

Paul Harfleet is a London based artist, writer, and designer. He formulated The Pansy Project in 2005 in Manchester, since then he has travelled across Europe, America, and most recently Canada. His first book, *Pansy Boy*, was short-listed for the Polari First Book Prize in 2018 and is available in independent bookshops. He is currently developing an exhibition with Homotopia Festival and St Helen's Libraries in Merseyside which opens in November 2019. Further information about his work can be found on thepansyproject.com.

Tourist in the Daylight

Paul Harfleet, London

In November 1989, I moved to Manchester. By the early nineties, Mancunian nightlife became my natural habitat – clubs and bars my home. I was a tourist in the daylight – when the sun was up, I bent the straight world. Homophobia was my theme tune and “Fucking Faggot!” was the chorus.

Sometimes I'd get angry and shout back. Mostly I'd hide, wither, fall back into my childhood self. I was catapulted to a time when I was panicked that my secret sexuality would unfurl in front of them. Shame and pride combined into a poisonous mix of self-loathing and anger, sadness, and sometimes despair. I sat with it, rarely expressing the way these micro-aggressions impacted on my daily life.



Paul Harfeet documenting pansies in Brussels, Belgium in 2014. Photograph ©Wen-Chi Su.

Early 2005, on another cold day in Manchester, I left Lamport Court. Two boisterous builders sat on a low brick wall. I looked at them silently hissing like a cat to a dog, "it's about time we went gay bashing again. Isn't it?", they laughed. I melted into myself, tears welling. I shuffled away, hunched over, saying nothing. I continued through the day, trying not to dwell on it. Later I told my boyfriend, we shared the anger. "Let's go for a walk", he said. We wandered through the streets. From the hedgerows a gaggle of youths appeared. They clocked our relationship and started throwing stones and insults. We exchanged worried glances and hurried away. Shaken, we carried on.

We reached our destination, 'The 'B' of the Bang' by Thomas Heatherwick. Partially built, spiking into the sky, it would later be dismantled, a failed monument to the starter's gun.

A man approached. "Do you have any spare change?" "No, sorry." I responded. "You ladies have a nice day", he said sarcastically. My boyfriend bristled, about to react. "Faggots!", the man said under his breath. We hurried home. Defeated.

These three incidents had just enough threat to create the impetus for an artwork. I would pass the locations, recalling the experiences. There was an emotional response – the shame, the rage, the hatred, rolling off an empty roadside.

My observations of floral memorials began to make a different kind of sense to me. I remembered the places I marched to protest Clause 28. How it felt to reclaim the streets on a pride march in the nineties on a trip to London. These were the ingredients that formed the work that would keep me busy for the next decade and beyond.

"Don't ask that guy – he wants to hang them all." President Donald Trump comments on Vice President Mike Pence's views on gay rights. White House, Washington D.C., USA, 2018. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.





"Nice Shoes, Faggot!" For Alain Brosseau. Alexandra Bridge, Ottawa, Canada, 2019. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.



"Roll a Queer." For Phillip Jennings. Major Hill's Park, Ottawa, Canada, 2019. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.



"I think it's about time we went gay bashing again, isn't it?" Grosvenor Street, Manchester, UK, 2005. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.

I returned to painful places with a tray of pansies and a trowel, I nervously knelt, punctured the neglected turf, and placed a pansy in it. I pressed it into the ground and stood. I backed away, watching the flower bounce in the grey wind, like a jolly pink flag – it was instantly pleasing, like a balm. The flower had a personality, a demeanour that echoed my own. It felt small and gentle and easily ignored.

Hundreds of pansies and fourteen years later, I stood in the shadow of Parliament Hill in Canada's capital in Major Hill's Park, pansy and trowel in hand. This place was once a renowned gay cruising ground. 'Roll a queer' was a term adopted by aggressors. It referred to the act of mugging, beating and then pushing men off the precarious cliffs that framed the park. In the summer of '89 countless attacks occurred, and as many as four men were killed.

That summer, after his shift in Château Laurier, Alain Brosseau was walking home. Four men attacked him. He ran, they chased him through the park, dragged him to Alexandra Bridge, dangled him over the edge, and dropped him. "Nice shoes, Faggot!" were the last words Brosseau would hear. His body was found the next day in the river. Alain Brosseau was not gay, but his killers believed he was.

For months, the LGBTQ2S+ community had been telling the police of the attacks. They did little. When a straight white man was killed, it was suddenly worthy of attention. Before long the slow process of educating the police began. Thirty years later the police have improved, but homophobia persists, even thrives.



"Indistinct Abuse, Stone Throwing." Gurney Street, Manchester, UK, 2005. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.



"For Tyli'a 'Nana Boo' Mack." Stabbed to death. 200 block of Q Street, N.W. Washington D.C., USA, 2018. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.

Despite the apparent strides forward, being queer still merits attack. In June, 2019, *The Guardian* reported that 'offences [have] doubled since 2014 against gay and lesbian people and trebled against trans people... The rate of LGBT hate crime per capita rose by 144% between 2013-14 and 2017-18. In the most recent year of data, police recorded 11,600 crimes, more than doubling from 4,600 during this period.'

Wherever I take The Pansy Project, I continue to find stories of violence and homophobia. When the project began, I naively believed that this work would gradually fade as society evolved into a final destination of acceptance. Alas the opposite appears to be true, as more black trans women are killed in America every day and beatings on public transport ripple through the press.

Homophobia continues, and so shall I.

"Fucking Faggot!" Queen Street, Blackpool, UK, 2014. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.



"Beaten." Jayhawk Motel, 1004 N 3rd St, Lawrence, Kansas, USA, 2018. Photograph ©Paul Harfleet.

