

Phel Steinmetz

March 3 – April 30, 2022

**Outside the Box  
A Daughter's Perspective**

My father, Phel Steinmetz became a photographer at age 14 with his first camera earned by the paper route. He had an extraordinary view of the world at a very young age and passed this on to me and my son. His viewpoint was that people observe visuals first and use words to communicate their observations. What if we change their point of view by having them describe what is not in the photo? Or what you did not see at first, "observe outside the box".

My father had this idea and was able to articulate this in his work, I used to ask to see his sarcastic humor all the time and he would say ok let's go for a drive to nowhere, giggling we jump in his car, and go. I was busy looking for animals or pretty rocks, while he spent hours looking at nature and how man was intruding. The picture of the road in the middle of the desert that has no beginning or end it just is, or the large white picture with a fly on it. Designed to make you think of our placement here and now.

Conceptual art was the title given to most of his work; Gas Crisis, Construction Sites, and Proofs were all works that he was doing his best to get across the underlying environmental issues we were creating, some understood others just thought the photos were good black and white pictures. So, he changed his focus, thought outside the box of his work, and created: *Landscapes* displaying lines of man and curves of nature or animals interplaying. *Narcissus Brother* is our ego shadow playing within our natural world leaving a thumbprint aurora behind. *Gene Pool* his fellow photographers who yearly traveled together blurring their art forms together. Then my favorite was blurring the edges of photos by printing many photos of the same focus and arranging them in various positions. My father wanted you to view objects in different perspectives. An example is the meadow walk through the forest. I was with him that day we were actually counting Mule Deer for the forestry Department when I stopped. Dad asked what was up? I said this is a great place to just breathe! He smiled and proceeded to photograph all around us.

The *Family* photos and the *Mall* photos were taken around the same time as my childhood. My parents had divorced and both of us were trying to understand family dynamics and how to be. In El Cajon, there was this largely undeveloped area dead center of the city that I loved playing in with my friends and bringing home all kinds of creatures and insects. Then one day we kids were told to go away. They started building the first indoor mall *Parkway Plaza*, I did not care for such a structure destroying a natural area along the San Diego River. My dad decided to make an occasion of the opening and took me there. I am not smiling in those photos due to upset, so dad asked me to look at the mall as a cultural opportunity and learn what makes people happy when shopping here. He always made all our trips a cultural learning experience. He even had a Kumeyaay Medicine Woman be my babysitter for a while, that was awesome and enlightening for an 8 year old. Again, my father was always widening my perspective of the world around me. Now that he has passed, I go to storage and pull out a box or two of his work and observe.

Through the decades I had with my father exploring with him on his photographic journeys and cultural observations, he trained me and my son to always observe outside the box. I have found this useful in all aspects of life, how about you?

- Traci Wagner, February 13, 2022