

Cultural Daily

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Edmund Teske: Art Photography

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, July 12th, 2017

In 1973, after arriving in Los Angeles from New York to live, I signed up for a photography class offered by UCLA. I was delighted to meet our professor, [Edmund Teske](#), an eccentric artist and an inspirational teacher. He formed relationships with his students that lasted a lifetime, until he passed away in 1996 at age 85. Teske held classes in his Hollywood home/studio, where in the darkroom he demonstrated a printing technique he invented, duotone solarization. It produced deep purple and blue tones in a B&W print. See a portrait of his mother that was hanging in his wall.



Duotone solarization print by Edmund Teske

Teske's most fun classes were the field trips he organized in evocative outdoor locations, where he showed students how to photograph nude models in nature. In 1973 we went to rocky formations in Malibu. In 1976 I asked permission to attend this class to write an article for an Italian magazine about the experience. We went to a wooded area in the Topanga Corral. Also in 1976 Teske organized a visit to [Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House](#) in Barnsdall Park, where he had lived from 1944 to 1949 in Studio residence B at the invitation of Aline Barnsdall. The architect had been his mentor at Taliesin in 1936, when he was 25-years-old, and exerted a profound influence on Teske's artistic vision.



Edmund Teske at Hollyhock House (c) Elisa Leonelli 1976

Twice a year Teske would hold events called "photo grabs" where his former students and friends would be invited to bid for one of his prints, chosen at random. The [Getty held a retrospective of Teske's work](#) in 2004. See more of my B&W and color photos of [Edmund Teske at this link](#).



Edmund Teske at Topanga Corral © Elisa Leonelli 1976

My interest in art photography continued with a class taught by Robert Heinecken at UCLA in 1975. He was a charismatic teacher, but I was disappointed to find out that he did not use a camera to produce his artistic creations, he re-arranged found photographs into collages. To impress him, I created a nightmarish photo sequence inspired by the work of Duane Michaels, [Insect Fear](#). It was included in an artist portfolio magazine edited by Los Angeles writer Eve Babitz, *Manifesto LAX*, with cover art by Jon Van Hamersveld. In 2014 I was in New York and went to see [a retrospective](#)

of Heinecken's work at MOMA.



Karl Struss © Elisa Leonelli 1977

I frequented the photography galleries that opened in Los Angeles in 1975, G. Ray Hawkins, where they always held fun openings, and the Photo Album Gallery by Stephen White. When I saw an exhibit of photographs by [Karl Struss](#) in 1977, I discovered that he was a well-known cinematographer of movies like *Sunrise* (1927) by Murnau, *The Great Dictator* (1940) and *Limelight* (1952) by Chaplin. So I took his portrait and wrote an article for the NTRA Journal. I met Struss and his wife Ethel at their home, they were lively elderly people. See my [B&W photos of Karl Struss](#) and [read my article at this link](#).



Cover photo by Don Peterson

Another inspirational teacher was Don Peterson, I attended his class at UCLA in 1974 and we formed an enduring friendship, until his untimely death. See his COAST magazine cover from December 1974, mentioned in [my article about Vietnamese Refugees](#), [click link](#). Don had photographed a series of self-portraits where he was inside a giant Kodachrome box, only his legs showing, in front of California landmarks, such as the Golden Gate Bridge. He inspired a series of self portraits I took in December 1978 where I dressed as Santa Claus at various Los Angeles locations; the idea was to show that this fairytale land setting suited the spirit of Christmas. It was published in the prestigious photography magazine *Zoom*, both in their French and American editions. For the complete series [click on this link](#) of the [Elisa Leonelli Collection at Claremont Colleges Digital Library](#).



Zoom 1979

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