

# IN PASSING

## Robert Opel: His Last High Performance

"I am Robert Opel. I am an artist, a cocksucker and an anarchist. My life is my art. Sometimes I use a camera. Sometimes I have trouble disseminating images I record because people seem to be frightened of sexual imagery. Men like myself have been feared and persecuted because of our sexual preference. But I persist. Eventually, I believe, I will receive wider attention."

April, 1979

PHOTO BY JIM STEWART



Robert Opel, who staged a mock execution of Dan White at the Gay Freedom Day parade and "streaked" at the 1974 Oscars ceremony, was shot and killed Sunday by bandits who invaded his gay art gallery South of Market.

All the robbers got was \$5, a camera and a backpack, police said.

Witnesses told police they were at the Fey Way Productions, 1287 Howard Street, about 9 p.m. when two white men in their 30s came in demanding money and drugs.

One man had a sawed-off shotgun, the other — believed to be the killer — had an automatic and was wearing a brown leather jacket with a large diamond stickpin.

Opel, 39, begged the men to leave, saying, "I don't want to see that (the guns)."

Homicide Inspectors Jim Crowley and Mike Byrne said the gunmen threatened to kill witnesses Anthony Rogers, 32, and Camille O'Grady, 29, when Opel said he had no money.

"We are not violent people," Rogers reportedly told the robbers. "Please don't hurt us."

When the bandit with the shotgun pointed it at O'Grady's head and said, "Give us the money or I'll kill her," Opel replied, "You'll have to kill us all there's no money."

O'Grady, Rogers and another witness, Ladon Palmer, 25, told police the bandit with the automatic took Opel into the apartment Opel shared with O'Grady behind the gallery.

A shot was fired, apparently to scare Opel, but he was heard to tell the bandit, "Get out of my space."

"I'm gonna blow your head off," the bandit threatened.

"You're going to have to," Opel retorted. "There's no money here."

The witnesses told police they heard another shot and the thump of Opel falling to the floor.

After taking \$5, a camera, and a backpack, the gunman told the witnesses, "You haven't seen us before, but if you see us again, you're dead." The two men then fled the building.

Opel was pronounced dead at 10:40 p.m., soon after being rushed to San Francisco General Hospital.

Opel's mock execution of Dan White, the slayer of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk, took place at the UN Plaza, with Opel pretending to shoot a friend dressed all in white.

Five years ago, Opel, then an advertising man in Los Angeles, "streaked" at the Academy Awards ceremony, prancing across the stage just as David Niven was about to introduce Elizabeth Taylor.

A couple of months later Opel stripped at a Los Angeles City Council meeting to protest an ordinance banning nudity at municipal beaches. He was acquitted in October, 1975, of indecent exposure, but convicted of disrupting a public meeting.

— S.F. Chronicle — July 9, 1979

