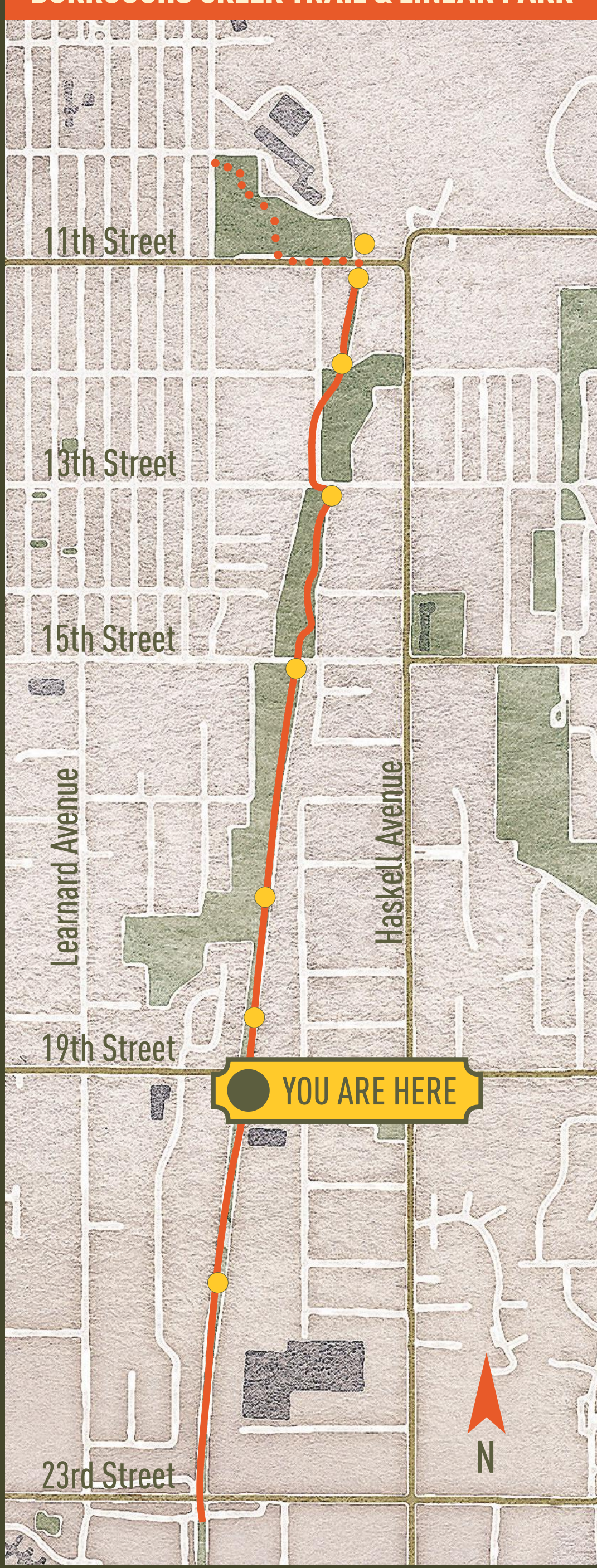


FOR BURROUGHS, IT ALL ADDED UP

BURROUGHS CREEK TRAIL & LINEAR PARK



Beat Generation icon William S. Burroughs found love – and loved life – during his years in Lawrence

William S. Burroughs, once hailed by Norman Mailer as “the only American novelist living today who may conceivably be possessed by genius,” lived in Lawrence a few blocks west of this spot for the last 16 years of his life. Generally regarded as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, his books have been translated into more than 70 languages. Burroughs was also one of the earliest American multimedia artists; his films, recordings, paintings and collaborations continue to inspire artists around the world. He is the namesake of Burroughs Creek and the Burroughs Creek Trail.

William Seward Burroughs II was born on February 5, 1914, to a well-off family in St. Louis, Missouri. His grandfather had invented the Burroughs Adding Machine. In 1932, aged 18, Burroughs attended Harvard University, studying English literature. Four years later, he moved to Vienna to study medicine but soon returned to New York City when World War II loomed in Europe.

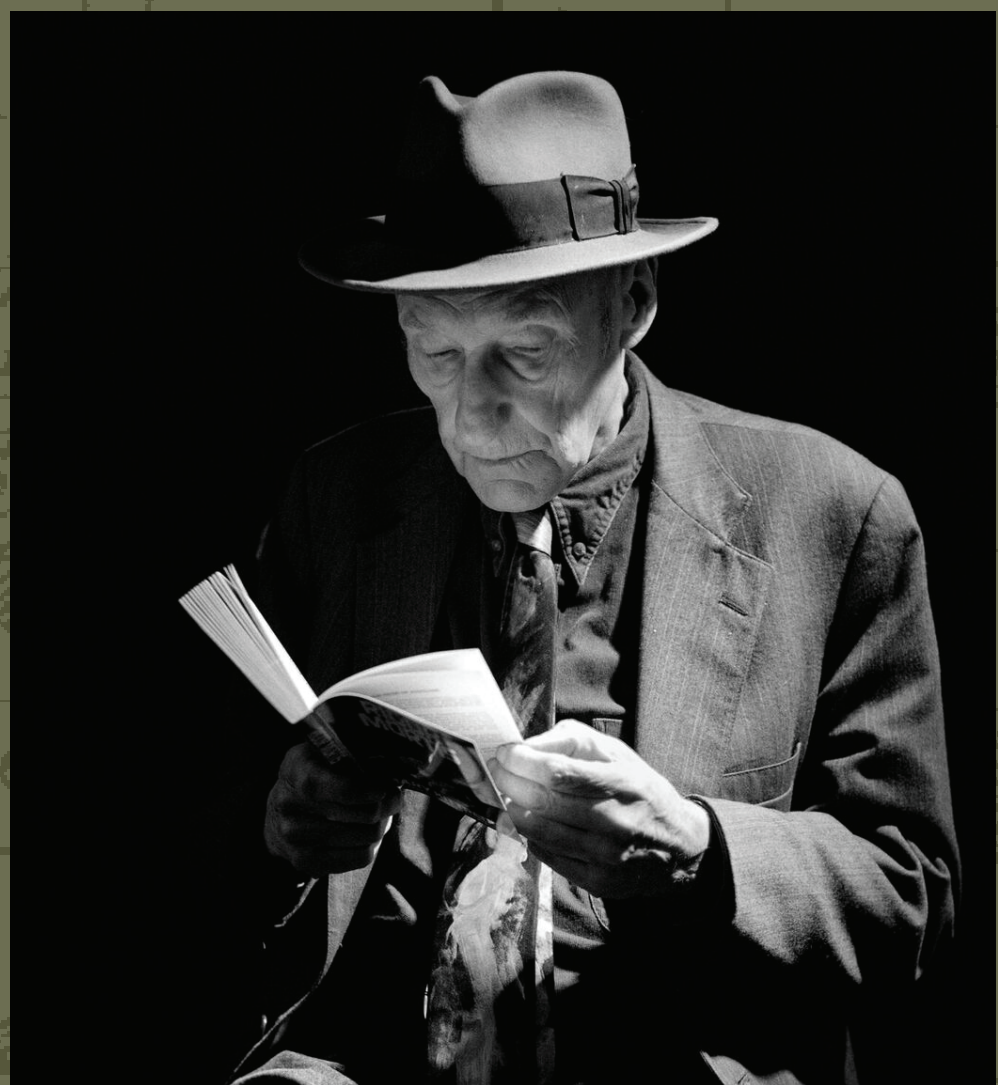
In 1943, Burroughs met Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. They became fast friends, forming the nucleus of the nascent Beat Generation, a group of often experimental writers exploring postwar American culture.

Burroughs became addicted to narcotics in 1945. The following year, he married Joan Vollmer, the roommate of Kerouac’s girlfriend. They moved to a farm in Texas, where their son Billy was born. In 1948, they relocated to New Orleans, then to Mexico City the following year, where, during a raucous party, Burroughs accidentally shot his wife in a drunken William Tell routine. He was acquitted in the case, but Vollmer’s death haunted him for the rest of his life.

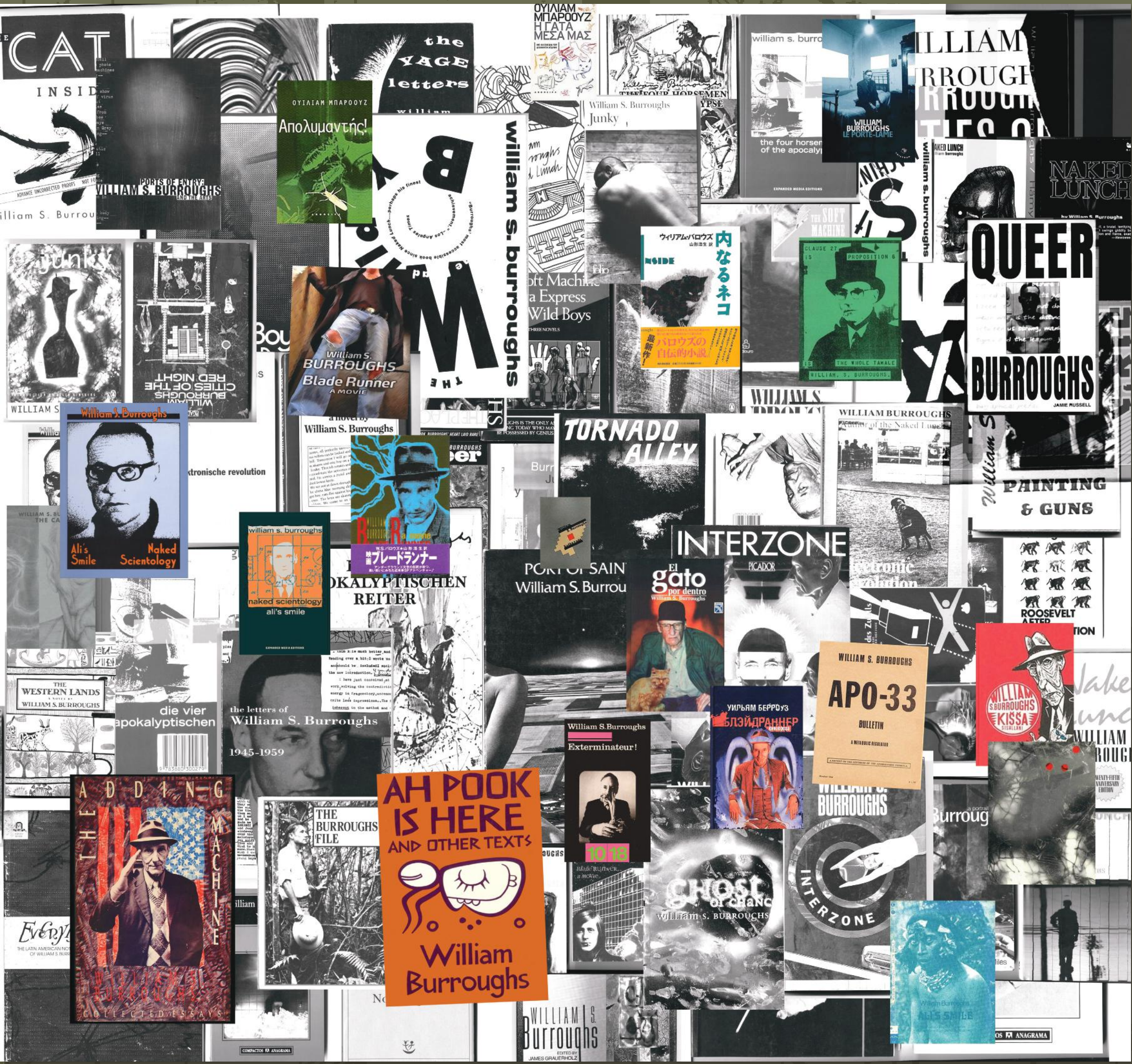
Burroughs’ first novel, *Junky*, was published in 1953. He moved to Morocco and spent five years writing *Naked Lunch*, his controversial breakthrough, published in Paris in 1959, and finally in

America after charges of obscenity were rejected by the courts. In the meantime, Burroughs had moved to Paris in 1958, working with artist Brion Gysin, then on to London in 1960, where he lived for 14 years, publishing six novels.

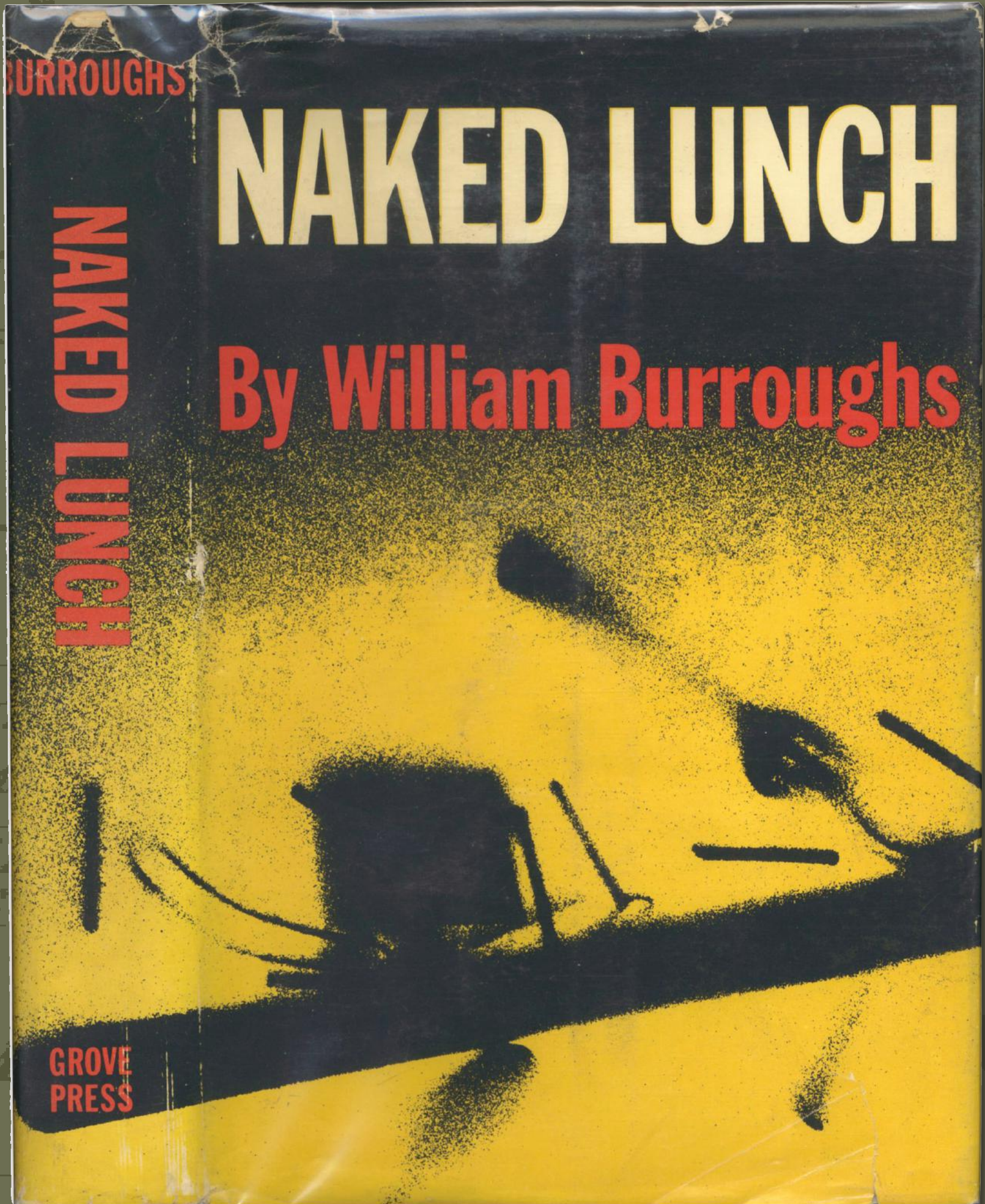
In 1974, Burroughs returned to New York City where he met James Grauerholz, a former University of Kansas student from Coffeyville, Kansas, who soon became Burroughs’ secretary and manager. Grauerholz booked Burroughs on a worldwide series of reading tours. During that time, Burroughs became re-addicted to heroin. Fearing disaster, Grauerholz moved Burroughs’ business office to Lawrence in 1979, hoping to entice Burroughs away from his excesses. It worked: Burroughs moved to Lawrence in 1981, remaining until his death in 1997 at age 83, the longest he had lived in one place.



Uncommon Core. William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsburg formed the core of the Beat Generation, a term coined by Kerouac. They came to national prominence in the late 1950s with the publication of Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956), Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), and Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* (1959). Ginsberg and Kerouac were students at Columbia University when Lucien Carr introduced them to Burroughs in 1943. In 1945, Burroughs and Kerouac collaborated on a fact-based murder novel, *And The Hippos Were Boiled In Their Tanks*, which remained unpublished until 2008. Burroughs deemed it “not a distinguished work,” but it offered an inkling of things to come. The Beat writers eschewed standard narrative forms. Central themes included the spiritual quest; rejection of control systems and social mores; and explicit, often bleak portrayals of the human condition. Burroughs, not much of a joiner, served more as Beat counselor than proselyte.



Five Phases. Burroughs’ writings might be classified into five overlapping periods. His initial works, written in the early 1950s, were mostly linear narratives. *Naked Lunch* (1959), with its fragmentation of narrative and increasingly explicit material, stands alone. The third period, (1961-1967), was highly experimental, furthering the fragmented narrative via the Cut-Up technique pioneered by the artist Brion Gysin, Burroughs’ longtime collaborator. A piece of text was cut into pieces and the pieces re-arranged to allow new meanings to emerge. In the fourth period (mid-1960s through mid-1970s), Burroughs published one novel, several volumes of short stories and essays, and dozens of magazine articles, often politically charged. From the mid-1970s onward, Burroughs entered his mature phase. He published the *Red Night* trilogy – somewhat more linear in form – along with numerous essays, his dream diaries, and a book about his cats.



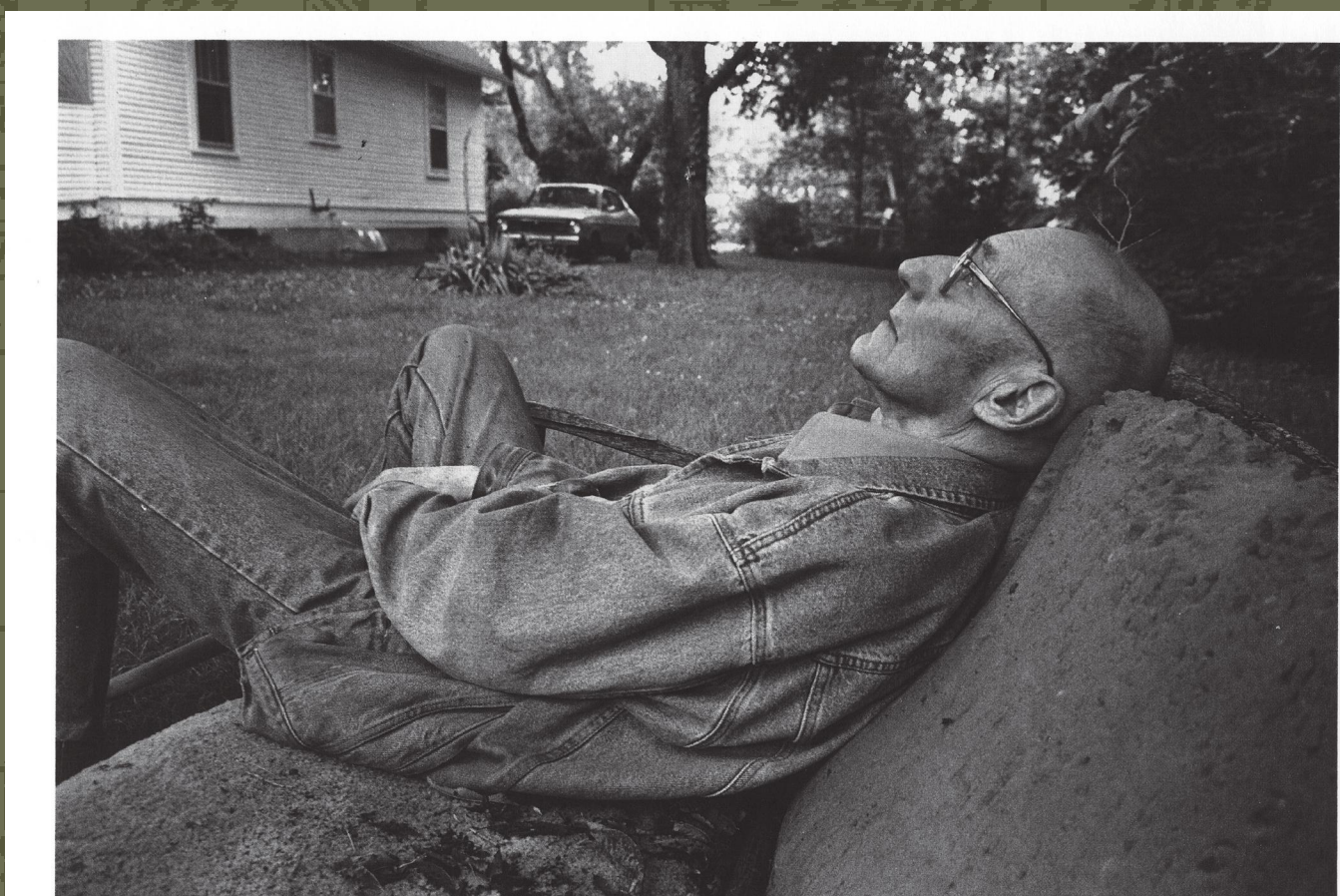
Banned in Boston. *Naked Lunch* was a series of vignettes—Burroughs called them “routines”—often shockingly explicit in its depictions of sex, violence, and drug use. “The title means exactly what the words say: naked lunch, a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork,” Burroughs wrote in his introduction. Originally published in Paris in 1959, the first American edition of *Naked Lunch* was released in 1962 by Grove Press. A year later, it was deemed obscene by the Boston authorities. The ruling was eventually rejected by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 1966, after the complex process of establishing the criteria for obscenity. Allen Ginsberg and Norman Mailer testified at the trial. It was a landmark case; one of the last books to be “Banned in Boston,” and the last obscenity trial against a written work in the United States. Director David Cronenberg released a film version of *Naked Lunch* in 1991.



On the Road, Again. In 1974, when James Grauerholz took over management of Burroughs’ affairs, Burroughs was in financial straits. A former touring musician, Grauerholz took Burroughs on the road, booking readings around the world and arranging recording sessions. Burroughs recorded over 30 albums, either solo or in collaboration, and appeared in more than 20 films and videos. He was pictured on the cover of The Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, and such rock bands as Steely Dan, Soft Machine, and Clem Snide mined Burroughs’ books for their names. In 1988, Burroughs collaborated with director Robert Wilson and musician Tom Waits on the avant-garde opera, *The Black Rider*. Burroughs made his national television debut on *Saturday Night Live* in 1981, reading *Twilight’s Last Gleaming* and routines from *Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express*. In 1992, he made one of his last recordings at the Red House studio in Lawrence.



Cool Cats. Burroughs came to Lawrence in December 1981, renting an old stone house four miles south of town. In the summer of 1982, he bought a two-bedroom bungalow – a Sears Roebuck kit house – in Lawrence’s Barker neighborhood. He was often sighted buying cat food at the nearby Dillon’s on Massachusetts Street. At one time, Burroughs cared for more than a dozen cats. Grauerholz and Bill Rich organized the River City Reunion in 1987, a week-long music and arts festival staged primarily at the University of Kansas and Liberty Hall. Participants included Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary (pictured above, left), Anne Waldman, Jim Carroll, Hüsker Dü, Michael McClure, Ed Sanders, Keith Haring, and Marianne Faithfull. In 1996, Grauerholz produced the Nova Convention Revisited at the Lied Center in Lawrence. Ginsberg, Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Patti Smith (pictured above, right), Debbie Harry, and Chris Stein, and poets John Giorno and Ed Sanders were among the artists who came to pay their respects to Burroughs.



William Seward Burroughs relaxing on the Ehrenkranz lawn. Author's Creek in background. Photo by John Burroughs, May 28, 1991.

1997, at Lawrence Memorial Hospital. He was buried in the family plot at Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis. In 2005, at the urging of Grauerholz and not without a bit of dissension, the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Tributary in East Lawrence was re-named Burroughs Creek by the US Board on Geographic Names. That same year, the City of Lawrence designated his home a local landmark. In 2010, the Burroughs Creek Trail was opened to the public.

Finding Peace in Lawrence. During his time in Lawrence, Burroughs published four books, produced an astonishing amount of visual art, and doted on his cats. In 1984, he was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and awarded the order of Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the government of France. Burroughs found peace in Lawrence. He had a modest home, hard-won security, many friends and visitors, and plenty of cats. And, at the end of an often tragic and dangerous life, he at last knew love. He wrote in *Last Words: The Final Journals of William Burroughs*, published posthumously in 2000: “Love? What is it? Most natural painkiller what there is. LOVE. Pure love. What I feel for my cats present and past.” William S. Burroughs died at 6 p.m. on August 2, 1997.



Image Courtesy: Ginsberg Estate



Image Courtesy: Philip Hoving

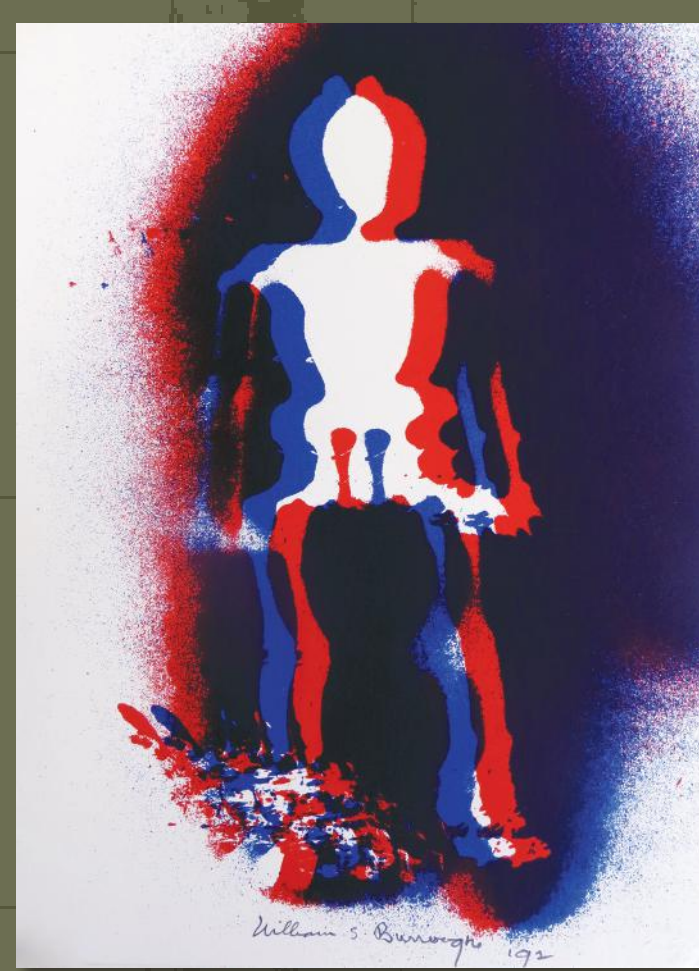


Image Courtesy: Burroughs Estate

Portrait of the Artist as an Older Man. Burroughs had a lifelong interest in visual arts—particularly photography and collage—but in Lawrence his interest shifted into high gear. In his garage studio he produced a series of “Shotgun Paintings” (left), attaching spray cans and bags of paint to pieces of plywood and exploding them with a shotgun. The shotgun paintings were featured in Burroughs’ first art exhibition in 1987 at the Shafrazi Gallery in New York City. Later, he painted on paper using brushes and improvised stencils; he made collages; he painted a triptych of garage doors; he collaborated with Robert Rauschenberg, Philip Taaffe and George Condo. Burroughs’ artworks, such as *X-Ray Man* (1992, right) have been featured in over fifty international galleries and museums. His exhibit venues include the Royal Academy of the Arts, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Guggenheim Museum, New Museum, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Lawrence Arts Center.