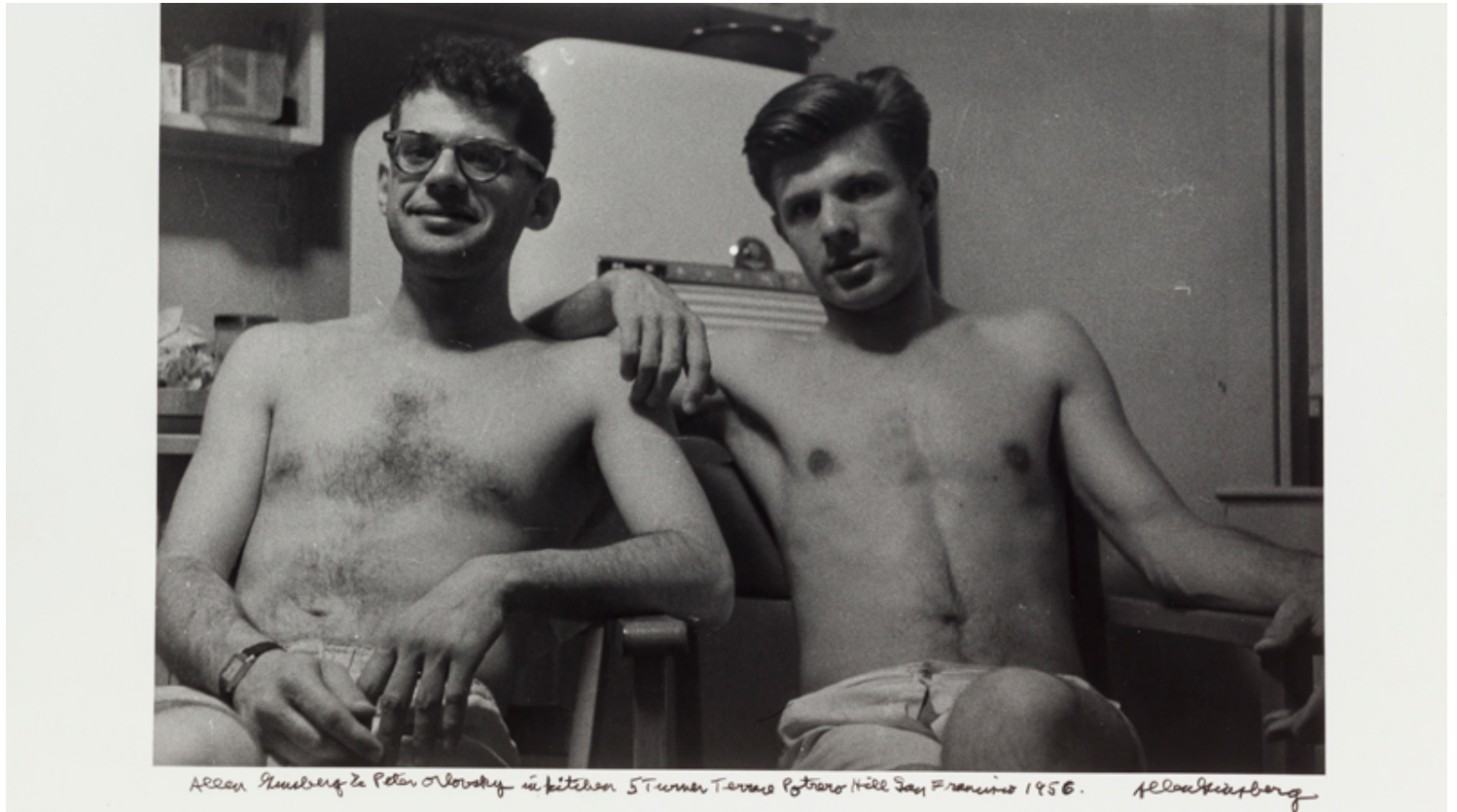


Halifax MAGAZINE

BLOG

When Allen Ginsberg came to Halifax

By Martin Wallace | October 26, 2015



Editor's Note: Continuing through November 8, the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery is hosting the exhibition "We are continually exposed to the flashbulb of death": The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg (1953-1996). Inspired by the exhibition, local writer Martin Wallace shares these memories of an Allen Ginsberg visit to Halifax.

news seemed unbelievable. Ginsberg was a “name,” a frequently mentioned figure in poetry books and literary histories, arguably most famous of the Beats, friend (and lover) of William Burroughs, mentor to Bob Dylan, artistic collaborator with The Clash.



It wasn't so much that I couldn't imagine Ginsberg coming here—he was, after all, a long-time follower of Buddhist teacher Trungpa Rinpoche, who had established Halifax as the center of his teachings—it was more that, in my naiveté and optimism, I expected there to be more fanfare and excitement. I mean, this was the guy! This was the author of Howl, that crazy exuberant chant of sorrow and celebration, of drugs and prophecy, of angels and jubilant sex. Ginsberg's reading of Howl in San Francisco in 1955 was legendary, and a symbol of that generation's rejection of the mannered, intellectual thing that poetry had become under the Moderns. To young poets, Ginsberg was a rock star.

The visit started with a poetry workshop at the Shambhala Center on Tower Road. We sat on cushions in appropriately meditative poses for several minutes until Ginsberg arrived, slipping quietly into the room with some other people. This Ginsberg—bald, myopic, paunchy—seemed a far cry from the legendary figure, clad as he was in his now standard costume of blue blazer, gray flannel pants and red tie. He was quiet and unassuming, occasionally seeming to mumble, his most constant expression a shy smile.

He read some of his own work. The poem I remember most vividly was about social awkwardness, snot, and well, what would today be called “Santorium.” He looked up after this and shrugged and said “See? It's just stuff that you remember.”

He then asked us to write a poem with a single image. Being young and determined to

[illegible]

CORRECTION: Due to an editing error, an earlier version of those post gave an incorrect closing date for the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery exhibition. The post above has been corrected. Halifax Magazine regrets the error.

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