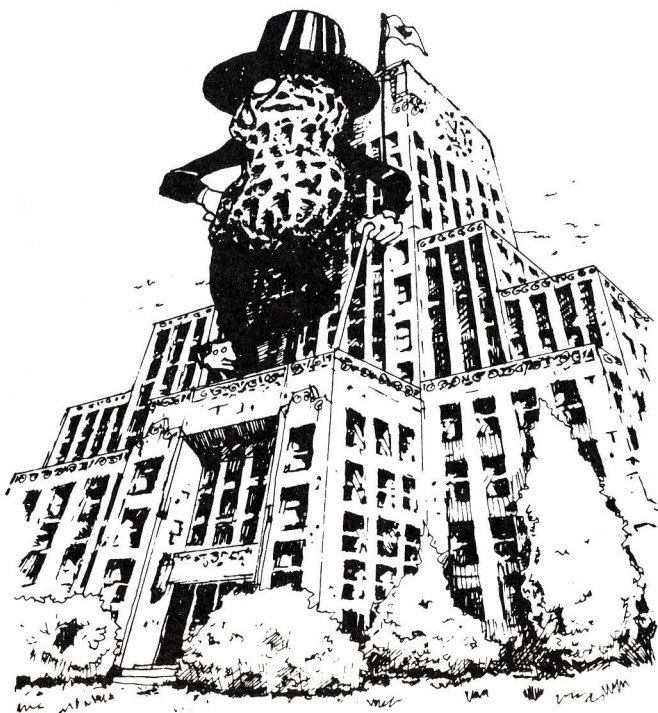


A NEW MAYOR A NEW ERA



VANCOUVER CIVIC ELECTION 1974

Western Front / MR. PEANUT FOR MAYOR

Included here: documents and a comment on the 1974 Mr. Peanut mayoralty campaign, in which Mr. Peanut and the Peanut Party brought politics to art. "Working on the basic assumption that art is a highly essential fibre in our social fabric, we conceived and generated a form of sculpture concerned with vital human activities." Although the editors were not personally involved in the campaign, they have had access to the Files, and to John Mitchell's campaign diary, Twenty Days in November. These are available to the public in the Archives of The Western Front Society, 303 E. 8th Ave., Vancouver, B.C.

A PEANUT IN EVERY POT

Art City: "Originally we were artists working together without any political ambitions or directions. The election was just visualized as another major art work." John Mitchell, in the summer of 1974, conceived of the city of Vancouver as a kind of screen on which an artwork could be played out. He approached The Western Front, and the Peanut Party was born, with no platform and a candidate who did not speak. The upcoming civic election was the perfect frame for the ongoing sculpture the party envisaged, for at no other time was the city so aware of itself. Good press (despite a campaign budget of \$12.80) guaranteed Mr. Peanut success and acceptance. The city at large participated in the event through the media, and became an important part of it: Art City. The artists involved did not let their more serious concerns get in the way of the good humour with which they conducted their campaign, winning them fans in light of the other candidates. The idea of a vegetable running for mayor caught on with the press and public all over North America, as the Files and the accompanying letters show. William Burroughs wrote:

I would like to take this opportunity to endorse the candidacy of Mr. Peanut for Mayor of Vancouver. Mr. Peanut is running on the art platform, and art is the creation of illusion. Since the inexorable logic of reality has created nothing but insoluble problems, it is now time for illusion to take over. And there can be only one illogical candidate: Mr. Peanut.

Politics as art. The recognition in satirical terms that every art is a political act. If the Peanut campaign were only the comic relief that made it popular, it would not be worth the trouble of resurrecting it so long after its demise. It is the ideas raised in its success that make it worth looking at again.

A consequence of conceptual art that many artists avoid, posed by the reduction or elimination of the object in favour of the idea, is the democratization of the art process. Art no longer *belongs* to those with technical polish, it is free to everyone with a creative intelligence. Mr. Peanut told *The Georgia Straight*, some time after the election:

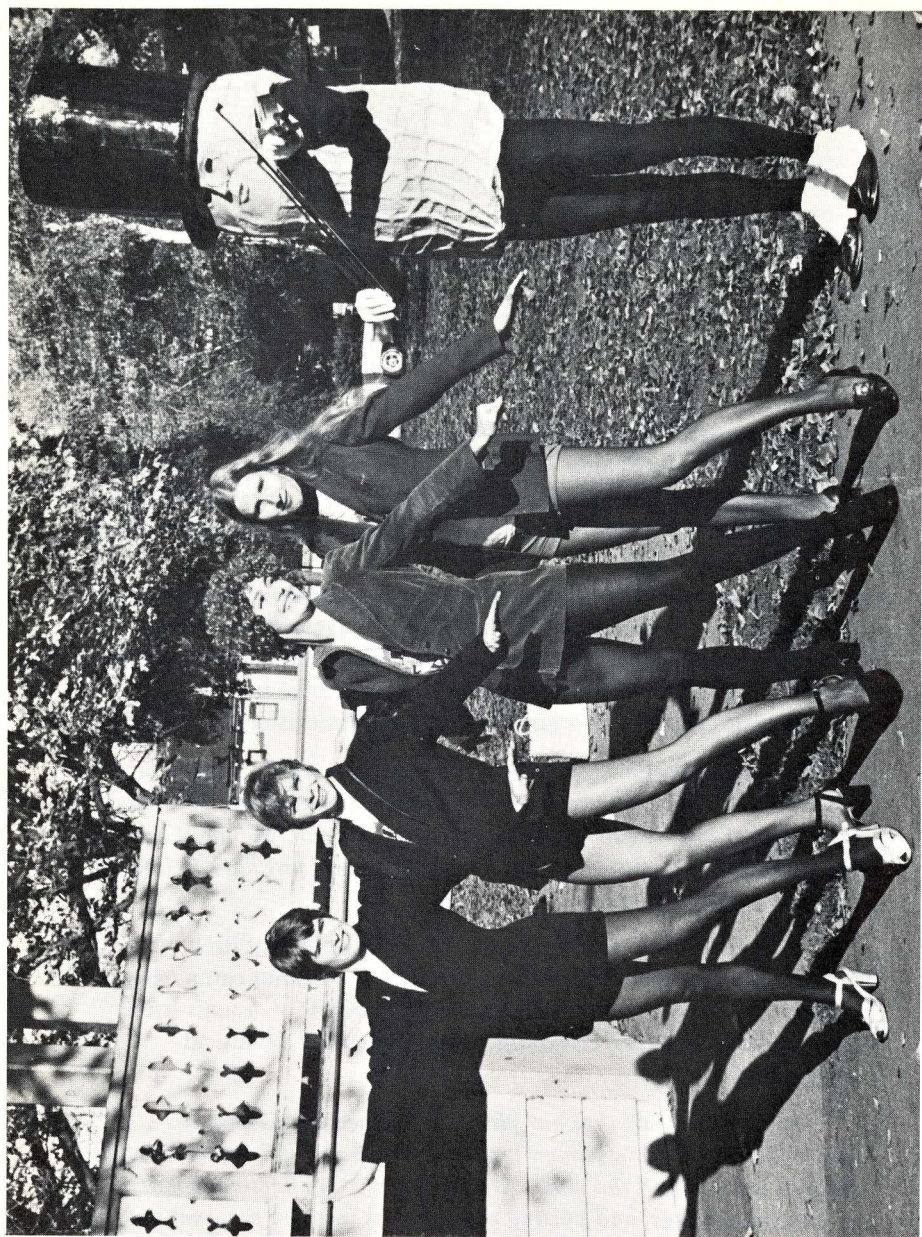
What we're proposing is a creative level of thought trying to attain some sort of a crystal thought-wave that you can work on, and that's basically an artist's outlook to his existence. I mean, you don't have to be painting any pictures or that sort of thing, you just have to live your life in a creative manner.

This is Art City in another sense. The Western Front itself exemplifies this life-style, and the success of the Peanut campaign, in which the whole city took part, was its first project on a mass scale. Art was taken into the community, and it becomes a political statement:

It must be stressed that our platform is based on the purest principles of interdisciplinary art, an attitude of mind wherein art and politics are one and the same. Art being our only effective tool in generating change, and putting control back into the personal lives of each and every citizen.

— S.H.

The images are taken from the Peanut File of The Western Front.



October 28, 1974

Mr. Peanut
The Western Front
303 - East 8th Avenue
Vancouver, B. C.
Canada

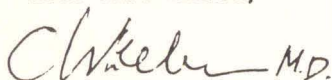
Dear Mr. Peanut:

I have just been informed of your splended campaign for the office of mayor of the City of Vancouver.

It is campaigns such as yours which will bring back much needed vitality and creativity to both politics as well as the management of our troubled cities. Dadadadadada.

I am most happy to go on record in support of your efforts to bring art and life more closely together.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Wheeler M.D.', with a stylized, cursive script.

Charles B. Wheeler, M. D.
Mayor,
City of Kansas City, Mo.

CBW/wv