

Well-known local writer remembered for love of the arts

Last Updated: Tuesday, May 19, 2009 | 10:13 AM MT

[CBC News](#)



Gilbert Bouchard was last seen on April 20. (Edmonton Police Service)

Gilbert Bouchard, a well-known figure in Edmonton's arts community, is dead. He was 47.

Bouchard was a freelance writer and arts commentator who was a regular contributor to CBC Radio and the Edmonton Journal.

"He will be surely missed," said his sister-in-law Jacquie Bouchard. "Not only a huge void in our family but also a huge void in the Edmonton arts community."

Bouchard went missing on April 20, and his body was found in the North Saskatchewan River on Friday. His family was notified on Saturday night.

Bouchard's death is not considered suspicious.

Jacquie Bouchard remembered Gilbert as someone who loved the arts.

"He inspired everyone around him for that love," she said.

Read more: <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/edmonton/story/2009/05/19/edmonton-bouchard-dead.html#ixzz15tFdHNCh>

May. 20, 2009 - Issue [#709: RIP](#)

Gilbert Bouchard

1961 - 2009

[Vue Staff](#) / arts@vueweekly.com



Vue Weekly wishes to join with Edmonton's arts community in mourning the passing of Gilbert Bouchard. Gilbert covered Edmonton's arts scene for more than 20 years, and was a mainstay at the city's galleries, theatres, book stores and cafés. Vue also wishes to extend our sincerest condolences to Gilbert's friends and family, and would like to encourage all who wish to pay their respects to attend his memorial service, to be held on Saturday, June 27 at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton (10804 - 119 Street).

May. 27, 2009 - Issue [#710: Messages Matter](#)

[Queermonton](#)

Goodbye, Gilbert

[Ted Kerr](#) / ted@vuwweekly.com

A few days after hearing Edmonton arts writer Gilbert Bouchard was missing I read a friend's comment on Facebook in which he expressed hope that Gilbert was not really missing but was actually just hanging out in a hotel room "watching cable and ordering room service."

Sadly, as I think my friend knew on some level and as many feared, this was not the case. Last week police found Gilbert's body in the North Saskatchewan River, another kindred creative queer brother drawn to the murky darkness of the mud-bottomed river.

Years ago I remember reading Gilbert's food reviews and being so annoyed by them, yet every week leafing through the pages to find them. I devoured them, secretly loving them, wanting to belong to the funny cosmopolitan world he created, full of great restaurants and Scooby-Doo friends.

Once when I was trying to figure out how I could get involved in the Edmonton arts and culture scene I waited outside the sound booth at CJSR until the end of Acultural Cocktail, a radio show Gilbert hosted with his friend Suzette Chan, to ask them if I could help out somehow. In my mind I can still see how adult and cool they looked to me—a world beyond what I knew. I think they were wearing all black and had sophisticated smiles on their faces. We chatted for a minute. They gave me some quick advice and suggested I contact them at a later date. I never did get back to them. I think I was intimidated. I never asked Gilbert if he remembered this incident.

Years later I had a chance to meet Gilbert again when he reviewed one of my art shows. We met for lunch to discuss the art and it was obvious within minutes that he had already taken the time to view the show, and had put some thought into what he wanted to say about it. In many respects he knew more about the themes that I was working with at the time than I did. Upon reading the article that came from that lunch I remember wishing I were as smart as Gilbert made me sound.

From then on in we would see each other around. We would have quick little conversations at art openings, restaurants, theatre lobbies, and I would always leave these tiny times wiser than when we first said hello. I left every conversation I had with Gilbert amazed at his breadth and depth of knowledge on any number of topics, and glad for his generosity in sharing what he knew, what he thought.

One time specifically I ran into him before I was about see the film 300. I remember wondering to myself afterwards if I would have hated the film so intelligently and fully if it hadn't been for the brief history lesson he gave me beforehand.

It was also during that same conversation that Gilbert gave me two gifts that have made me a better writer. The first gift was the only lesson in journalism I had ever received up to that point; how to write articles in a pyramid structure—the most important information at the beginning of the article and the least important (and therefore the easiest to edit out for space) at the end of the article.

The second gift was a piece of advice he gave me that I never figured out how to take. It was after we had discussed 300 and I told him that I would be contributing to Queermonton. He expressed his misgivings to me about writing a queer-focused column, warning me not to become a "gay writer." He said I ran the risk of being pigeonholed as a writer, that once I started with such a specific focus it would be hard to branch out. His words have stuck with me ever since. At times they haunt me and now, in the face of his death, the words hover just out of reach.

In many ways I think Gilbert was always looking to mentor developing and ever-expanding minds. I think part of my own grief in Gilbert's passing is that I never fully took him up on his kindness.

One of the most rewarding conversations I had with Gilbert was one in which he told me what he remembers of when the AIDS crisis began. He shared with me that he, like many of the men and women he marched with, cried with and struggled against the silence with, were socially progressive but privately conservative when it came to matters of the heart and sexuality.

There was something so tender, real and sweet about this admission that in that moment I saw Gilbert more clearly than I ever had before.
Goodbye, Gilbert. You are missed. V

Apr. 29, 2009 - Issue [#706: Nevermore](#)

[Prairie Artsters](#)

Looking ...

[Amy Fung](#) / amy@vueweekly.com

The past two weeks have been scattered. Finishing my last semester of graduate studies has freed my schedule and thoughts for all things nonacademic, but the last few months of driving towards this arbitrary end point has left me drained, and disappointed, as churning out research papers at this stage is a flush of invigorating thoughts that never receive the process time deserved. Topics may be more complex and challenging at their best, but any actual exchange of ideas moves much slower in the academy, and more often than not, dialogue is directed backwards where the production of ideas is reactive rather than self-generative. Education is not for naught, of course, but it has become crystal clear that there is a far more prominent lineage underlying all thought production in the academy, a lineage that constructs the very walls that it then proceeds to methodically tear down.

Needing a palette cleanser, I headed out to Vancouver for an extended weekend, where, much to my surprise, I spent an afternoon in an art gallery with my mother. Possibly for the first time in my adult life, we did something cultural together that was beyond going to the movies. Arts and culture were never a topic of conversation growing up; rather, arts and culture were simply regular activities around the house on equal footing with everything else from walking the dog to cleaning up after yourself. Music lessons and art classes were standard chores; visits to galleries and museums were best left for school field trips. Drifting up the floors of the Vancouver Art Gallery and watching and listening to my mother's present-day reactions to everything from Kyla Mallet and Germaine Koh to Claude Tousignant and Rodney Graham, I came to suddenly (and finally) realize where my skepticism comes from and how my reactions are provoked. Although our tastes and standards differ vastly, we share a similar approach in wanting to be convinced and engaged in a manner that approaches art as part of the everyday.

The day after getting back into town, urgent messages and updates about Edmonton arts writer and radio broadcaster Gilbert Bouchard began appearing all over the web, mostly through Facebook statuses, but then in emails, news links, and search groups. His sudden disappearance has ricocheted shock throughout the arts community, as he was one that covered it all and was always everywhere. In terms of local lineage, Bouchard is the predominant figure ahead of myself and the peers of my generation. As a voice for the visual arts in the city, I don't remember reading anyone before him. Over the years we crossed paths numerous times, but I can't say we ever spoke much to each other. Why we never did is what keeps spinning in my mind, as there are only a small handful of arts writers around who work and understand that

particular brand of the freelance writing grind. Networks of support only exist if you build them.

Throughout the afternoon of the community search, even though I rationally knew we were just doing a general sweep of an area, I couldn't help but keep wondering if he had actually walked down this exact path. I could only keep looking ahead as our small group wandered through a section of the immense river valley looking without knowing what we were actually looking for.

V

Happy Harbor remembers Gilbert Bouchard

October 15, 2009 - 5:51pm

[Ian Phillipchuk](#), Arts & Entertainment Staff



Gilbert Bouchard Memorial Art Show: Visions of Comics

October 17–30

Happy Harbour Comics Volume 1

(10112–124 St.)

Free

With protagonists that can leap tall buildings in a single bound, tear up city streets with brute force, or hit a fly on the wing with thrown projectiles, it's very easy to see the appeal of comic books. Until more recently, that appeal was concentrated in a small group of freaks and geeks, but a long list of big-budget Hollywood movies has revived the superhero genre in a big way. In Alberta, there is a groundswell of support forming a vibrant indie comic scene.

Happy Harbor Comics, the 2007 Outstanding Canadian Retailer of the Year has seen this popularity and is doing its part to boost the medium to places its never truly seen at a local level. This year, they're hosting the Gilbert Bouchard Memorial Art Show: Visions of Comics.

The show is dedicated to the memory of Gilbert Bouchard, a former *Edmonton Journal* and CBC freelance writer and proponent of the comics industry. Gilbert died earlier this year after suffering through depression. He was the subject of several different dedications, including having an Edmonton Fringe venue named after him, and a memorial placed in the official program. Said Happy Harbor owner Jay Bardyla in a May 16 *Edmonton Journal* article about Bouchard:

“We would host lectures and invite him to speak because he was just so incredibly well-versed and deep in knowledge and he just loved comics so much. He understood how great they were and loved every ounce of them. We lost someone who had a significant voice in the world to champion our little cause.”

Growing up just south of Peace River, Bouchard attended the University of Alberta, even writing and editing for the *Gateway*. Gilbert lived for the majority of his life in Edmonton, and wrote culture pieces on a multitude of art forms for various different news and media outlets. As a fan of comics and a regular of Happy Harbor before his passing, it seems especially fitting that the art show that bears his name is focused on comics.

The show is also an exploration of the medium through the iconic creators and visionaries of the genre, and has contributions by artists including Scott Kowalchuk and Brent Smith of Thunderfist Productions.

“I’ve met a lot of people in the comic book industry in the past one to two years in Calgary [...] and getting to know the comic book community and culture within Alberta, you realize pretty quickly that there are a lot of people in Western Canada, that are [making comics]. I know there will be a couple of people in the show who have published work, and that was a really gratifying moment.

‘Hey, if these cats, who have very similar education to me, can make a living at it, there is no reason I can’t,’” Kowalchuk says.

“Originally, our cartoon started as a comic book, so I included a picture of that; it was kind of nice for myself to get back to the root of the story. I was heavily influenced by comics so I put a piece in for that, and we actually have a splash page from *The Last Outlaw* comic book I included as well,” Kowalchuk adds.

One of Kowalchuk’s pieces, which can be found on the event poster, is an introspective look into *Spider-Man* creator Steve Ditko’s artistic centre:

“I had just recently read a book on Steve Ditko, and how he became, to some degree, this self-destructive creator. For me, I found that really striking because his contribution of *Spider-Man* alone to comic book mythos is pretty epic. And then to read how he got on board with a philosophy and never strayed from it; he’s kind of destroyed, to some degree, the name of Steve Ditko and the future work of [himself] by restricting himself based on his philosophy,” Kowalchuk says.

“That was the over-riding factor of the piece, that’s on the poster [...] where he’s standing there with kind of a shrugged look, ‘Who am I? What am I doing?’ while the name Steve Ditko is crumbling around him.”

Being among the first of its kind in Alberta, the show will depend heavily on support from the community. With a wide variety of artists and pieces on display, it’s sure to please everyone from the most dedicated comic book enthusiast to the indie comic aficionado. Even Kowalchuk seems to be drinking the Super Soldier Serum on this one.

“As far as I know, it’s going to be a pretty sexy event. Any sort of comic book art show is going to be inherently sexy. It’s really the only show of its kind that I’ve heard of in Alberta. I know even in Calgary, we’ve never had a solely comic book show. I know a lot of the artists are going to be there, I’m going to plan to be there for the opening as well, so it should be pretty rocking fun. If there is anyone who can cut loose and have fun, it’s comic book guys.”

Folk Fest just gets better with age

📍 A diverse lineup for event's 30th year

YURI WUENSCH

METRO EDMONTON

Published: August 05, 2009 5:20 a.m.

Last modified: August 05, 2009 12:23 a.m.

If you haven't already purchased a ticket to this year's Edmonton Folk Music Festival, will you ever learn?

Full weekend passes are once again sold out. Best peruse the Craigslist or Kijiji classifieds, or park your butt at the main gate, if you're looking for last-minute ticket deals.

As of press time, the only tickets left are for tonight's Sarah McLachlan and Tracy Chapman Forever Folk Fest concert, a special fundraiser for the festival endowment fund.

The rest of the fest boasts what may be the event's most diverse lineup yet: Arrested Development, Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings, Neko Case, Joel Plaskett, Steve Earle, the Wailers, ex-Barenaked Ladies singer Steven Page, Boz Scaggs and Spirit of the West, among many others — assuming the lineup actually matters that much to you.

At this point, the Edmonton summer staple would likely be a sellout regardless of who was booked, a credit to the reputation for excellence that festival producer Terry Wickham, festival staff and their army of volunteers have cultivated over FF's hallowed 30-year run. Definitions about just what "folk" is have likewise evolved.

"One of the traditions of folk music is that it has always welcomed other musical traditions," explains Wickham.

"Granted, where the festival is concerned, it's not always an easy reach. But we've always tried to stretch our boundaries artistically and we always will."

Few people understood the folk fest better, says Wickham, than Edmonton arts writer and booster Gilbert Bouchard who passed away earlier this year.

"I remember driving in my car one day and hearing Gilbert talking about the festival on the radio," Wickham recalls. "He said something to the effect of it not being just about the music, but about how we're trying to build a utopia on the Gallagher Park hillside.

"I had never heard it said that way before and I realized I have always been reaching for that. We haven't had an incident in a decade, no fights nor thefts. We let kids in for nothing and my father, who is 87, will be there this year, so it's really for everyone. It is Edmonton."

Bidding Gilbert Goodbye

The local arts scene will keenly feel the loss of Gilbert Bouchard's kindness and dedication
Published May 21, 2009 by [Fish Griwkowsky](#) in [Wildlife](#) (SEE)

There are a number of us who would like a last chance to thank Gilbert Bouchard for being so kind, for saying and writing so many encouraging words about the arts scene. Gilbert made a difference, and I wonder if he knew that or, knowing it, needed to know how much his enthusiasm mattered to emerging artists. I feel this personally, with an extremely sad heart.

The last time he interviewed Tim Rechner and me, Gilbert talked about how depressing it was that his deadlines were so early in order to meet the weekend print run — before midweek, if I recall. He mentioned the increasing rarity with which he was getting to see the final-version gallery shows he would then so gracefully write about.

I thought about his intentions and diminishing hopes a lot during the recent call for a coup d'état in arts journalism, where debate raged for weeks about the effectiveness of the established critical scene and whether arts writers had a duty to be vicious. Which Gilbert wasn't, of course. I especially wondered why we were obsessing about critics instead of the actual work. It reminded me of blaming the Democrats for George W. Bush's failings.

First time I ever met Gilbert, he walked into *The Gateway*, handing us a cake. For no reason except his unusual kindness, the student-paper alumnus decided to drop by layout one night and tell us a number of friendly things that, indeed, encouraged us onward, and outward too. I liked the cheerful way Gilbert did his work, especially in the context of the larger, bitchier world in which I've hissed with the chorus so often.

As in the passing of Joe Bird, you should know there's now one fewer person protecting your back. Gilbert, we would have loved your jovial face around longer. But I know how these things go. Thanks for everything.

News on the closing Southside Sound front, which dovetails nicely with the fate of the Garneau Theatre block businesses. Locating in roots guru Peter Sutherland's old nest just east of Calgary Trail will be Vivid Print, the artist-friendly, multimedia print shop with all the silky textures. This happens July 1, while the Garneau complex hopes to attract national chains, possibly a fourth coffee shop in a fastball-throw radius, which I can't see competing with the specific chi-chi/college/hippie niches of Da Capo, Sugarbowl, and Remedy.

In a brief conversation with Vivid Print's schemer Markie (Moose) Wilson, he brought up an exciting possibility of turning vacant Whyte storefronts into placeholder galleries until they could be rented again — a trick which I saw with me own peeper work wonderfully in Seattle. This is another example of how recessions are good for art. Angst helps, too.

A Sad Farewell To A Passionate Arts Booster

From *Radio Active* to The ARTery, the absence of Gilbert Bouchard is keenly felt in Edmonton
Published May 21, 2009 by [Scott Lingley](#) in [Comment](#)



[Supplied](#)

Gone, But Not Forgotten | Gilbert Bouchard is remembered as a respectful critic and an avid art lover.

I know our minds are supposed to be on the Best of Edmonton this week, but it's hard not to think about the fact that this has been the Worst Spring Ever, not just because of the persistently gloomy weather that gives us to think winter may never completely cease in time for it to start up again next September, but because of its sad human toll.

This past weekend our worst fears were confirmed about Gilbert Bouchard, who went missing on April 20. Gilbert was a great friend to and booster of Edmonton's arts community, he was the most reliable and collegial contributor an editor ever had, and on a personal level he was an incredibly good-natured and gracious person. And as with singer/songwriter/comedian Joe Bird, who passed away in March and would have turned 42 on May 17, the news of Gilbert's death feels not just like a tragedy, but a stroke of cosmic injustice. Both people were deeply involved in the cultural life of their city; both touched a lot of lives. Maybe we even took it for granted that we would always have them around.

For years, I was one of Gilbert's most devoted readers. As a SEE editor, I relied heavily on his expertise and apparent inability to say no to any assignment in the fields of theatre, books, visual arts, food, music, film, poetry, or whatever else needed doing to make my life easier. Gilbert probably always had, in the two-plus decades he worked as a freelance writer and broadcaster, 10 or more editors simultaneously dependent on his resolute professionalism and boundless passion for creativity in virtually every medium. When Gilbert told you, "I can take care of that for you," it meant you didn't have to worry about that particular detail any more. In fact, it was an unprecedented missed deadline that alerted his peers to Gilbert's disappearance last month.

I can't begin to imagine how hectic this must have made his worklife, especially considering the extensive homework Gilbert did just to stay abreast of the arts scenes he covered. My own freelance experience suggests he must have lived in a pressure cooker of constant deadlines, to say nothing of the standards he set for himself and the expectations he created amongst the city's arts workers, who must have come to see him as one of their own. Even so, Gilbert usually came by my office to pitch ideas for arts coverage rather than wait for the inevitable barrage of assignments I'd foist upon him.

In the four years we worked together, Gilbert was an anomaly in the competitive, frequently ego-propelled realm of low-paying alt-weekly writer-editor dynamics. Despite my total lack of experience when I first took charge of Gilbert's copy for SEE, he treated me with deference and affability it would take me years to earn, and he was always helpful in directing my attention to significant things our readership probably cared about. He was never precious about his work, never got his shit in a knot if a sudden change to the ad stack cut his article down to three inches, and was on the phone with profuse apologies if it even looked like his copy was going to be late.

That kind of respect for other people pervaded what I knew of his interactions with the world. Gilbert had a lot of respect for the people whose creativity he wrote about, and that always came across in the way he reflected on the artist's intentions or brought some smart cultural cross-reference in for consideration. I think Gilbert took shots from some of his peers who thought he wasn't confrontational enough in his approach to arts reportage, which seems to me an uncharitable reading of the sense of responsibility he brought to his job and the grace with which he reconciled his critical tendencies and his pro-local arts bias. Smack-talk is a standard lazy ploy for arts writers who like to make themselves look smart both on and off the page, but I never heard Gilbert say a mean word about anyone — creative types or colleagues — period.

I doubt I'm alone in remembering Gilbert as kind and hospitable every time I saw him. The last time we really spoke was a little more than a year ago at Over the Edge With 4-Play, the Catalyst Theatre fundraiser where the cream of Edmonton's theatre scene write and produce an evening of plays in a day. Gilbert and I had been drafted as "celebrity" critics and, as a veteran of countless such events, he set to helping me feel at home, fixing me up with pages from his notepad and a pen when I showed up completely unprepared and sharing his supply of decadent truffles and the flask of single malt he had brought to include in the string of gags he'd concocted for his turns at the microphone. As always, he seemed sincerely curious about how my freelance career was progressing and, as always, he seemed to be keeping a very full schedule.

Given his consistently positive and affable demeanour, it was a shock to hear that Gilbert had been battling depression and that he had gone missing. Suddenly his absence loomed large at places you might have counted on finding him: not just in the Journal's culture section or on CBC's Radio Active, but at an Edmonton Poetry Festival event at The ARtery, or at the Art on the Block fundraiser at the EAG — those perennial stomping grounds where you wouldn't have been sure whether he was on duty or basking his affection for the city's culturesphere.

It's not my place to speculate on the unfathomable forces that colluded to take Gilbert Bouchard from our midst, but I can't stop myself from thinking of them as something alien and extrinsic to the ardent arts advocate and gentle person of my acquaintance. All I know is our city can't spare a person of such warmth and dedication to community at the best of times, which spring of 2009 has not resembled in any way.