



...SOME OF THE FIFTY THIRDS AND FORTY  
THAT MAY BE...



DAVID AVON



oh, London, it's funny



"I GOT TO LIVE WITH THE IDEA OF MEDIOCRITY ALTHOUGH EXCELLENCE IS DOWN TO BORING LEVEL"



*Group of Seven  
R.I.P. (Remembering Inc. Pioneers)  
Curated by Brian Johnston & Bryce Kanbara*

DAVID AVON, JEWEL FOSTER, GLEAVE HARRIS, JACKIE KAY, BOB MASON, GEORGE WALLACE, GORD WHITE

David Collier, Owen Ford, Thea Haines, Gord Pullar

Curated by Brian Johnston & Bryce Kanbara

June 9 – August 12, 2023

*This exhibition was initially scheduled to commemorate the Inc.'s 45th Anniversary in 2020. Because of COVID -19 programming delays, we held off until now so we could celebrate together.*

*The seven persons we are honouring were vital, individualistic, and passionate in their involvement in the Inc. If you met them, you wouldn't forget them.*

*It's our hope that some of you will recollect them with delight, and that others (particularly the younger generations of Hamilton artists) will appreciate this introduction to their personalities and times.*

- Brian Johnston / Bryce Kanbara



Bob Mason & Gord Wallace, Group of Seven R.I.P. (Remembering Inc. Pioneers), 2023.

## *Group of Seven*

By Bryce Kanbara

*antiszygy: The presence of dueling polarities within one entity, thought of as*

In finding my way to writing these introductory notes about Inc. pioneers who have passed away, I came across a reference to Scottish poet/writer Hugh MacDiarmid's study of Scottish personality and its intriguing, oppositional tensions.

"Hugh MacDiarmid's biographies of the eccentric, impulsive Scottish genius is one of his most enthralling prose works...(His) study of both famous and forgotten eccentrics becomes a study of individualism and national identity. He focuses on ten characters from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; ... The book culminates in an epilogue: the 'Strange Procession' of men and women whose characteristic qualities display the unpredictable energies, the extremes of human behaviour, associated with 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy' - the close association of gargoyle and saint."<sup>1</sup>

Associating my task (of describing the characters who gave the early Inc. its colour and oft- clashing verve) with an esoteric word such as "antiszygy" may seem far fetched. But, in such a momentous occasion as this anniversary I'm not adverse to fondly think of them in heightened terms because their personalities, as admirable and/or flawed as they may have been, energized and emboldened the Inc. They shaped the Inc.'s culture, each in their own inimitable way.

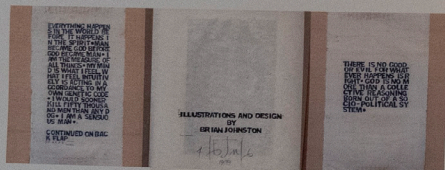
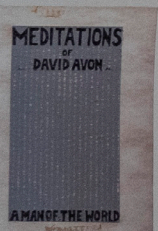
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<sup>1</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid and Alan Riach, *Scottish Eccentrics* (Manchester England: Carcanet, 1993).

In 1975, when Hamilton was contending with its image as a cultural wasteland and beginning the slip into post-industrial malaise, Hamilton Artists' Co-op was born in a small storefront at 143 James North. The Co-op was renamed Hamilton Artists Inc. upon incorporation in 1978. Even as the INC. became more organized and professionalized, artists and non-artists dropped in off the street. Some were regulars who not only hung out, they volunteered. They found a nurturing place, and sustenance for their varied artistic aspirations and personal idiosyncrasies. In its first constitution, the Co-op described itself as a "social backdrop" for discussions and presentations of art.

When we look back on beginnings, and the contributions of these seven individuals, we're grateful that they made the Inc. important to their lives. They're all gone now, drifting out of the Inc.'s collective memory. Some of them died alienated from their families and alone, others were surrounded by loved ones. David Avon is buried in a small cemetery on the mountain in a family plot; there was no funeral I was aware of, and I found no grave marker. Gleave Harris rests in the family plot in a large municipal cemetery in his hometown, Stratford, ON. Gord White's ashes were scattered in Cootes Paradise and Salmon Arm, BC. There were celebrative memorial events for George Wallace (in Victoria, BC, and Dundas at Carnegie Gallery), Bob Mason (at Workers Arts Centre and Heritage Centre), and Jewel Foster in her beloved backyard garden on Beulah Ave. We don't know where Jackie Kay is. I imagine him doing a Gene Kelly tap routine across the big, tavern dance-floor in the sky. It's tempting to mythologize them. Every organization must remember its pioneers.

"I WOULD SOONER KILL FIFTY THOUSAND MEN  
THAN ANY DOG."



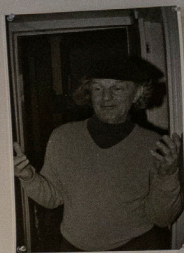
## DAVID AVON

DAVID AVON was the unofficial, often officious, "resident artist-philosopher" of the INC. His philosophical leanings were not home-spun, as one might expect. He pontificated about his life's project, *The Definition of a Human*, and challenged Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein most influentially on his own writings, which culminated in hundreds of pages of text pocketed out on a typewriter with an absent "e," which he filled in by hand. (See displayed sample page.) None of it was ever published or scrutinized by academics.

He was a photographer and portraitist who had been schooled at the Art Institute of Chicago. He seemed to have thoroughly studied Ralph Moore's *The Artists Handbook* and freely dispensed technical advice to INC members whether they wanted it or not.

David Avon was unconventional in every way and he found at the INC a uniquely tolerant setting for his proclivities. His attire was staunchly idiosyncratic featuring an ever-present beret, and knee-length pants. (He relished telling men they should wear skirts or kilts for practical adjacent to the H&A grounds, with the water-heater and furnace turned off year round to reduce expenses. Books were precious to him. He insisted on instructing others to appreciate a new book by smothering it and loaning it to property torn down by pages to avoid cracking the spine.) Books filled every room. He frequented the downtown library, listened to classical music tapes, and drank a bottle of vermouth a day - which to classical music tapes. His big black dog was named Dogma.

In 1979, Brian Johnston created a suite of linecuts based on David's quotes. *The Addition of David Avon: a man of the world on Cable*. David hosted a couple of programs for a limited INC series on Cable TV called *Calling Avon* (check out the TV monitor).



## What is ART?

the art for art's sake approach by David Avon

— definition of anything is the word as the meaning of itself which was for definition or meaning of art could be made in its case 1 and enlarge upon it.

For example: 1. Is a work of art in relation to itself or to anyone? 2. Is it a work of art in relation to its social existence? The work of art is for its own sake. Everything is in relation to another thing. It is only when art is in the world that it is in relation to the society, withdrawn from it and withdrawn into themselves, that such a change can take place. They did not withdraw from society but outside of it but withdrawn from it as a critic and thus were still part of the society.

1. the artist for society. Art is not made for itself but for its communication, world is the name for itself but for the object as the same thing.

2. the question quite: 1. What are the primitive social conditions in which the idea of "art for art's sake" arises and is strengthened? 2. What are the primitive social conditions in which the so-called "art for art's sake" conception of art arises and is strengthened with the tendency to social withdrawal from it? The significance of judgment on the phenomena of life? The reaction of art to a social art? Is the art of communicating ideas and emotion by the artist to itself? 3. If you have listened carefully you will have noticed that I stated







## Quotes

DAVID AVON

"I would sooner kill fifty thousand men than any dog."  
(from *The Meditations of David Avon* 1979, by Brian Johnston)

GLEAVE HARRIS

"Thanks 143 James North ... just keep your penchant for those long nights of the soul. They are, after all, as important as our butterfly days."  
(blue hush/ZERO magazine, spring 1986)

JEWEL FOSTER

"I do take issue with the idea that 'mediocrity always draws excellence down to its boring level'... This idea is an insult to the viewer who is quite capable of judging 'excellence' for her/himself. Whose concept of excellence? What is ART anyway?"

(Jewel, in a response to Robert Langstadt, Zero DifferAnce Zero magazine, Fall, 1986)

JACKIE KAY

"Oh com'on, it's funny."  
(one time too many)

BOB MASON

"Jeepers..."

GEORGE WALLACE

"...I think wit is the great charm of all works of art – the major quality of being able to turn a phrase humorously, or maliciously ..."

GORD WHITE

"Stick with me, boys, and you'll be farting through silk!"

Thanks to Dawn & Brian Burns, Owen Ford, Thea Haines, Ted Haines, Kit Wallace, Carol Podedworny, Lisa Audette, David Collier, Gord Pullar. Sam Robinson, Bob & Donna Yates, Jim Chambers, Cees & Annerie van Gernerden.



Owen Ford, Group of Seven R.I.P. (Remembering Inc. Pioneers), 2023.

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For more information, exhibition documentation, and extended biographical notes on the artists, please visit [theinc.ca/exhibitions/](http://theinc.ca/exhibitions/)

Cover: Group of Seven R.I.P. (Remembering Inc. Pioneers), 2023.

Page 5 & 6: Brian Johnston & David Avon, Group of Seven R.I.P. (Remembering Inc. Pioneers), 2023.

Page 7: Thea Haines, Group of Seven R.I.P. (Remembering Inc. Pioneers), 2023. Detail view.