

V. VALE, THE MAN BEHIND *MODERN PRIMITIVES*



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During the last couple of years, the APP Conference in Las Vegas has had a number of special guests—some real innovators in our industry. Sometimes these were historians, others were anthropologists. The point is that every year there are some extra highlights at the event and this year, without a doubt, it was the participation of Charles Gatewood and V. Vale who are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the world-famous book, *Modern Primitives*.

I had a little chat with V. Vale about his work, life, and projects...

Tell us a little bit about the *Search & Destroy* years - when you got involved, why you got involved, what the goal of the publication was, and how the general public responded?

Search & Destroy aimed to both document and catalyze the revolutionary way of life known as punk rock. I called punk the “International Punk Rock Cultural Revolution” as indeed a few thousand people from all over the planet created music, style, graphic art, posters, films, clothing - anything that might be called culture. I got involved because I wanted to give the most inspiration possible to others.

I wanted to be as thorough and detailed as possible, but also expand the intelligence and concepts for readers to ponder and then act upon. Just because something is labeled “punk” doesn’t mean it can’t be of the highest quality prophetic intelligence.

How was your reaction to all those “other” people that were really modified, as punks had their ways to show their discomfort (hair, clothes, thoughts, actions) as these “others” had more radical, physical mods?

Remember when British punk rockers were described as putting safety pins through their cheeks and other facial areas? Punk rock also put S&M fashion on the street. All this may have planted a seed (or seeds) that slowly grew on an international level.

Why the change from *Search & Destroy* to *RE/Search*?

The first wave of punk rock people dispersed, like a kind of diaspora. *RE/Search* was chosen as a new name because we felt the need to RE-do and RE-think everything in our lives and the world. In fact, RE seems the most important prefix in the English language now. And even we, right now, are participating in a kind of REnewal. REevaluation. REappraising. REconceptualizing. REinvigorating ourselves. REnewing our world.



Any memorable interviews or anecdotes?

The interviews I had to do the least amount of editing on were with William S. Burroughs and J.G. Ballard. The most poetic interviews I did were with James Blood Ulmer and Sun Ra, in the early *RE/Search* tabloids.

How and why did you get involved with *Modern Primitives*?

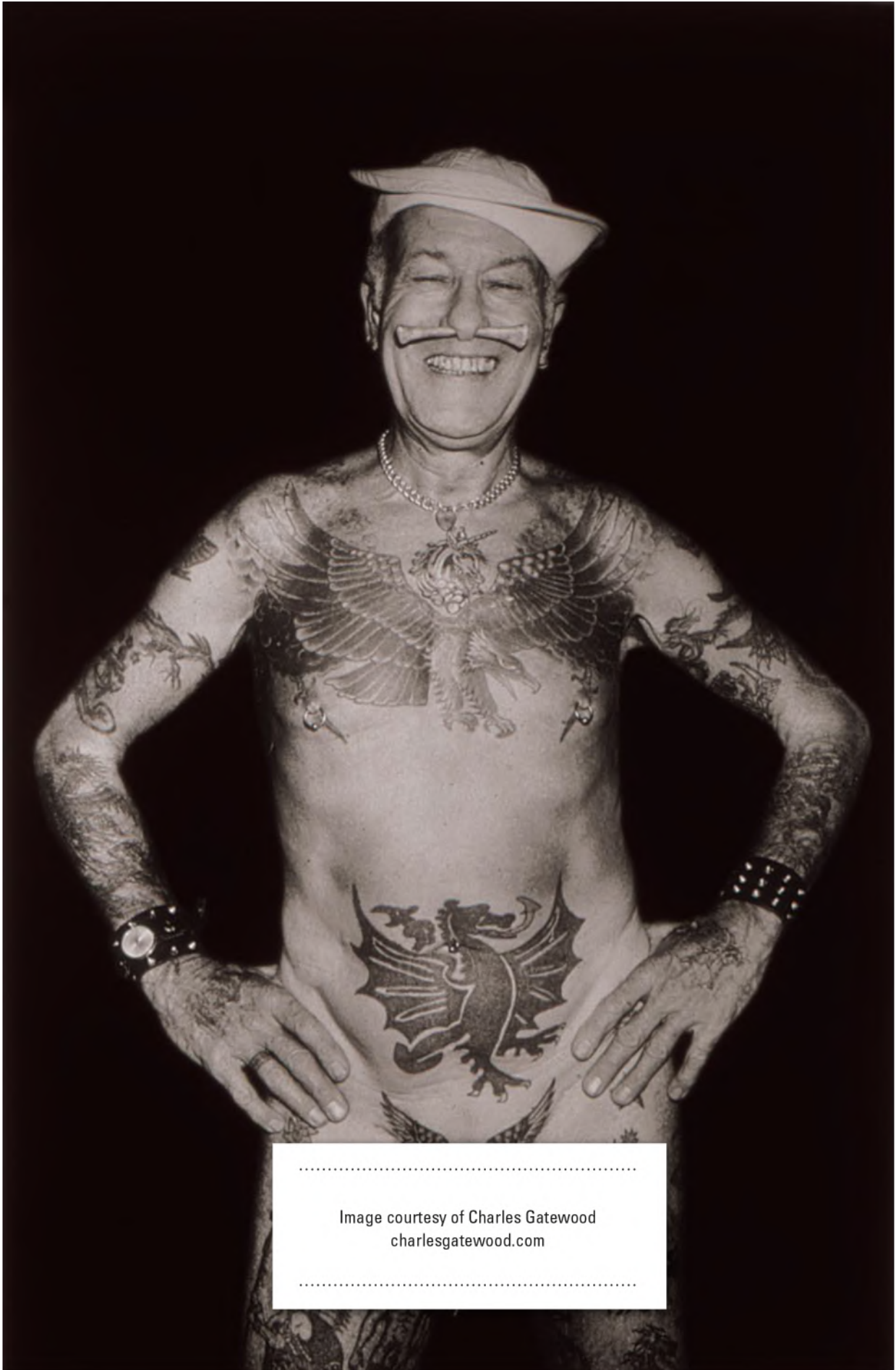
I was introduced to Fakir Musafar by the great photographer of the underground, Charles Gatewood. Our conversations sparked the idea of REmapping the body as an artistic canvas, which resulted in the publication of *Modern Primitives*.

When and how did you meet Charles Gatewood?

We got in touch through early punk rock underground connections. Charles had published *Sidetripping*, which was and is my favorite photography book of all time (text by William S. Burroughs), and he photographed Helen Wheels, a New York punk singer, and I put his photo on the cover of *Search & Destroy* #4. Charles and I have worked together ever since—32 years to date.

How did you meet all those other interesting people that are published in the book such as Ed Hardy, Raelyn Gallina, Lyle Tuttle, Leo Zulueta, and Psychic TV, among others?

Whenever you start a project, just one person leads you to another, and the chain continues seemingly effortlessly. Actually, just pure luck has a lot to do with everything in your life. I gravitate toward creative, unusual people who aren’t afraid to get more “extreme.”



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Image courtesy of Charles Gatewood
charlesgatewood.com
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Maybe it can't get better than this. APP Conference seemed like a little bit of heaven right here on earth—sounds corny, but 1,000 “outsiders” all in one place, having fun just talking and meeting each other—what a paradise.

Why do you think the publication quickly became the “bible of body modification,” and what do you think about that?

Being an amateur anthropologist and book lover, I spent seven years “perfecting” the book. If an idea wasn't in an interview, I made sure it was at least mentioned in the quotations section in the back of the book. I think that all the work put into making *Modern Primitives* as high-quality as possible was worth it. It took many edits to make the text concise, readable, and hopefully, inspiring as well. We tried to show as many BodyMod possibilities as were possible without a hospital or surgeon being required.

How many copies of *Modern Primitives* have been printed?

Can't remember, but it's in its 16th or 17th printing now, and absolutely no change was ever made!

Any special anecdote that you remember and why?

Sometimes people change. The 1988 version of a person may want to completely censor and almost obliterate the 1982 version as captured on cassette tapes. This was attempted in *Modern Primitives*, but failed. You can guess who tried to bowdlerize himself!

How many different publications have you worked on; which one is your favorite “baby,” and why?

I've done a whole spectrum of publications involving the mind-body relationship to art, imagination, creativity, and fulfilling the potential one is born with, but I have a special love for my two *Pranks* books (*Pranks!*, and *Pranks 2*) as well as my *Freaks: We Who Are Not As Others* book.

Tell us a little about the *Pranks* books.

Ideally, after reading the *Pranks* books, then: Everywhere you go in the world, your outlook and attitude is: “What prank could be done here? How could this billboard be ‘improved’?! How can we subvert the meaning of this advertisement, sign, or situation?” There are so many opportunities to have free fun and make the world a more tolerable place, more to your liking. However, we are against pranks that just victimize other humans. Our favorite prank is really a performance art piece, or a surrealist installation that makes people go, “Huh?! What does this mean?”

What is next?

I need to work on something of a more personal nature, like a kind of autobiography or two. I'm hoping my obsessions will coalesce and bear some strange fruit.

How did you feel about the APP Conference, how was the response of the attendees?

I loved the APP Conference and all the attendees I met: everybody doing creative work, trying to improve their art and technique, really trying to make the world a more beautiful place, and getting paid for doing this “missionary work” all over the world. Maybe it can't get better than this. APP Conference seemed like a little bit of heaven right here on earth—sounds corny, but 1,000 “outsiders” all in one place, having fun just talking and meeting each other—what a paradise. The only way APP could have been improved is to skip the live music at the closing party - just play quiet, quiet music, because really everybody just wants to meet and talk to each other, not shout over loud broadcasts. And everybody wants to look at each other and admire each other. The loud music gets in the way of this. Everything else at APP seemed perfect! And, of course, thoroughly professional attention to details, and very considerate treatment of all who attended. This was my impression.

Anything you would like to add?

Obsession is the key to everything in life. Imagination is more important than mere knowledge. I have a deep distrust of logic and rationality, and feel that everyone is, at least potentially, a psychopath, and a sex maniac. Given that, it's utterly important to have as many creative outlets as possible, and be working on refining one's creative techniques and skills - this keeps us from descending into madness, boredom and criminality. I also think that we live on a criminal planet, and that criminals are running the major countries and corporations. It's time for a clean sweep - get rid of everybody who caused the big mess the world is in - and start all over again on a platform of rigorous, black-humorous, skeptical empiricism. As Albert Einstein said, it's madness to do the same things over and over and expect different results. Likewise, you can't use the same people (like Ben Bernanke) and expect different results like an economic improvement. No, you need all new people - people with fresh ideas and untainted ethics. I think we're in for a long, dark century. So put your money into body modifications - when real economic collapse happens, they can't take that away from you! **P**