



An Aseema Story, Volume 5

## A Global Connection to Creativity

PITTSBURGH NAVY VETERAN ROB STROVERS' PASSION FOR ART SUPPORTS MUMBAI SLUM STUDENTS' EDUCATION DREAMS

For the past four years, **Rob Strovers**, [fine arts photographer](#), Navy veteran, and owner of Pittsburgh-based [Artistic Pursuits](#), has been a crucial affiliate of the Friends of Aseema (FoA) team. Aseema schools include a robust art program that is part of the international Room 13 art network and which yields stunning results. FoA sells high-quality prints of original works by Aseema students and young alumni.

Rob is responsible for printing each beautiful student art print sold in the [FoA Etsy store](#). All proceeds support Aseema.

Working with a small, U.S.-based, veteran-owned business like Rob's is an act of interconnectedness. **Christine Biancheria**, FoA founder, explains: "Everybody should care about everybody. The U.S. comprises only 4% of our inevitably interdependent and interconnected world. Buying an artwork created by a student in India that is printed with such care by Rob is simultaneously an act of supporting local business and global community."

### Detail-Oriented Encounter

Rob and Christine met at the height of the pandemic.

It began when Aseema ran an online, star-studded art auction in conjunction with Friends of Aseema and hosted by



**Rob Photographs His Lush Garden**

Artrepreneur, a global online art marketplace. Aseema auctioned original works of art by the children, and each child's painting was paired with an online celebrity meeting for its highest bidder. The goal was to raise money not only for education but also to sustain Aseema's children and their families through the COVID crisis. With parents unable to earn even meager wages at day-labor jobs due to COVID lockdowns, Aseema repeatedly delivered rations and school supplies to the families.

In addition to the auction, Aseema hoped to sell prints of the children's originals, including in the U.S. And so, Christine set off in search of a printmaker who could reproduce Aseema students' art at the highest quality. "We

*Aseema is a nongovernmental organization formed in 1995 that provides secular, high-quality education and medical care for thousands of impoverished children in Mumbai as well as a remote tribal region northeast of Mumbai.*

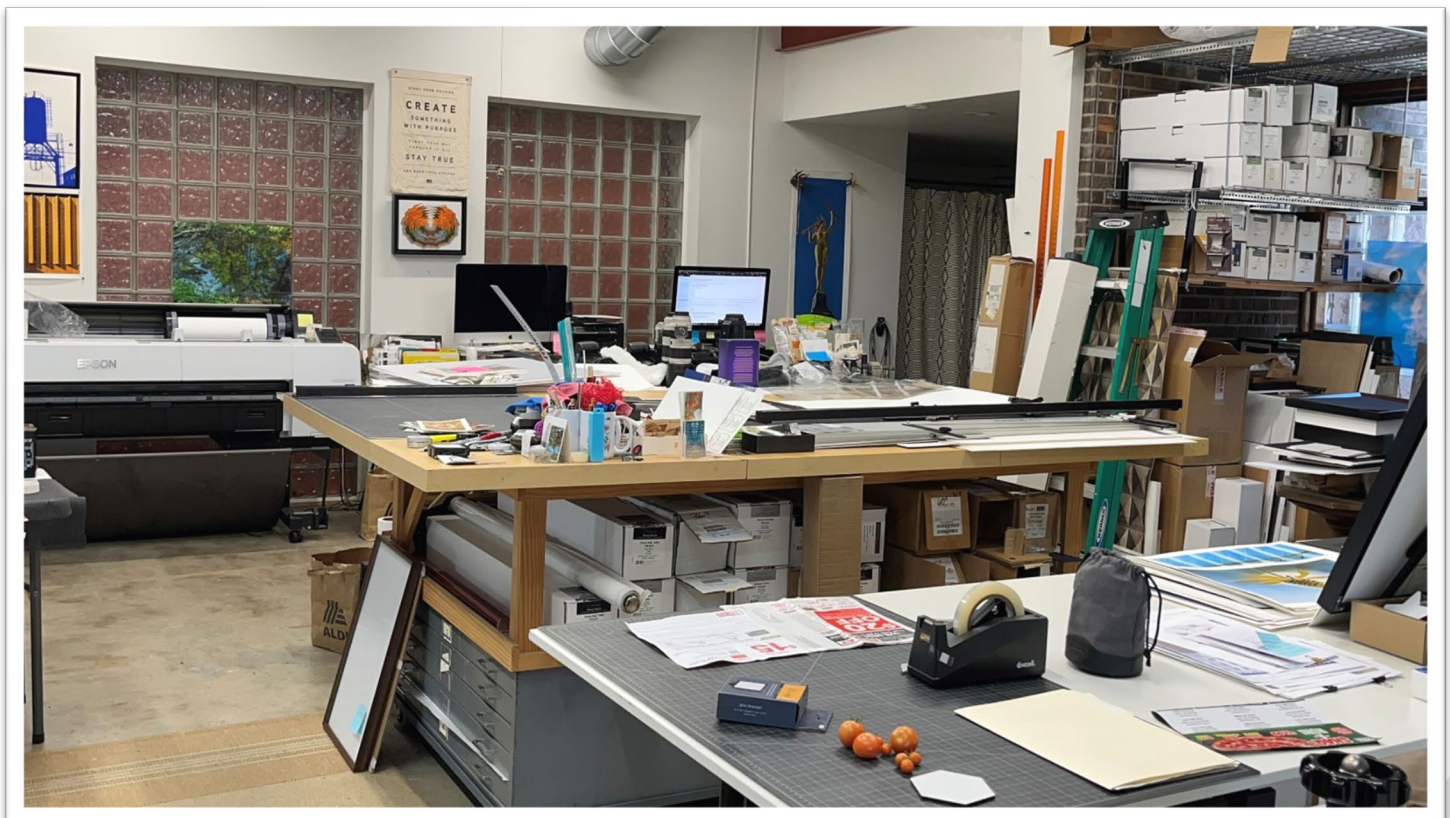
wanted the prints to capture the students' art boldly and faithfully," Christine says. "When buyers receive their prints in the mail and open them, we want those customers to stand stock-still, transfixed by the beauty of the print in their hands."

Aseema's head of art Varsha Trivedi, a gold medalist from one of India's best art schools with decades of experience, advised Christine to make the prints on Hahnemühle paper with 310 GSM, at which point it was Christine, a lawyer by training, who stood stock-still in confusion, not knowing what Hahnemühle paper was, much less what a GSM was.

With a tendency to perfectionism, Christine wanted to get it right, and thus the search began. After making multiple phone calls, the magic moment came when one printer suggested trying Artistic Pursuits. Christine

called Rob, who obviously spoke this new language of Hahnemühle paper and GSMs. Christine and FoA Vice President Tyler Gillett headed off to Rob's studio, where he lives and works. Entering Rob's workplace, Christine and Tyler immediately encountered machinery, computers, and cutting boards as well as breathtaking photographs and art hanging all around the room and perched on every available surface.

Rob took an image of an Aseema student's art called "Blue Lotus," printed it to the exact specifications, and began to cut it by hand. "Rob is an artist, an artisan. Rob is detail-oriented," she says. "He uses archival paper and inks as well as a protective compound that prevents the prints from fading. He has a great work ethic, and he obviously cares about the project."



***Art Studio and Printing Equipment***





**Rob Cutting “Blue Lotus” by Hand as a Demonstration**



**Rob’s Camera Collection**

## Lifelong Learner

An autodidact, Rob has acquired many skills over the years — often by taking things apart and putting them back together. As a kid, he wanted to be an illustrator, but with no encouragement from family, friends, or teachers, Rob graduated from high school begrudgingly and worked in the steel industry briefly, before joining the Navy, where he served six years here and overseas. “My dad was a career Air Force guy,” Rob explains. “So for me, joining the Navy seemed like as good a plan as any for someone who wasn’t able to go to college and didn’t know what he wanted to do other than be an illustrator.”

Rob’s dream to be an artist never left him, even after a 20-plus year, post-Navy career in the telecom industry that landed him stints in Texas, Wyoming, Buffalo, New York, and Pittsburgh, a city, he says, that “felt like a good place.” That career ended abruptly in 2000 with deregulation and 15,000 layoffs, one of which was Rob. Fortunately, when he was stationed in Germany, Rob bought his first camera and began taking photographs. “At first, I started shooting things I wanted to draw,” he explains.

“Then I got into photography for its own sake and taught myself composition, light, contrast, and color.”

After working odd jobs and caring for his ailing mother in Texas, Rob moved back to Pittsburgh where he began photographing the Steel Town’s many bridges, distinct neighborhoods, and gardens. He bought a decommissioned bank in the Observatory Hill neighborhood and gutted and reconfigured it into half living space, half photography studio and print shop.



**Living Room with Bank Vault Door**

He planted a large flower garden and started photographing the blooms and the pollinators they attracted. He bought the largest printer he could get his hands on and taught himself how to print posters and mat photos. He started a Google business of on-demand fine art prints. He also began selling his own photos to the public on Saturdays in a 10 ft.-by-10 ft. pop-up tent on the street in Pittsburgh's Strip District open air market.

### **Rob's Big Break**

For eight years, Rob's fine art prints and photos, especially his artistic shots of bridges, provided a steady income. Pittsburgh is home to more than 440 bridges. "Pittsburghers have their favorite bridges and liked my compositions," he says. One businessman liked them so much, he wanted bigger versions. Eventually, those framed photos graced the public spaces of a premier Pittsburgh hotel, which led to other corporate interest, including photo installations at a major Pittsburgh-based bank and its branches.

Finally, Rob had achieved his childhood dream of making a living as an artist. But really, Rob had been an artist all along.

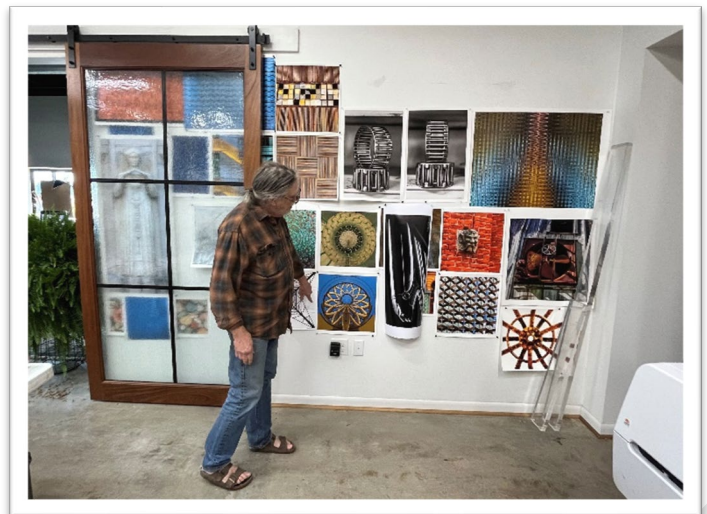
### **The Power of Encouragement**

Today, Rob continues to sell his art and to produce Aseema student art prints, which he has indexed meticulously. He marvels at the idea that street and slum children in Mumbai, India receive a life-changing education that encourages them to explore and expand their artistic talent. "I never received any encouragement to be an artist when I was a kid," he says matter-of-factly. "The Aseema students' art is so diverse and beautiful. It makes me wish I would have had the encouragement and instruction they have at the same age." As Christine likes to emphasize,

*"Aseema is a model for change anywhere."*



***A Larger Pittsburgh Bridge Photo by Rob***



***Rob Points Out a Pittsburgh Bridge Photo***