

= Will Munro =

William Grant " Will " Munro (February 11 , 1975 ? May 21 , 2010) was a Toronto artist , club promoter , and restaurateur known for his work as a community builder among disparate Toronto groups . As a visual artist , he was known for fashioning artistic works out of underwear ; as a club promoter , he was best known for his long @-@ running Toronto queer club night , Vazaleen .

Born in Australia , Munro grew up mostly in Mississauga , Ontario , Canada , and moved to nearby Toronto to study at the Ontario College of Art , graduating in 2000 . Influenced by such artists as General Idea and the queercore movement , he received critical attention for his work with men 's underwear , a medium he used eventually to create collages of colourful performers he admired such as Klaus Nomi and Leigh Bowery . He created silkscreen posters to advertise Vazaleen ? his monthly nightclub party that was unusual for being a queer event where punk and other rock music was prominently played , and for being one of the first to exist beyond the confines of the gay ghetto . The party was known for attracting a diverse crowd , and at its peak brought in such performers as Nina Hagen ; international " best @-@ of " nightclub lists took notice .

Munro died of brain cancer in May 2010 . Posthumous exhibits of his art work included a 2010 show at the Art Gallery of Ontario , and in 2011 he was the first male artist to be featured in the feminist Montreal art gallery La Centrale .

= = Personal life = =

Will Munro was born in Sydney , Australia in 1975 . Later that year his family moved to Canada , just outside Montreal , and then lived in Mississauga , Ontario from 1980 onwards .

Despite his involvement in nightclub events , Munro did not consume alcohol or recreational drugs . He was a vegan from a young age . For many years , he volunteered as a peer counsellor at the Toronto Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line , where an annual award was established in his honour after his death .

Munro was diagnosed with brain cancer and underwent surgery to remove a tumour in 2008 . A second surgery was performed in October 2009 . He entered into palliative care in April 2010 , and died on May 21 , 2010 .

= = Art career = =

Munro moved from Mississauga to Toronto after high school , to attend the Ontario College of Art (OCA) . From early on in his career , his signature medium was pastiche work with men 's underwear . The origins of this work date back to his Intro to Sculpture class at OCA , where his professor asked the students to " bring a special object to class that isn 't really functional , but is special to you . " Munro had long had an affinity for special underwear , ever since his mother had refused to buy him Underoos superhero underwear when he was a child ; regarding white briefs , he said , " They were clinical and sterile . They weren 't very sexy . It just felt very repressed . I wanted Underoos so bad . " For the sculpture class , Munro decided to bring in a pair of underwear that he had stolen from a high school friend on whom he had a crush . He put the grey underwear on display in a Plexiglass cage , complete with air holes . In his subsequent work he decided to use white briefs as a medium " because they were so accessible . " The summer after his sculpture class , to keep himself busy on a road trip , he made a quilt out of white underwear . In 1997 , his first show involving underwear was held in a gallery supported by his college . The show received publicity after conservative columnist Michael Coren , in the Toronto Sun and on the radio , criticized Munro and his show , in particular for having said that it involved " boys ' underwear " (although Munro had simply meant guys ' underwear) . Coren asked the public to bring dirty diapers to the exhibit , but no one did . Munro went on to have many showings of his underwear art , mostly " rescued " from second @-@ hand Goodwill clothing outlets , including at Who 's Emma , HEADspace , and Paul Petro Contemporary Art . Actor Selma Blair bought one of Munro 's underwear works when she was in town for the 2004 Toronto International Film Festival .

Munro 's influences included the work of General Idea , and the queercore movement . Speaking about the confluence of his music events and his art , Munro said in 2004 , " This is where the music scene and gay underground come together . We 're at a time when all kinds of shifts are happening . The structure of artists ' galleries are changing . Magazines are changing . There 's more different kinds of artist activity that 's happening . All this is having an impact on my visual work . And my visual work is more and more going into performance . " Galleries exhibiting his work have included Art in General , in New York City , Confederation Centre Art Gallery in Charlottetown , and Toronto galleries Zsa Zsa , Mercer Union , YYY Artists ' Outlet , Paul Petro Contemporary Art , and the Art Gallery of York University . Munro was named on the longlist of finalists for the Sobey Art Award in 2010 .

A posthumous exhibit of his work , " Total Eclipse " , was presented at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2010 . Works included collages , made from underwear , that depict Klaus Nomi and Leigh Bowery , both of whom Munro admired . Reviewing the show in Canadian Art , critic Sholem Krishtalka wrote that Munro 's work is " insistent on the necessity of self @-@ made culture and buttressed by an encyclopedic knowledge of queer underground cultural history . "

Other posthumous exhibitions of his work include a 2011 show at the feminist La Centrale gallery in Montreal ? a first for a male artist in that space ? and in 2012 a major retrospective at the Art Gallery of York University .

= = Club promoter and community builder = =

Munro started the monthly party Vaseline (later renamed Vazaleen) in Toronto at a time when most gay clubs featured house music or other types of dance music . His hope was to draw a more diverse crowd : he said at the time , " I 'd like to do something that 'll encompass all the freaks out there , myself included . " In addition to its stereotype @-@ countering incorporation of punk and other rock music , his club night was also noted to be unusual for being located outside of the Church and Wellesley gay neighbourhood . It was atypical as well for having about 50 percent women attending the event . Munro said , " I was determined to get women to attend and I did it in a really simple way . I put lots of images of women and dyke icons on the posters and flyers ? groups like The Runaways or singers like Nina Hagen and Carole Pope . I wanted women to know instantly that this was their space as much as anybody else 's . " It began in the downstairs space at El Mocambo in late 1999 , moved to the upstairs space in January 2000 , and in late 2001 , when El Mocambo was threatening to close , to Lee 's Palace , where it continued as a monthly event until 2006 ; it continues to this day as an annual event as part the city 's Pride Week festivities , to raise money for the Will Munro Fund for Queer and Trans People Living with Cancer .

In a lengthy article about Vazaleen in Toronto Life , critic R. M. Vaughan wrote , " In its lewd , spontaneous , hysterical and glamorous way , Vazaleen defined a new Toronto aesthetic , a playful and endlessly inventive mode of presentation that encompassed everything from lesbian prog- rock to tranny camp to vintage punk revival to good old @-@ fashioned loud @-@ mouthed drag . " In an editorial in C magazine , Amish Morrell wrote , " At [Vazaleen] it was not only okay to be gay , but it was okay to be other than gay . One could be just about anything . The effect was that it completely destabilized all preconceptions of gender and sexual identity , in a hyperlibidinous environment where everyone became a performer . " Benjamin Boles of Now wrote , " These days it 's normal in Toronto for hip gay scenes to flourish outside of the queer ghetto and to attract a wide spectrum of genders and orientations , but that didn 't really happen until Vazaleen took off and became a veritable community for everyone who didn 't fit into the mainstream homo world . For too long , it was too rare to see dykes , fags , trans people , and breeders hanging out together , and Munro changed that . " Vazaleen became a launching pad for such musical acts as Peaches and Lesbians on Ecstasy . Other bands performing at Vazaleen early in their careers were The Hidden Cameras , Crystal Castles , and The Gossip . At the height of the event 's popularity , Munro appeared on the cover of Now magazine (made up to look similar to David Bowie 's Aladdin Sane album cover) , musical guests included Carole Pope , Tracy + the Plastics , Vaginal Davis , Glen Meadmore and Nina Hagen , and Vazaleen appeared on " best @-@ of " nightclub lists internationally .

Munro produced other Toronto club nights such as Peroxide , which featured electro music , No T. O. , which showcased No Wave , Seventh Heaven Dream Disco , and the amateur stripper party Moustache . In 2006 , Munro and his friend Lynn MacNeil bought The Beaver Café , in the West Queen West neighbourhood . Arts columnist Murray Whyte of the Toronto Star wrote , " Will ? s virtual status as hub took bricks @-@ and @-@ mortar form : The Beaver quickly became that cozy , everyone @-@ in @-@ the @-@ pool house party , a sort of community hall / mini dance club , and an alt @-@ culture oasis " . " Love Saves the Day " became Munro 's dance music night at The Beaver , which he continued to organize even as his illness began to prevent him from leaving home . His final night of DJing in person was at a special Halloween Vazaleen party at Lee 's Palace in 2009 .

Bruce LaBruce wrote of Munro 's impact on Toronto , just prior to his death : " As we all know , Toronto can be a cruel and unforgiving city . What makes Will Munro so extraordinary as an artist and as a person is that he has not only remained true to such a harsh mistress , but that he has also contributed so substantially to the fabric and heft of this often maleficent metropolis . His dedication to community work (including volunteering for a decade at an LGBT youth crisis hotline) and to creating social and sexual stimulation for the queer community outside the decaying gay ghetto (namely , his wonderfully raunchy club night , Vazaleen , and his participation as a founding partner in revitalizing the Beaver Café) is unmatched . "

In 2013 , Toronto @-@ based writer Sarah Liss published *Army of Lovers : A Community History of Will Munro* , a book which collected reminiscences about Munro from his family , friends and colleagues . The book 's launch party , dubbed Vaza @-@ Launch , featured performances by both Peaches and Light Fires . The book is divided into three parts (Mississauga Goddam , Rock Show , and Heaven) , which all work to highlight what an extraordinary talent Munro had for community cultivation . It begins with Munro 's childhood spent in Mississauga , which both of his parents state that Munro and his brother , Dave , " hated Mississauga . " (pg . 16) Dave Munro recalls that Will experienced a sudden shift in personality in or slightly before grade seven , where he became a different person : " Will was like , ' Fuck doing after @-@ school @-@ programs , ' and started down his own path " (pg . 23) .