned into a massive junkyard.

"I thought, 'My God! It's been abandoned,'" Moss said. "I began taking photos of the building. I realized the smaller photos couldn't do justice to building. That's when I came up with the idea of building a huge pinhole camera."

"The life-sized photos are able to bring the abandoned plant to life on a full

scale," Moss explained.

Meanwhile, Moss added that his art has a political slant.

"It's my way of showing people that you don't have to cut down another tree or waste a piece of land to manufacture new objects," Moss said. "There's always a way to get around waste. People must strive to save the planet. Recycling is the only way to do it. And my pinhole camera is one way to prove you can make something out of nothing."

Moss said it took him one hour in full sunlight before he captured the right exposure for the camera to take photos. The camera's three large panels magically combine to produce 10-foot photographs.

Those who can't make the one-man show during the exhibit can catch a peek of the giant pinhole camera during the Tacony History Day Parade on Sept. 18.

If time permits, Moss said he would talk with parade-goers about his creation and explain exactly what a pinhole camera is, and the simple concepts that allow it to take photos.

A pinhole camera, according to Moss can be made from a purse, a cardboard box, even an automobile.

"There was one guy who constructed a pinhole camera out of a Volkswagen and made color prints from it," Moss said. "My pinhole camera isn't common, but it's not as extraordinary as using a car. But I believe it to be the largest one around."