

Posthumous Award: Ralph Eugene Meatyard, class of 1943

Ralph Eugene "Gene" Meatyard was a 1943 graduate of University High School. He attended Williams College in 1943-1944 and then went to Wesleyan in 1950. In between, he served in the Navy, got married, and had three children. His growing family moved to Lexington, Kentucky where he became an optometrist. When his youngest child was born, Ralph borrowed a camera to take some baby pictures. From that moment forward, he was hooked by photography.

Gene's grasp of photography was mostly self-taught. What he wanted to show in his photos was much different from Ansel Adams' natural grandeur. Gene first wanted a "billboard element" to catch your eye and make you stop and look more closely at what he had done. His use of square black and white film, rubber masks, and movement make it difficult for the observer to understand his message.

The photos raise many questions about identity, anonymity, and particularity. They can seem terrifying or exhilarating to the observers. Many of his pictures involved his wife and his children wearing strange clothing and masks. All of his photography work was done on the weekend since he was still an optometrist working Monday through Friday.

Ralph Eugene Meatyard's name is discussed in high circles of photography along with Ansel Adams and Walker Evans; their styles are very different, but their impacts on society are similar. Gene died from cancer in 1972.

What is considered by many to be to the best collection of Gene's work with commentary and explanations is *Ralph Eugene Meatyard: The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater and Other Figurative Photographs* by James Rhem.

Gene's work is on display at The: Museum of Modern Art, George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, Smithsonian Institution, and many other important collections.