

**ADDICTION, from page 10**

percent of Canada's overall population. Heavy drug use among indigenous people is connected to their higher rates of homelessness, child welfare interventions, poverty and suicide compared to the rest of Canada. All of these issues are linked to the colonial violence indigenous people have endured across generations in Canada.

On the surface, Hart said, poor physical and mental health of many residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighborhood – notorious for its high levels of poverty and public drug use – make them the poster children for the antidrug campaign. But he sees something else going on.

"If you look at those folks really carefully, you can see that many folks have psychiatric illnesses that are not being attended to," he said. "They have a multitude of problems. But it's just simply easy to say that it's (their intersecting social and economic issues are) because of their drug use."

**"Once they have the information, then they can put pressure on their legislators. And that's my strategy, to basically educate folks. Help people to understand."**

CARL HART

**Educating people**

Hart doesn't bother to debate his findings with the antidrug crowd.

"I have to make sure I don't engage in conversations with people who don't abide by the rules of evidence" is one of his best-known quotes.

The day after his Vancouver talk, Hart said he preferred to talk to people open to listening.

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Once they understand, Hart lays out how they can help, from knowing the science behind his work and engaging in factual debates, to holding yourself and others accountable for racism.

Perhaps the most difficult ask is coming out as a drug user to help dispel the myth that only addicts use illegal drugs. While Hart is open about his drug use, he said that in his case, it helps that he's proven himself as an award-winning Columbia University professor.

"For (other) people, when they think about coming out of the closet, they may have to do it on a smaller scale, like to friends and relatives," he said.

Hart acknowledges it isn't an easy path to tread; he's lost friends and research funding due to his views. His book tour has been the main source of research funding as of late. But these are sacrifices he's willing to make to change society's attitude and policies toward drugs.

"The focus shouldn't be on whether you are using drugs, but it should be on your deeds," Hart told his Vancouver audience before it erupted into the second standing ovation of the night.

"I want to make sure people are good people."

Courtesy of INSP News Service [www.street-papers.org](http://www.street-papers.org) / Megaphone, Vancouver, B.C.

**ARTIST, from page 9**

them by because you don't have a big enough name to command a huge price, so they're not interested.

**The people and the books**

**S.Z.:** I just learned, in talking to you, that you acted in early Kuchar films. You also edited a book about the Kuchar brothers, "Reflections from a Cinematic Cesspool," with a foreword by John Waters. Did you know the brothers personally? Tell me about that time in your life.

**M.P.:** Actually, I published and edited the book. Mike and George always lived hand to mouth. I was making good money at the time as a freelancer and offered each of them a \$500 advance to write their autobiographies. George gave me boxes of photos and memorabilia to pour through. From it, Julie Lee pulled together their first-ever filmography. The John Waters thing was funny. George would say, "You call him," and I would say, "No, you call him." We went round and round until George finally called and asked Waters if he'd write the introduction.

Richard Pleuger, a German journalist and former student of George's, brought George and Mike by my studio. We hit it off. George liked home cooking, and I cooked many a meal for him and Mike. The first time I cooked, I made a roast chicken for the three of us. I should have made a chicken for each of them! They are big men – 6 feet, 4 inches – and can eat a lot! Subsequent meals were more bountiful.

I was in a number of Kuchar productions and a couple of documentaries. George had a habit that if he knew someone was depressed and needed a boost, he would star them in a video. As a "star," you get lots of lines, lots of attention and lots of garish makeup. During one of my down periods, George, taking full advantage of my Boston accent, starred me in "Society Slut."

The last time I saw George, he told me a New York gallery was handling his work. When he told me a watercolor sold for \$35,000, we both burst into laughter – the insanity of it.

**S.Z.:** You are presumably one of the last living people to actually remember Elizabeth Short, or Bette, as you refer to her. Tell me about the

importance of writing "Childhood Shadows: The Hidden Story of the Black Dahlia Murder."

**M.P.:** Writing that book was a catharsis. I went deep into areas that I had avoided dwelling on. It was emotionally very difficult. Throughout my life, I kept an image of the real Bette Short deep inside me, protected. I didn't care what people said about her; she was my friend. For years, Elizabeth Short had been so reviled. In that book, I wanted to bring the real person back to life.

**S.Z.:** What would you like to see as Elizabeth Short's legacy?

**M.P.:** I would hope that the myth of the Black Dahlia becomes separate from Elizabeth Short, the real person, and that victims are never, never again treated the way she was.

**An artist's 'balancing act'**

**S.Z.:** You handed me a couple of quotations from Albert Camus. Can you speak to the importance of his philosophy that strikes you?

**M.P.:** Camus speaks of the balancing act artists must endure to be relevant – between activism and their creative work. I have been a longtime community volunteer – very, very active in political campaigns, antiwar and environmental causes and often would forgo my creative work.

Camus' philosophy served as my guide, helped me to balance my art and writing with my desire to work to better human conditions. Camus believed in "solitary individuals ... whose deeds and works ... build for all."

**S.Z.:** You have seen the world change in your lifetime, in so many ways. What do you see for the future?

**M.P.:** My large print of the rowers reflects my guarded optimism – if only we all would work together to better the world and protect the environment. My greatest hope is with the younger generation – so many of them are free from the prejudices that we had to work to overcome, and which a significant portion of my generation never did. I think it is the liberalism of the young people that is driving this country. It may be two steps forward and one step backward, but I think the better nature of humankind will prevail.



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