



MAINSTREETERS









# THE MAINSTREETERS

Kenneth Fletcher

Deborah Fong

Carol Hackett

Mary Janeway

Marlene MacGregor

Annastacia McDonald

Charles Rea

Jeanette Reinhardt

Paul Wong

A self-described “art gang” who lived along Vancouver’s Main Street from 1972 to 1982 and travelled the city with cameras, recording their findings, stagings, arguments, and experiments.



















Your my honeybee  
c'mon sting me  
Your my honey bee  
c'mon sting me

Do a little dance  
Make a little love,  
Get down tonight  
Get down tonight  
Do a little dance  
Make a little love  
Get down tonight  
Get dâwn tonight

Shame shame shame  
Shame on you  
If you cant dance too  
Shame shame shame  
Shame on you  
If you cant dance too



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May 17, 1976

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As previously discussed members of MAINSTREET INC. will host a late afternoon picnic on Quebec Street. The theme Summer 76. A select invitation list will be drafted at a later date. In keeping in the spirit, the spirit of kicking off Summer a special showing of "OUR SUMMER COLLECTIONS" what to wear when, trends past and present, how not to be seen will be displayed via a highly polished and choreographed show. EMPHASIS will be placed on these categories:

1. Mid Morning Ware
2. On the street (Mainstreet) Casuals
3. AQUATIC Wear (beachware, poolside and yachting)
4. Sportswear (Tupperware)
5. Yard Apparel (gardening, barbecues)
6. Dins Wear and After Hours

Designers in this presstige showing of SUMMER HAUTE COUTURE include:

ANNASATCIA  
RAMBI FONG  
KENNETH GORDON  
HOUSE OF WONG  
CHARMALCOSE CREATIONS

The event will be documented by carefully chosen members of the press. We assure the widest possible media coverage.

A reminder to assemble and catalogue all garments for this special collection. Please include all accessories (sunglasses, visors, jewellery)

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PRESS RELEASE

# 4

4 is the biographic/autobiographic story written for and played by the 5 performers. The story evolves around the 4 women. ANNASTACIA McDONALD, CAROL HACKETT, DEBORAH FONG, and JEANETTE REINHARDT collaborate with PAUL WONG. PAUL WONG directs and provides the necessary framework for the action to take place.

4 is a quadraphonic performance utilizing sound, music, live actions, text, slide projections and pre-recorded video.  
Running time: approx. 40 minutes 1979/1980

4 is derived from a unique accumulation of long-term intense Friendship, some 6 - 10 years of bonds, trust, and honesty. It is about living and growing in our times.

The 5 performers are members of MAINSTREET. Mainstreet is a group of friends, lovers, artists and non-artists alike who all live within a 6 block radius of each other in Vancouver. Mainstreet as individuals and as a 'non-chartered' group have been vital forces in 'new' art occurring in Vancouver and elsewhere.

This collaborative has participated in the recent LIVING ART PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL, are involved with the VIDEO INN and WESTERN FRONT, produces videotapes, co-ordinated the recent MONDO ARTE CABARET, were-involved with last year's slow-scan performances "HANDS ACROSS THE BORDER", a six-city interconnect, as well as "MAINSTREET SALUTES A DECADE OF GENERAL IDEA" slow-scan to the C.N. Tower, are co-editors of VIDEO GUIDE and ENNUI Magazine, as well as staging the MAINSTREET ANNUAL DRAG. Members past involvements includes- . extension programs of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Burnaby Art Gallery and the Surrey Arts Center, as well as numerous collaborations with other artists.

4 will preview at the Western Front on the 14th of January and will tour nationally. Tentative places include: Ottawa, Montreal, Kingston, London, Toronto, Buffalo, New York, Winnipeg, Regina, and Calgary.

4 is commissioned by the MUSIC GALLERY in Toronto and co-sponsored by the WESTERN FRONT. We acknowledge the assistance of the Canada Council Touring Office.

For further information, contact: MAINSTREET INC.  
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Vancouver, B.C.  
(604) 876-0650









## MAINSTREETERS

MICHAEL TURNER

My introduction to the Mainstreeters came not from an exhibition, a performance, or a critical text, but from a conversation overheard as a young writer alert to the stories of Vancouver's art and artists. Indeed, much of what I have learned about Vancouver's cultural ecology, as we sometimes still call it, came from such eavesdroppings. And so it was that my first memory of the Mainstreeters took shape at the now defunct Marine Club in the late 1980s, when writer Nancy Shaw, describing, for a tableful of writers and visual artists associated with the Kootenay School of Writing/Artspeak, an opening at the grunt gallery, concluded with the line "When the Mainstreeters showed up, we knew it was time to leave," which was followed by a round of knowing laughs.<sup>1</sup> Who were these Mainstreeters and why did their arrival hasten a departure? And what is it about this group that makes them important to a discussion of post-war Vancouver art?

This memory was recalled some twenty-five years later when grunt gallery director Glenn Alteen asked curator Allison Collins and I what we knew of the Mainstreeters and would we be interested in undertaking a research project on them for the gallery's online archive.<sup>2</sup> Additional recollections followed: some from subsequent eavesdroppings, some from what I had seen and heard of the group in the popular and critical media, and some from direct contact with



the group's members (half of whom I became acquainted with as my involvement in the local scene grew). Among my first responses to Glenn's proposal were questions I thought might find answers through the work he was offering. For example, could it be said that what the Mainstreeters accomplished in their heyday was more relevant now than at any time during their retirement as a self-identified collaborative "art gang"? Were they a missing link between those first intermedial conversations instigated by the Roy Kiyooka salons<sup>3</sup> of the early 1960s and self-funded social practice collectives such as Intermission<sup>4</sup> that emerged in Vancouver in the late 1990s?

But as the project developed, and Allison and I waded deeper into the Mainstreeters' archives—interviewing all but two of its members<sup>5</sup>—it became clear that there was both more and less to this group than I previously thought and that whatever conclusions could be drawn about their achievements might be better expressed in a publication that followed the completion of the online project and what was by then to be a concurrent Presentation House Gallery-sponsored exhibition of the group's art and artefacts.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this text, then, I would like to focus my discussion not just on the emergence and eventual relaxation of the Mainstreeters as a collaborative act, but on the city in which that act played out. Of particular interest is how they reflected—and were shaped by—the ever-transitioning city of Vancouver, and what can be learned from a group that, for some, remains a perceptual force more than an actual one, a Greek chorus to those for whom art objects, rather than gestures, will always carry the narrative.<sup>7</sup>

The temporal frame Allison and I arrived at for the Mainstreeters project is 1972–1982. It begins in the year that half the group graduated from Sir Charles Tupper Secondary School and ends with them no longer acting as an "incorporated" artist collective—as evidenced by Paul Wong's singularly authored *Prime Cuts* (1981), whose hierarchical production credits behave closer to those used in Vancouver's then-emerging commercial film and television industry than those used by similarly structured, glamour-oriented artist

collectives like General Idea.<sup>8</sup> Another correspondence has 1972 as the year British Columbians elected a New Democratic government—the province's first left-wing government after years of paternal Social Credit capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Because of this, together with the relatively social-democratic Liberal government in Ottawa<sup>10</sup> and a municipal government (TEAM) that was at least tolerant of social programs,<sup>11</sup> underprivileged youth like the Mainstreeters suddenly had options hitherto unavailable to them in a city that had been, at least overtly, more intent on enabling private development than on balancing such development with the needs of a larger and more varied public.<sup>12</sup>

One such option was a project funded by the federal Liberal government's Local Initiatives Program (LIP), a "short-lived, large-scale job assistance program that sought to support social, cultural, and humanitarian activities while channelling youthful energies toward productive ends."<sup>13</sup> For the hippie-ish Mainstreeters, most of whom had come together as an artistic entity through Tupper's "more open," arts-oriented curriculum,<sup>14</sup> this meant employment through the Vancouver Art Gallery's Extension Program, where Paul Wong, Kenneth Fletcher, Deborah Fong, Anastacia McDonald, and Jeanette Reinhardt taught arts and crafts to neighbourhood kids at a boarded-up Riley Park baseball stadium.<sup>15</sup> But in addition to employment opportunities, the LIP and VAG programs also provided the Mainstreeters with hands-on educational opportunities; specifically, workshops on how to operate and maintain a video camera, as hosted by Intermedia-affiliated artists like Michael Goldberg, with whom the group teamed up to help form the Satellite Video Exchange Society and its storefront presence, Video Inn, the following year.<sup>16</sup>

While it would seem that the Mainstreeters' affiliation with Video Inn allowed the group entrée into the Vancouver art scene, it should be remembered that, in a city defined by art school educated, abstracted landscape painters and similarly trained art-as-life explorers, video was not generally accepted as a discrete artistic medium and that artist-run centres (today a staple of the local scene) were limited to what was by 1972 a moribund Intermedia.<sup>17</sup>

A further complication in the recognition of the Mainstreeters as a legitimate artistic force was their lack of post-secondary artistic training. Another concerned their geographical location in a city where artists either lived in downtown Vancouver warehouses, in Westside neighbourhoods like Fairview Slopes or Kitsilano, or in architect-designed homes in the adjacent municipality of West Vancouver—not in Vancouver’s working-class, ethnic East End.

Implied in the name Mainstreeters is an identification with a street that was for many years the social and cultural dividing line between Vancouver’s eastern neighbourhoods and those of its well-heeled, primarily Anglo, Westside. Thus, if 1972–1982 is the temporal frame through which to view the group as a collective unit, this east–west divide is its spatial equivalent—a divide created, as it were, by the real estate ambitions of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late nineteenth century,<sup>18</sup> but a divide that has all but vanished in a city where a “freak show” housing market has made every house in Vancouver unaffordable for most of its residents.<sup>19</sup> With that said, although it would be a mistake to argue that Vancouver had completely re-spatialized by 1982, certain political economic forces were at work to downplay the province’s historic labour–management polarities in favour of promoting a more fluid, market-friendly entrepreneurial subject primed for what the reformatted Social Credit government of 1975 would—after receiving an even bigger majority in 1982—eventually refer to as a “new reality.” This declaration, based on an alleged fiscal crisis that, according to the “Socreds,” would require a program of government “restraint” in public spending,<sup>20</sup> mirrored policies adopted by equally ideologically motivated governments in the United Kingdom and the United States, both of which sought to decrease the role of government through the deregulation of private industry and set the stage for the market society that many global subjects find themselves “participating” in today.

The evolution of the Mainstreeters from progressively educated East End schoolkids and beneficiaries of multi-level government social programs to a group that, at their first formal meeting in 1976, chose

incorporation (“Mainstreeters, Inc.”) as an organizational model for their entrepreneurial activities (a modelling agency, a fashion magazine, costume jewellery production, “drag ball” promotion, etc.) finds a parallel in the province’s own transition from a 1972 NDP government that, in three short years, attempted to build a provincial welfare state<sup>21</sup> to a returning 1975 Social Credit government that saw in this welfare state an impediment to foreign investment and, once again, private development. A more telling proposition, however, might be the group’s resistance to what had been, since the mid-1960s hippie era through to the crash-and-burn punk era of the late-1970s, a north–south civic reorientation based on youth culture’s abandonment of staid suburbs like Surrey and Delta and boring inner-city neighbourhoods like Marpole and Oakridge for the free-wheeling demimondes of Vancouver’s West End and its grittier downtown Eastside.<sup>22</sup>

When Paul Wong’s *Prime Cuts* (1981) premiered, reviews were largely negative. Few understood that this was not a video in search of a subject, however “shallow,” but a neo-liberal “new reality” playground, a Marienbad for those who believed that the pages of fashion magazines were *in media res* snapshots of the lives of those inhabiting them—in this instance, young models-for-hire who looked like they were moving in and out of the monochromatic panels of an Ian Wallace photo-painting, if as subjects they were not so glamorous, and if Vancouver were not a resource port but the exclusive resort it has over the past quarter century become. Perhaps compounding the negative response to *Prime Cuts* was its comparison to previous works authored (and peopled) by Wong and the other Mainstreeters—works such as ‘4’ (1981), whose video element features the group at their manic, punk-rock orneriest, or *in ten sity* (1978), a multi-channel video installation whose scheduled solo performance by Wong was violently crashed, and ultimately enhanced, by Carol Hackett, Anastacia McDonald, and Charles Rea. Taken together, these three videos can be read as a triptych that addresses how the Mainstreeters dealt with and overcame the suicide death of its frailest member, Kenneth Fletcher, in 1976, but also how Wong’s attempts to assert himself, as an individual and as a solo artist, was challenged (*in ten sity*),



remediated ('4') and, finally, accepted (*Prime Cuts*). If there is a third reading, it might speak to the passing of civic, provincial, and federal governments that were there for this “art gang” when its members had little more than their enthusiasm, imagination, and rage for a world that wanted them, then didn't, then wanted them to behave.

*Michael Turner is a Vancouver-based writer of fiction, criticism, and song.*

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- 1 Nancy Shaw (1962–2007) was a writer, artist, critic, curator, and educator associated with the Kootenay School of Writing (1984–), a collective dedicated to the advancement of a socially and formally critical literature. In 1986, KSW helped to form (and house) Artspeak, an artist-run centre whose mandate—“to explore visual art at the intersection of text and language”—remains operative today.
  - 2 The title *Alteen* had assigned to the project was *Taking Advantage*. Eventually this title became part of the project's subtitle, *Mainstreeters: Taking Advantage, 1972–1982*.
  - 3 Roy Kiyooka (1926–1994) is widely regarded as one of Canada's first interdisciplinary artists. Upon arriving in Vancouver from Regina to take a teaching position at the Vancouver School of Art in 1959, Kiyooka's provocations quickly extended beyond a critique of the importance of regional styles in painting (abstracted landscape) to questions concerning the singular pursuit of painting, or any medium, in relation to the larger question of what it means to be both an artist and a social being in an increasingly globalized world.
  - 4 Intermission Artists Society was a collective originally founded by then Emily Carr Institute of Art students Marianne Bos, Derek Brunen, Khan Lee, and Brady Marks in 1998. According to its website, the group “was initially formed through a common interest in experimentation and a dedication to facilitating the realization of each other's desires.” Soon enough these “desires” extended beyond its membership. <http://www.inter-mission.org/founding.html>.
  - 5 Of the eight core Mainstreeters: Marlene MacGregor, Jeanette Reinhardt, and Paul Wong consented to an audio-video interview; Deborah Fong and Charles Rea agreed to in-studio audio interviews; Anastacia McDonald agreed to an audio interview under the condition that it not be broadcast; Carol Hackett did not consent to be interviewed, but gave the project her blessing during the preparation of its first grant; Kenneth Fletcher passed away in 1976.
  - 6 The exhibition *Mainstreeters: Taking Advantage, 1972–1982* ran from January 9 to March 14, 2015, at the now-defunct Satellite Gallery at 560 Seymour Street. Included in the exhibition were displays of scanned photographs (snapshots, performance documents), correspondence, and issues of *Ennui* magazine; drawings, paintings, and costume jewellery (Plastic AMP); unedited video footage and completed video works such as the *Mainstreet Tapes* (1974–1981), *Murder Research* (1977), *in tens sity* (1978/2005), '4' (1981), and *Prime Cuts* (1981).
  - 7 Competing views of post-war Vancouver art tend to focus on ascendant forms of either object or gestural production. The first ranges from abstracted landscape painting and photo-based post-conceptual pictures to a sculptural/installation project that swings between collage and montage; the latter includes multidisciplinary/intermedial actions and the development of artist-run collectives/centres to more recent relational and social practices.

- 8 As well as General Idea—the Toronto-based collective founded in 1969 by Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal, and AA Bronson—the Western Front hosted the architecture and design collective Ant Farm (founded by Chip Lord and Doug Michels) in this period. For one of its projects, Ant Farm teamed up with another San-Francisco based collective T.R. Uthco (Diane Andrews Hall, Doug Hall, Jody Procter) to recreate the Zapruder footage of the Kennedy Assassination. The resultant work, *The Eternal Frame* (1975), is in some ways an inversion of Kenneth Fletcher and Paul Wong's conceptual photo-sequence *Murder Research* (1977). Whereas the former is derived from Super-8mm film images of a murder as it is being “executed,” the latter is a 35mm still-camera cine-poem that begins with the discovery of Eugene Lloyd Pelly's body, chronicles its removal by local police, and ends with the impression of the body left in the snow. (Only later, at the city morgue, was it determined that the cause of Pelly's death was murder.)
  - 9 Apart from the BC NDP government's three-year term of office (1972–1975), the BC Social Credit Party held power continuously from 1952 to 1991. In 2013, after running less than two candidates in two consecutive elections, the party was de-registered by Elections BC.
  - 10 Similarly, apart from a 273-day Progressive Conservative minority government in 1979, the Federal Liberal's held parliamentary power from 1963 to 1984.
  - 11 From 1972 to 1978 the Electors' Action Movement (TEAM) held the majority of seats on Vancouver City Council and provided a centrist “alternative” to the left-wing Committee of Progressive Electors (COPE) party and the right-wing Non-Partisan Association (NPA). As Donald Gutstein puts it: “The only difference between the TEAM-dominated city council and the Non-Partisan Association (NPA) city council that preceded it is that NPA gave the developers *even more than* they wanted, whereas TEAM gives them *slightly less than* they ask for.” Donald Gutstein, *Vancouver Ltd* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1975), 21.
  - 12 Gutstein identifies three strata of private developers prominent in Vancouver: “local, such as Ben Wosk, the Bentall family, Block Bros; the big eastern developers such as Cemp Investments (the Bronfman family), Marathon Realty Co. (CPR); and the foreign developers such as the Guinness family (British Pacific Properties, the Guinness Tower), and Grosvenor-Laing (Project 200).” *Ibid*, 7.
  - 13 <http://www.contemporaryartgallery.ca/exhibitions/lip-service/> The Mainstreeters, however, benefited mostly from a related federal program, Opportunity for Youth (OFY).
  - 14 Charles Rea speaking of the Mainstreeters' “art room” at Sir Charles Tupper Secondary School. <https://vimeo.com/111684396> (6:20).
  - 15 Stadium Gallery, as it was called, was an experimental extension project of the Vancouver Art Gallery in what is now Nat Bailey Stadium. After getting the premises in shape with the help of local kids, the Mainstreeters ran free workshops and special events which, as listed in the flyer, included “rock bands, ethnic bands, folk singers, movies. In addition, there has been extensive use of the baseball diamonds by the two leagues of organized hardball and many softball games by various groups of people. Our own workshops included painting, life drawing, batik and tie-dye (sic), macrame, weaving, collage, etching, photography, candle-making, leatherwork etc. We have a library, an exhibition space, a darkroom, a workshop complete with power tools, a trampoline, a theatre. A kitchen, teen drop-in room and acoustically good areas for special events are being added. Workshops will be extended in the fall to include more specialized areas such as pottery, silkscreen, and graphics.” <http://www.takingadvantage.ca/images/pages/Stadium-Gallery-Flyer.pdf>
- The Satellite Video Exchange Society emerged from the Matrix Video Conference co-organized by Michael Goldberg and Trish Hardman at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1973. (Two years earlier, Goldberg, in collaboration with Image Bank, had sent postcards around the world, calling on groups and individuals to form a network for the free exchange of non-commercial videotape, as a result of which the first International Video Exchange Directory was published.) Admission to the conference involved depositing a videotape and filling out a

Video Exchange Directory card. Shawn Preus and Paul Wong, recruited to work on Matrix, spent much of their time dubbing copies of tapes. These became the base for a new, publicly accessible video collection, the Satellite Video Exchange Society. Both Annastacia McDonald and Paul Wong were co-founding directors. The centre, later known as Video Inn, eventually built up a store of equipment to facilitate new production and host workshops. In 1980, Video Inn began a distribution wing (founded by Jeanette Reinhardt), Video Out.

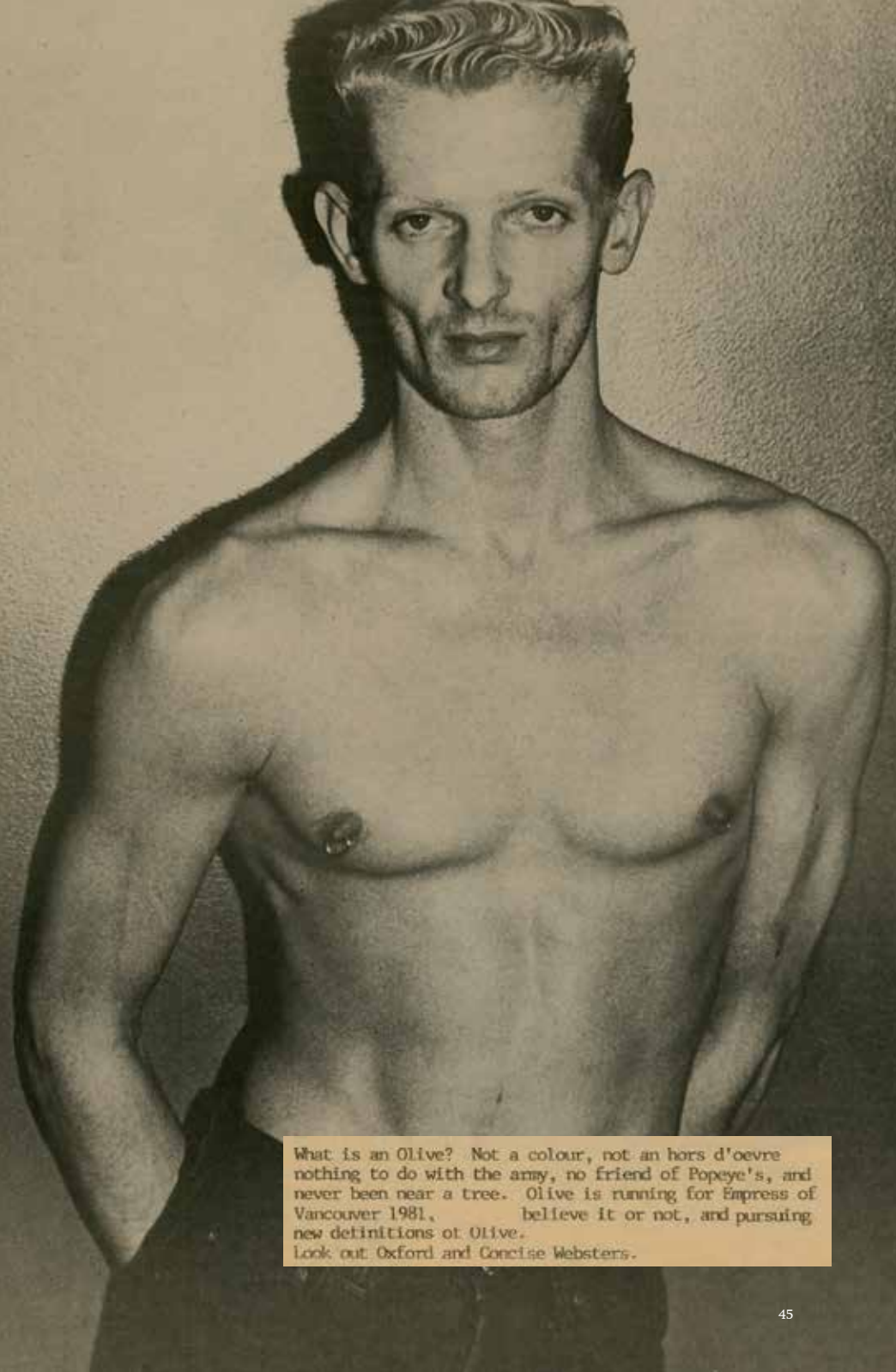
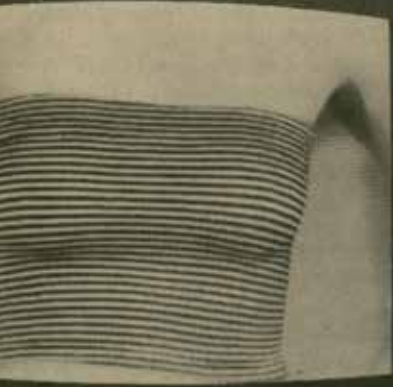
- 17 On the decline of Intermedia (1967–1972) as a place where artists could “work with various media in a non-structured, free-ranging manner, with no a priori determinants,” Vancouver curator Alvin Balkind writes: “Its democratic policy was a Pandora’s Box. A number of Mickey Mouse artists and axe-grinding dialecticians had jumped on the bandwagon, nudging the talented artists aside and competing for the electronic equipment and the Roneo.” Alvin Balkind, “Body Snatching: Performance Art in Vancouver—A View of Its History,” in *Living Art Vancouver* (Vancouver: Western Front/Pumps/Video Inn, 1980), 73–74. Regarding the publishers of the text from which Balkind is quoted, it should be noted that Video Inn and Western Front were formed in 1973 and continue to this day, while the more loosely structured Pumps opened its doors in 1976 before closing them in 1980.
- 18 For a critical history of the CPR’s role in the making of Vancouver as both a city and a real estate market, see Gutstein, *Vancouver Ltd.* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1975). Here, the author details how in 1885 Granville city officials gave the CPR enormous tracts of land in exchange for making what is now Vancouver, not Port Moody, the terminus of its national railway. The largest land gift given to the CPR was a roughly eight square-mile tract between Trafalgar Street and Ontario Street, a block west of Main. It is from Ontario Street east that the numbered avenues have “East” before them.
- 19 See Nancy Macdonald’s May 10, 2016 *Maclean’s* interview with the *South China Morning Post* Vancouver correspondent Ian Young on the particularities of Vancouver’s “unaffordability crisis.” <http://www.macleans.ca/economy/economicanalysis/ian-young-on-vancouvers-freak-show-housing-market/>.
- 20 In his *BC Studies* No. 68 Winter 1985/86 review of *The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia*, Warren Magnusson et al., eds. (Vancouver: New Star, 1984), Mel Watkins writes: “While the book ranges widely over the multitudinous crimes of the Socred government, one theme stood out for this reviewer, perhaps because I am an economist. It is that there never was a fiscal crisis in BC that required a restraint program. There was an economic crisis, but that is a different matter, and it was simply worsened by alleging a fiscal crisis and tailoring policy thereto instead of to the real crisis.” <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/article/view/1223/1267>.
- 21 “During its relatively brief time in office, the Barrett [NDP] government set a legislative pace unmatched before or since, averaging more than two bills a week, enacting in total 367 pieces of legislation.” Geoff Meggs and Rod Mickleburgh, *The Art of the Impossible: Dave Barrett and the NDP in Power 1972–1975* (Madeira Park: Harbour, 2012), 326.
- 22 Why the Mainstreeters remained on the east–west divide of the southern part of the city is a question that brings to mind a somewhat less cohesive “school” of critically and commercially successful photo-based Vancouver artists who, when asked why they did not leave Vancouver for more art-friendly cities, have also refused anything resembling a coherent answer. One explanation could be as simple as narrative control: the further the Mainstreeters entered into the downtown core, the more they would be held to its terms, and thus determined by them. What the Mainstreeters had achieved as a collaborative unit was theirs, on their terms. Why mess with it?











What is an Olive? Not a colour, not an hors d'oeuvre nothing to do with the army, no friend of Popeye's, and never been near a tree. Olive is running for Empress of Vancouver 1981. believe it or not, and pursuing new definitions of Olive. Look out: Oxford and Concise Websters.



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ALTERNATIVE VIDEO

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EPISODE #4

## CAST FOR ALL OCCASIONS,



DEBORAH FONG

DENNIS MILLS

ALISTER BROWN

JERRY McBRIDE



EPISODE #7

## SUPPORT MODELLING

A TALENT AGENCY

Photography: John Schneider  
 Concept Design: Paul Wong for Support Modelling  
 Wedding: Deborah Formal Rentals  
 Props: Vancouver Playhouse  
 Minister: Alan Gussman  
 Production: Western Front, Mainstreet Inc., Enrol



JOHNNY BELLAS

GINA DANIELS

JEANETTE REINHARDT

MARK OLIVER







Th a ever popular and versatile denim cutoffs by GORDON. slashed high on the left thigh for unhampered total movement. At the height of fashion after three years of wear and tear

EMPHASIS ON YOUTH UNISEX

At the height of casual summer fashion after three years of steady wear and tear we present to you the ever popular and versatile denim cutoff. slashed high on the left thigh for unhampered total mobility. Alluring but outright crude. This cut off with two full pockets in the front and patch pockets in the back maintains minimum wear with maximum capacity. Snaps and lubricated zipper for ease on and off. Styled by Gordon modelling by.....

A  
for the dark of summer nights

for the dark and cool of summer nights ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ House of wong dramatically brings you the casual but ~~xxxx~~ elegant outfit of basic black. From head to toe it is but a total outfit. The precision ~~xxxx~~ styled by Brute Scissors, The new York Mythology edition of

whit on black Fetish T-Shirts purchased through Art Metropole in Toronto. At 5\$ it is a fashion Bargain. The whole basis for this designer is flash with little cash. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ The European cut as you can see is the summer favorite, this black corduroy is semi wide for minimum swaying and maximum air circulation. Around the waist the line the belt woven cotton belt as found in Army surplus stores is the right accessory with the silver buckle to accent the entire ensemble





## SLOW MOSH MAINSTREETERS UNDONE

ALLISON COLLINS

The history chronicled in the Mainstreeters project, like the mythology it re-animates, is relayed through hearsay, oral testimony, photographs, video, and ephemera—all shadows cast by a group of young artists brought together in bonds of friendship, as lovers and chosen family, collaborators and co-conspirators. These three men and five women may be called an artist collective or—a more apt term, given their creative rabble-rousing—a gang. They called themselves “Mainstreeters,” claiming their home turf as integral to a collective identity, a stand-in for other types of affiliation (ethnicity, class, religion, etc.). They belonged to the Vancouver neighbourhood of lower Main Street, between 10th and 45th Avenues, a place that, for the better part of the decade between 1972 and 1982, was the frame for many of their pursuits; a space both full of potential and, at times, a host to conflict.<sup>1</sup>

This neighbourhood of low- and middle-income families became the ground for *Murder Research* (1977), their most well-remembered project. Issuing from the aftermath of a violent act accidentally witnessed, the story begins in an apartment shared by Paul Wong and Jeanette Reinhardt with a laneway view onto “Watson Strasse.”<sup>2</sup> On the morning of 26 February 1976, Reinhardt looked out the window and saw a dead body lying in plain sight. While she hid behind a locked door, Wong grabbed his camera and took pictures, first through the

window and then down in the street.<sup>3</sup> His images, captured on a single roll of 35mm film, document the fate of the body, from the moment of its discovery, to the coroner's visit and pronouncement, to the eerie shadow-print of blood and snow left behind on the cold concrete.

Instead of remaining a singular if somewhat gruesome document, this opportune recording of an encounter with death evolved when the murdered man, Eugene Lloyd Pelly, became the basis for a group research project. By the time of its completion, nearly four eventful years later, *Murder Research* was realized in a variety of formats—as a sequence of photographs accompanied by texts, a live slideshow, a video, a publication, and an archive of documents, images, and ephemera. The project—problematic, difficult, poignant, and sad—was a conscious reworking of journalistic prying into the misery of a solitary, violent death and of the media sensationalism and attendant cultural voyeurism that surrounded it. Throughout their work on the project, the Mainstreeters' made use of an idiosyncratic methodology involving first-hand observations and data gathering, photographic re-stagings, and intensive collecting of documents including: official statistics; found images of weapons, violent acts, and scarred bodies; and quotes from favourite authors, like Jean Genet<sup>4</sup> and Gertrude Stein.<sup>5</sup> This behaviour follows the larger trajectory of their practice of collective performance-as-life, which was both naive and influenced by their community of peers, and ultimately demonstrates their desire to chart an avenue of intimate reflection through an intense and very public terrain of trauma.

By the time work began on *Murder Research*, the Mainstreeters had developed a practice of performing for the camera. Beginning with the adoption of "Mainstreeters" as a group personae, posing together for photos and videos soon extended into social behaviours that established their place in the Vancouver community. Striking an *enfant terrible* attitude in their gritty glam clothes, they were initially recognized less for being "artists" than for being "Mainstreeters," remarked upon for their fashion and wild parties. But starting with the *Mainstreet Tapes* (1974–81), they turned their "local" identity into fodder

for art-making. Whether observing their surroundings by walking the neighbourhood or shining spotlights on each other's personalities by taping "televised" gossipy interviews, they manipulated these constructs to create a new social reality for themselves as artists, despite their lack of economic advantages or post-secondary training.<sup>6</sup> Certainly this process of self-fashioning was a means to build up their credibility, but it was also a common artistic practice at that time.

The group's performative and collective working process was a starting point for their portrayal of Pelly's death. For *Murder Research*, they performed the roles of witnesses-turned-detectives and—through gesture, documentation, archiving, and pictorial re-enactments—inscribed themselves in the murder case. Using their own bodies as conduits for expression, the group staged violent scenarios for the camera—limbs locked in violent embraces, sharp objects positioned threateningly—to mimic the love-hate tensions they read or imagined had led up to Pelly's death. They tracked the news for details and followed the trail of evidence into the library and city morgue. Armed with an official press card, they captured and recorded whatever they could find: newspaper articles, images of Pelly's corpse, video footage of news reports, copies of the coroner's report. In digging for facts, they learned that Pelly was a First Nations man, and therefore statistically more likely to suffer a violent death; that he was the victim of a domestic dispute; and that his accused killer, Jeffrey Alfred Gladeau, himself a First Nations man, was, in all likelihood, also a victim of a criminal justice system plagued by racism and inequity. This fact was underscored on 29 March 1976, when Gladeau was found hanging in his cell while awaiting trial. His death was duly entered into the Mainstreeters' files.

The Mainstreeters' manipulation of image through endless posing for an omnipresent camera—a self-conscious blending of personality and strategy as social performance—was at the centre of their working process, if not always the final product.<sup>7</sup> As *Murder Research* evolved from research and re-enactment into a carefully crafted narrative, evidence of their group dynamic of play and posture faded.



Treating the media circulating around the murder as a metonym for larger considerations of social justice, Wong took ownership of the content and arrived at the final form of the project: a tightly edited photographic book (and corresponding set of framed photographic prints) in which the roll of film taken of Pelly becomes a formal sequence of images showing the transformation of an individual into a “victim.” The narration offers up Pelly’s death as an opportunity to expand on the journalism around death.<sup>8</sup> The result is a sequence with different mediations, factual and abstract, on the meaning of one such tragedy.

In June of 1978, approximately a year after the first public presentation of *Murder Research* at the Vancouver-based artist-run centre Western Front,<sup>9</sup> Mainstreeter Kenneth Fletcher hanged himself from the ceiling of his bedroom. The loss of this shy, inward, creative young man devastated the group, testing their physical and emotional limits as a family and tearing into them a deep wound that has never truly healed. The emotional toll of this act was very intense, and initially too difficult to share with anyone outside the group, and so—as they tell it years later—they “closed ranks.”<sup>10</sup> The traces of Fletcher’s life became the focus of intense group scrutiny. Taking up residence in his home, they mothered his cats and created videos and photographs of everything in sight, including one another. The cataloguing of mementos and relics was in keeping with their group practice of embodying pain and trauma through image-making, but here served a crucial function in recording and processing Fletcher’s disappearance from their world. Bowling pins, cats, photographs of Patti Smith, and scribbled notes, all became sacred indexes of his artistic labours and evidence of his unrealized potential.

Included in this archive of loss are a series of photographs documenting Fletcher’s battle with depression, some taken by Carol Hackett when she accompanied him into the hospital for a CT scan. The lens captures Fletcher’s prone body lit by a window and is penetrated by his gaze as he stares pensively back at his friend and collaborator. This private record figures the group’s

intimacy, and eerily parallels Fletcher and Wong’s earlier visit to the city morgue in pursuit of Pelly’s body. Despite a similar impulse to document personal tragedy, Fletcher’s presence was not to be abstracted or turned into a metaphor. While pictures of him from this period became part of a photographic memorial collage, the most graphic depictions of previous acts of self-harm, in which his wrists show evidence of violent tearing, were never released.

The circumstances of Fletcher’s death have today, somewhat inevitably, cast his early performance photographs and video works in a different light. *Camp Potlatch* (1976), his re-enactment of a boyhood ritual, using a metal comb to score the skin on the back of his hand and drawing forth beads of blood with swoops of a swinging arm, has acquired a sad edge. Instead of a harmless ritual of bravado, isolated as a close-up image of his cut hand, Fletcher’s unflinching fascination with blood rituals becomes a forewarning of his future despair. His inquiry into the vulnerability of bodies continued in a video collaboration with Wong entitled *60 Unit Bruise* (1976). Together, the pair withdraw sixty units of blood from his vein and inject the syringe into Wong’s back, forming a large purple bruise for the camera.<sup>11</sup> Both works testify to a direct intention to pierce the body and foreground Fletcher’s willingness to put his own blood into public gestures of intimacy.

When Fletcher died, the neighbourhood itself seemed no longer capable of containing the Mainstreeters’ work. Conflicts among the group began to heighten and became notable recurring themes in their collaborations. The climactic synthesis of this escalating abuse and violence took form as two discrete works, *in ten sity* (1978) and ‘4’ (1981), which also marked the end of their collaborative period, as the role-play that had previously taken productive forms began slowly to pull them apart.

Soon after Fletcher’s suicide, Wong was invited to make a new work at the Vancouver Art Gallery. In tribute to his friend, he created a performance consisting of a padded cell with an eight-channel video installation/live feed. To a soundtrack of Fletcher’s favourite music,

*in ten sity* saw Wong in a desperate endurance act of self-flagellation through slam dancing. The performance reached a crescendo when the Mainstreeters climbed the walls of the cell to join him. The improvised mosh-pit introduced an element of danger, as the confined space became full of elbows, hair, heads, arms, and legs thrashing about. As this performance indicated, Wong was emerging from the group as a promising solo artist, albeit with a behind-the-scenes process that continued to involve his Mainstreeter family. They helped him to build the *in ten sity* installation, each day's labour followed by a night of communal excess. In the Mainstreeter archive, the bodies that appear as blurs and piles on beds, or crowded over hot knives at the stove, are the same bodies that would collide in catharsis during the *in ten sity* performance.

While Wong's career gathered momentum, the group identity further atomized in a kind of slow mosh. Mary Janeway, Charles Rea, and Carol Hackett together started *Ennui* magazine, an assemblage of fashion, lifestyle imagery, graphic work, and interviews with artists in their community. The Mainstreeter women stepped forward together in other ways. Reinhardt, Hackett, Annastacia McDonald, and Deborah Fong became the collective subject of a new work, '4', which can be read today as a re-staging of the group's domestic dysfunction. Once again using performance and video as a narrative strategy, the group acted out jarring scenes of decidedly "low-class" activities like petty theft and sexual exploitation. In the video, the four women are framed together as one entity and Wong is framed separately and alone, their efforts and difficulties to get along with him, and with one another, exploding into drunken screaming matches. Wong went solo for his next work, *Prime Cuts* (1981). He steered clear of self-expression, hiring actors, not Mainstreeters, to posture and play in this ironic celebration of glamour and image culture. As he describes it now, *Prime Cuts* was a direct and conscious move away from the group, which at the time seemed capable of only spiralling down further.

And yet, however difficult the Mainstreeters' reckoning with violence may have been in these years, the possibility of adequately recognizing subjectivities and experiences was always in the foreground of their

lives and art. Along with the group's fascination with death went a vigorous all-inclusive embrace of life, which manifested in their work. As recorders and image-makers of their time, the Mainstreeters stand in stark contrast to the picture of an artist offered today. Exploratory, experimental, sometimes abusive, theirs was a "social media" that lacked the sanitized boundaries of self-censorship.

*Allison Collins is a writer and independent curator, as well as Media Curator at Western Front, Vancouver.*

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- 1 It was with an undeniable sense of responsibility that we allowed ourselves to take advantage of the Mainstreeters' openness and generosity. Their tendency to act together, as one collective body, is most cohesively explored through the images they have left behind. Prior to our curatorial intervention, these archives were stored away in the private homes and studios of the remaining members. Lingered over the questions raised by them, we have been mindful of the care needed to avoid nostalgic historical revisionism. Our intention from the start was to engage the group in the construction of a social history of sorts, and we have assembled this book from the Mainstreeters' image archive in that spirit, proposing it as an important staging ground for further exploration of this era in Vancouver.
  - 2 Watson "Strasse" was the group's pet name for the tiny road on which Reinhardt and Wong lived. Always playing to the imaginary, they cast the location as a foreign-sounding, glamorous space, in sharp contrast to the working-class culture of the neighbourhood, and an ironic equivalent of "Robson Strasse," one of the core retail thoroughfares in downtown Vancouver.
  - 3 Paul Wong and Jeanette Reinhardt, personal interviews, April 2014.
  - 4 "He could know that every murder obeys, in its execution as well as in its motivation, certain laws that make it into a work of art. Besides the moral solitude of Querelle and Gil there was the solitude of the artist who cannot admit of any authority, not even that of a fellow craftsman." Jean Genet, quoted in Kenneth Fletcher and Paul Wong, *Murder Research*, David Hlynsky ed. (Toronto: image nation, 1980).
  - 5 "In the nineteenth century when they wanted it to be a mystery they ended it with a dead man in the twentieth century when they want it to be a mystery they begin it with a dead man." Gertrude Stein, *ibid.*
  - 6 *Support Modelling*, for instance, is a further development of the re-enactment photos made during *Murder Research*. A sometime modelling agency that later manifested in the photo spreads of *Ennui* magazine, *Support Modelling's* earliest photo-shoots saw



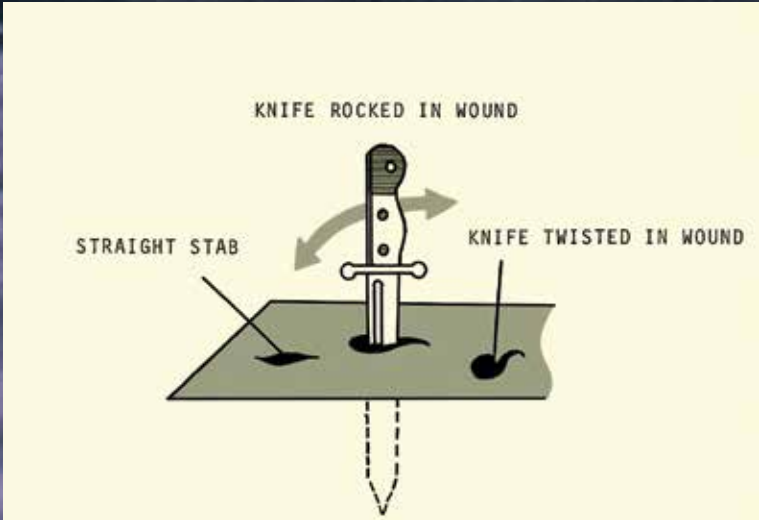
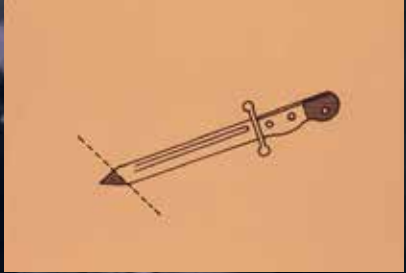
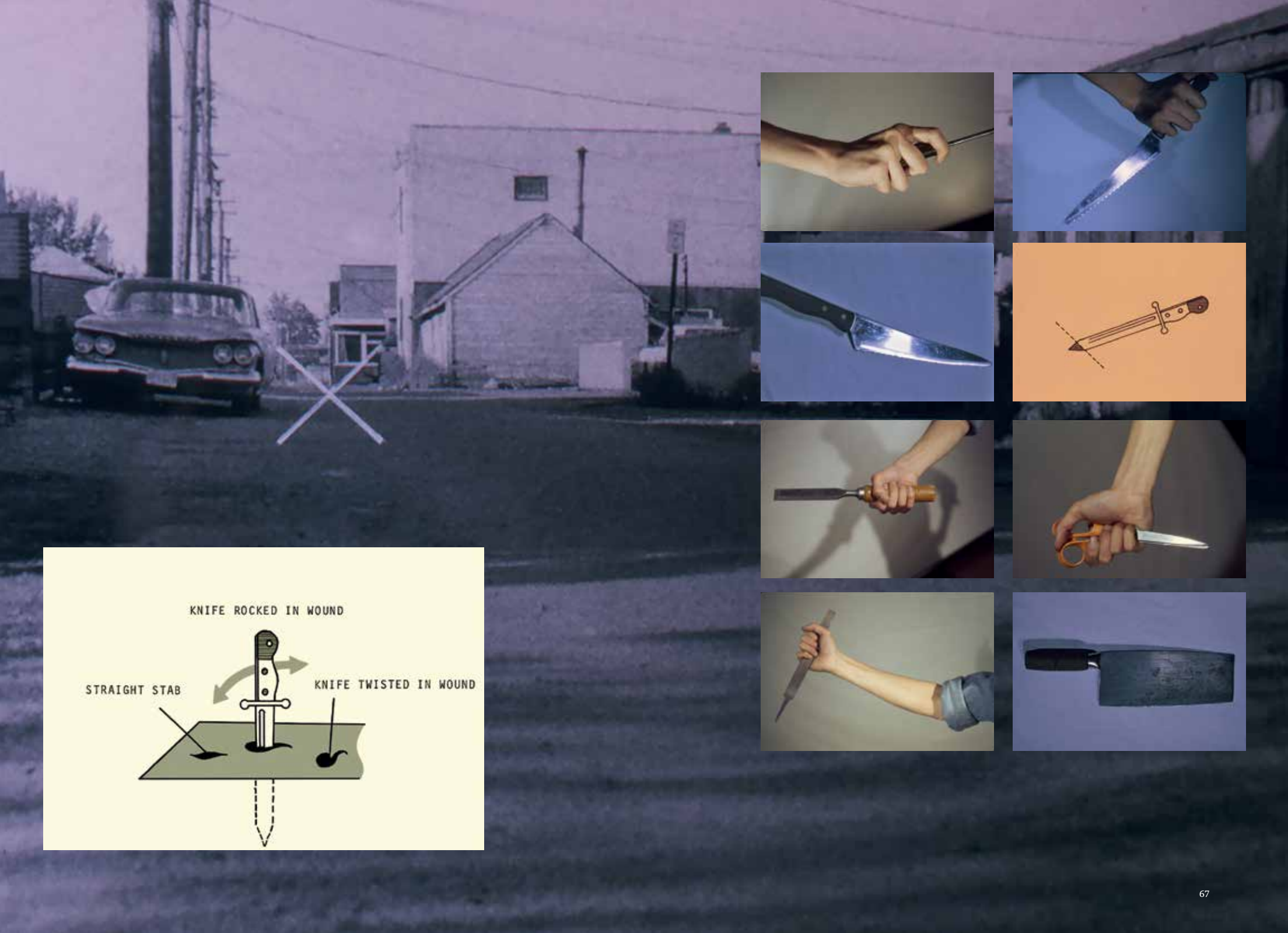
the group generating a series of poses representing body typologies that allude to domestic violence. Body typology and nudity were explored further in a video work of the same name. A possible intention of the project—to challenge social mores around sexual norms—is a topic that would be far more directly challenged in a later work by Paul Wong, *Confused Sexual Views* (1984), which was the subject of a career-altering controversy when a showing of it was abruptly cancelled at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1984.

- 7 “The camera generates events other than the photographs anticipated as coming into being through its mediation, and the latter are not necessarily subject to the full control of the agent who holds the camera.” Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (New York: Verso Books, 2015).
- 8 There is undoubtedly a discomfiting element of exploitation in their making an artwork out of Pelly’s death; documents in the Murder Research archive reveal that the Mainstreeters shared this apprehension. Aware of being complicit in the spectacle, they consciously strove to act with empathy toward their neighbour. The research was an emotional experience, visiting the morgue, the coroner’s office, police files and libraries. “The further we got, the more we were aware that this case was statistically the most common kind of murder in Canada. We became alarmingly aware of the social injustices inflicted on Native People in North America. We were concerned with sensational aspects of this research and sought to explore the situation in a more sensitive way. We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of a stagnant gallery display distilled from the multimedia presentation which contained the bulk of our research. Thus the present photo narrative exhibition was streamlined. The facts, statistics, quotes, opinions and reports were edited to maintain a carefully controlled distance. It is left to the emotions of the reader to close this distance.” Unattributed quote in Fletcher and Wong, *Murder Research*.
- 9 Western Front is an independent arts centre located on 8th and Scotia, near the busy Main and Broadway intersection of Vancouver. An important space for contemporary art in Vancouver since 1973, the centre played host to scores of visiting artists from around the world and was a beacon of local activity when the Mainstreeters were active.
- 10 Marlene MacGregor, personal interview, April 2014.
- 11 *60 Unit Bruise* went on to have a notoriety of its own, accumulating meanings during the AIDS crisis, which refigured an act of boyhood trust as a dangerous adult gamble.
















Immediate cause of death: Hemorrhage and shock. Cause: Laceration of lung, Stab wound of chest. Blood - 0.22% alcohol does not contain barbiturates. Bile does not contain morphine. Urine does not contain morphine. Sudden death homicide: Lacerations to shoulder, wrist and stomach.



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## Captions

### Front and Back Cover

Paul Wong and Marlene MacGregor, *Support Modelling* photo shoot, c. 1976

### Inside front cover–p. 1

Deborah Fong learning how to swim at Kits Pool, c. 1975

### pp. 2–3

Insert: Mainstreeters' HQ, 4196 Main Street

Background: 4400 block Main Street, with Deborah Fong's apartment balcony to the left, Paul Wong's to the right, 1979

### p. 4

Main Street neighbourhood map, with X's marking the locations of Mainstreeter homes

### pp. 6–7

Above: Agenda for "The First Official Meeting of the Mainstreet Inc. Cultural Society," 1976

Below (L to R): Jeannette Reinhardt, Charles Rea, Marlene MacGregor, Annastacia McDonald, Kenneth Fletcher, Bonnie Bell Awny, at Seventh Heaven, 1977

### pp. 8–9

L to R: Annastacia McDonald, Deborah Fong, Ken Hawes, Paul Wong, Kenneth Fletcher, at 4196 Main Street

### pp. 10–11

Background: Murder reenactment photograph from the *Murder Research* files, c. 1976

Inserts: Paul Wong and Marlene MacGregor, *Support Modelling* photo shoot, c. 1976

### pp. 12–13

Robert Hackett reading *File Magazine*, with (insert) an unidentified production assistant holding script, *High Profile Slow Scan* performance, 1978

Slow Scan TV (SSTV) was a transmission technology that used television equipment with computerised memory to sample a televisual image every few seconds, "freeze" it, and send it down a telephone line as an audio signal. The system transmitted black-and-white images that were reconstituted on a monitor at the other end of the signal.

On 13 October 1978, a live-feed slow-scan transmission was made between artists in Vancouver and Toronto to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Canadian art collective General Idea. The Vancouver event consisted largely of Mainstreeters, who gathered in costume at Video Inn, with Paul Wong acting as director. With an approximately 10-second delay between transmissions, allowing for scene change, the Mainstreeters performed a sequence of tableaux in front of a small audience, while the anniversary event in Toronto unfolded at the CN Tower with performances by Carol Pope and Kevin Staples of Rough Trade, David Buchan as La Monte del Monte, and the Clichettes.

### pp. 14–15

Insert: Disco medley for the soundtrack to *Support Modelling*, 1977, 3-channel video by Paul Wong. Lyrics, top to bottom, are from Gloria Gayner, *Honeybee*, 1975; KC and the Sunshine Band, *Get Down Tonight*, 1975; Shirley and Company, *Shame, Shame, Shame*, 1974.

Background: Ivo Zanatta, Stan Lake, and Trevor Arntzen, at Mainstreeters' Drag Ball, 1982, NDP Hall, Watson Strasse

### pp. 16–17

4300 block Main Street, c. 1976. The Mainstreeters, at various times over several decades, occupied all four corners of the block. Abe, of Abe's 2<sup>ND</sup> hand Store, was

their landlord. The laneway behind, not visible in this photograph, is Watson Strasse.

### p. 18

Carol Hackett as an SS Girl at Mainstreeters' Drag Ball, 1977, 4196 Main Street. To her right, half in frame, is Jeanette Reinhardt; between them, and slightly to the rear, is Cornelia Wyngaarden.

### p. 19

Paul Wong drawing on Jeanette Reinhardt, who is dressed as an SS Girl—here, Slow Scan Girl—for *High Profile Slow Scan*, Video Inn, Vancouver, and CN Tower, Toronto, 13 October 1978

### pp. 20–21

Insert: "Your Social Affairs/Affaires Sociallite," 17 May 1976

Background: Photo shoot on the corner of Kingsway and Main for *Ennui* magazine's "Cast for All Occasions," *Support Modelling*, c. 1980, courtesy Mary Janeway and Charles Rea

### p. 22–23

Valerie Hammer and Paul Wong on location of *Rock Garden*, 3-channel video, 1976, UBC Museum of Anthropology

### pp. 24–25

Insert: Reitman's window display by Jeanette Reinhardt, mid-1970s

Background: Jeanette Reinhardt, 1977, at Seventh Heaven

### pp. 26–27

Paul Wong at the fourth annual Mainstreeters' Drag Ball, 1979, 4196 Main Street, courtesy Mary Janeway

### p. 28

The SS Girls: Jeanette Reinhardt, Carol Hackett, Deborah Fong, Annastacia McDonald, *High Profile Slow Scan*

performance, Video Inn, Vancouver, and CN Tower, Toronto, 13 October 1978

### p. 29

Press Release for Tour de '4', 1980. '4' was developed as a performance in 1979, toured the continent in 1980, and was adapted for video in 1981.

### pp. 30–31

*Prime Cuts* beach party cast, production still, West Vancouver, 1981

### p. 32

Deborah Fong, Paul Wong, and Annastacia McDonald, 1978, in Kenneth Fletcher's backyard, 4200 block Quebec Street

### p. 41

Paul Wong, MC'ing at Video Inn's National Bus Tour Fundraising Event, 1975

### pp. 42–43

SS Girls in the shower, Tour de '4' promotional postcard, 1980, Annastacia McDonald, Jeanette Reinhardt, Carol Hackett, Deborah Fong

### pp. 44–45

Pages from *Ennui: Vancouver's Art and Fashion Magazine*, March–April 1981, pp. 14–15. On the left, video stills from Paul Wong, *Support Modelling*, 3-channel video, 1977, models are Charles Rea, Jeanette Reinhardt, and Marlene MacGregor; on the right, model is Olive How.

*Ennui* began as a conversation between Carol Hackett, Mary Janeway, and Charles Rea at Kenneth Fletcher's wake. The first issue came out two years later and appeared six more times through 1981. Janeway and Rea did much of the production and design work while Hackett focused on writing and editing. Each issue was between 16 and 24 pages, and featured articles, photographs, and advertisements that both reflected and

contributed to the consolidation of the local art, music, and fashion scenes.

**pp. 46–47**

Insert: Phil Hanes at the fourth annual Mainstreeters' Drag Ball, 1979, 4196 Main Street, courtesy Mary Janeway

Background: Detail of prize table at Video Inn's National Bus Tour Fundraising Event, 1975

**pp. 48–49**

"Cast for All Occasions," in *Ennui: Vancouver's Art and Fashion Magazine*, Xmas edition 1980, pp. 14–15, courtesy Mary Janeway and Charles Rea

**pp. 50–51**

Deborah Fong and Jeanette Reinhardt, Tour de '4', *Véhicule Art*, Montreal, 1980

**pp. 52–53**

Jeanette Reinhardt, Tour de '4', *Murder Research* book launch at Printed Matter, NYC, 1980

Insert: Kenneth Fletcher and Paul Wong, "The ever popular and versatile denim cutoffs..." 1976

**pp. 54**

Paul Wong, *in ten sity*, 1978, Vancouver Art Gallery, photo by Kim Tomczak

**p. 63**

Murder reenactment with steak knife by Annastacia McDonald and Paul Wong from the *Murder Research* files, 1977

**pp. 64–65**

Paul Wong, *in ten sity*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1978, photo by Kim Tomczak

Insert: Video still from the performance

**p. 66–67**

Inserts: photographs and graphics from the *Murder Research* files, 1977

Background: South view of 4200 block, Watson Street (1 block east of Main Street), with 'X' marking victim location, *Murder Research*, 1977

**pp. 68–70**

Three of 18 colour photographs with text from Kenneth Fletcher and Paul Wong, *Murder Research*, 1977

**pp. 72–73**

Kenneth Fletcher's home, June 1978

**pp. 74–75**

Background: Kenneth Fletcher, 1977, at Seventh Heaven

Top insert: Fletcher's home, June 1978

Bottom insert: Kenneth Fletcher, *Camp Potlatch*, performance document, Watson Strasse, 1976

**pp. 76–77**

Annastacia McDonald in the editing suite, Western Front, c. 1976

**pp. 78–79**

L to R: Josh Baer, Deborah Fong, Annastacia McDonald, Jeanette Reinhardt, and Carol Hackett, Tour de '4', White Columns, NYC, 1980

**pp. 80–81**

"Robert", *Prime Cuts* production still, 1981

**p. 85**

Annastacia McDonald, 1977

**pp. 86–87**

*Prime Cuts* production still, West Vancouver, 1981

Inside back cover: Tour de '4', 1980, rubberstamp and pencil print

Source materials are from the Mainstreeter archives and, unless otherwise stated, courtesy Paul Wong.







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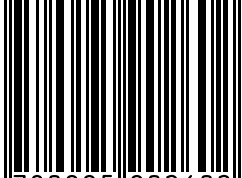
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