

# George Hitchcock in his Santa Cruz Studio, 1973

silver print

**JIM HAIR**

George Hitchcock (1914–2010), was a major American poet, activist, actor, painter, and editor. The author of dozens of books across many genres, he is best known for founding and editing *kayak* (1964–1984), an influential and visionary poetry magazine widely collected nationally and internationally.

*“To understate the matter, George gave the American poetry world three principle gifts: his own writing; kayak—the finest poetry magazine of my era; and his complex and unusual presence, which served as a model for so many of us: the model of the poet as a total human being.”*

—Philip Levine,  
former U.S. Poet  
Laureate



courtesy: Jim Hair photography archive

## Remembering *kayak*

**Y**ou had to go to the giant under the stairs if you wanted advice of the literary kind, because he was the one who made *kayak*, that “avenue to our rage, our sense of the ludicrous, the unreal that America had become,” Philip Levine would say. I’d been turned away before, with a roar, asking to enter his advanced poetry class as a freshman. But some of us had started a student journal and put up posters all around, never mind that they said *Submit to the Blunt Probe*, we were surprised no one responded, and now we had to go see a minotaur with hair the color of ivory.

This appealed to him, and thus began his sponsorship of *The Blunt Probe* and a set of tutorials in which he showed us what it took for a new literary magazine to take off. As far as submissions, his advice was simple. “At first you’ll need to solicit.”

*Solicit* sounded both soulful and illicit. He gave us names. We called the names and the people who belonged to the names were glad that their names had been the names that came up when names had to be thought of by George Hitchcock. We drove all over town in the fog finding addresses and fetching manuscripts, and at each stop we’d read the new manuscript right away in the car before we drove on. Sometimes we’d go back to the person’s door and tell them yes then and there. George Hitchcock had given us a literary treasure map.

*The Blunt Probe* appeared three times, floated by his support. *Kayak* had a run of sixty-four. In a few years I would go to a party at his condominium by Neary’s Lagoon and hold a fresh *kayak* in my hands, magnetized. We’d like to remember *kayak* as an inspiration with the first issue of *Catamaran*.

—Elizabeth McKenzie, Fiction Editor

### [Fever sits on my skull]

Fever sits on my skull  
Living in dread  
Thirsting of caustic  
And bursting veins  
The Gods appear in  
Tatters and ribbons  
Of glorious song.

—George Hitchcock (1914–2010)

*From Six Minute Poems: The Last Poems of George Hitchcock, a limited edition, 36 page, hand-sewn book created by Marjorie Simon in 2011 with Tavern Books in Portland. By permission of Marjorie Simon.*

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### New Wave

Words wave to the wave  
no one taught them  
to dive beneath its rising crown  
to not swallow salt  
before they bob up  
from the sand below  
sputtering anew

—a stanza from the poem “New Wave”  
by Marjorie Simon

*Poet Marjorie Simon, the long time companion of George Hitchcock, worked on kayak with George for many years.*