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News from the



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January 2017

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Artist Fran Frisch (left) and curator Jeremy Prince at the artist's Palm Springs home.

Exhibition Traces History of Bear Subculture: Gay Masculinity Beyond the Stereotypes

by Marke Bieschke

"Beartoonist of San Francisco: Sketching an Emerging Subculture," a new exhibition opening at the GLBT History Museum on January 27, traces the first three decades of the bear community, a subculture that developed in the 1980s to celebrate older, larger, hairier, ruggedly masculine gay

men who had been largely excluded from standards of attractiveness in gay popular culture.

The show focuses on San Francisco, one of the places the bear scene emerged before becoming an international phenomenon. Using cartoons by Fran Frisch as a mirror for the community's evolution, "Beartoonist" also exhibits photographs, magazines, memorabilia and other materials. Curator Jeremy Prince, who serves as manager of the GLBT History Museum, responded to our questions about bear history and his work on the exhibition.

What changes have you documented in the bear community over the years?

When the bear community began to emerge in the late 1980s, it drew from existing groups of gay men: the leather and biker communities and the chub subculture that brought together large gay men. By the mid-1990s, the bear community's sex-positive outlook coupled with the bear erotic type attracted many men who didn't subscribe to the "Castro clone" look or didn't see themselves in the stereotypes of male beauty portrayed in the gay media.

The growth of the bear community also coincided with the dawn of the Internet as a medium for social and sexual contacts, making it easier to connect with other men who felt marginalized by the gay mainstream. Although bear spaces and organizations started out on the margins, they have become integral parts of the community in San Francisco. The organization [Bears of San Francisco](#) raises thousands of dollars each year for LGBTQ causes, and establishments such as the [Lone Star Saloon](#) sponsor fundraisers and other events to give back to the community.

What sources did you draw on to put the exhibition together?

A number of items in the show are from my own project, the [Bear Ephemera and Archival Repository](#), a collection I launched in 2013. The exhibition also draws on the GLBT Historical Society's archives, of course. The institution is constantly working to build its holdings in this area, and it already preserves a wealth of materials in its ephemera and periodical collections. The Historical Society has almost complete runs of *The Bear Fax* and *BEAR* magazine, as well as newsletters from the Bears of San Francisco and buttons and programs from bear weekends.

How is "beartoonist" Fran Frisch important to the story?

Throughout my research, one thing stood out: Fran Frisch's work permeated the bear community in San Francisco for more than 20 years. A native of Minnesota, Frisch called the city home from 1989 to 2007. He was a cartoonist for the [Bay Area Reporter](#) and for bear-related publications, and he was involved in producing community events from

the 1990s on. What's more, Frisch's art helped create the emblematic image of the bear: cuddly and erotic, playful and laid back, yet sexually subversive. And Frisch's drawings brought humor into the mix as one of the aspects of bear masculinity that remains central to the community today.

"Beartoonist of San Francisco" runs January 27 through the end of May 2017 at the GLBT History Museum. For details on the opening reception and programs planned in conjunction with the exhibition, see the [Upcoming Events](#) section below.

From the Managing Archivist **Capturing the Diverse Voices of Our History**



by Joanna Black

Over the last year, the GLBT Historical Society archives has seen a lot of changes: We moved to a much larger space, we've grown our collections, and we've expanded our assistance to researchers. But that was just the beginning. In 2017, we'll continue building our capacity by introducing new projects that will advance the society's place as one of the

world's leading LGBTQ history research centers.

As a public history institution focusing on Northern California queer life, the GLBT Historical Society has an obligation to actively collect our stories from every possible source. That's why we're proud to announce that we'll soon relaunch our oral history program, intended to engage LGBTQ leaders, movers and shakers, activists, artists and everyday people to tell their stories, share their wisdom and reflect on the past in ways that will inform generations to come.

The oral history program will build on years of existing recordings that are already part of our vast collections, including interviews with pioneers of the homophile movement of the 1950s and with LGBTQ voices representing the diversity of races, ethnicities, social classes, sexualities and genders that have made up our community over time. Our collection now includes nearly 500 such oral histories -- and while that sounds like a lot, there are countless stories and wide areas of queer experience we have yet to record.

Like much of what we do, the oral history project will be a community-driven program, managed by our staff but made possible by the individuals who volunteer their time to preserve LGBTQ history. If you're interested in participating -- conducting interviews, researching

background histories, providing technical assistance or offering general support -- please join us for an informational meeting on Wednesday, February 1, at 7:00 p.m. at the [GLBT History Museum](#) at 4127 18th St. in the Castro. And if you have any questions, please contact me at joanna@glbthistory.org.

Joanna Black is the managing archivist at the [GLBT Historical Society](#).

Upcoming Events

Living History

How ACT UP Fought Back: Stories of Direct Action



Saturday, January 7

2:00-4:00 PM

Center for Sex & Culture

1349 Mission St., San Francisco

Donation welcome

Since the 2016 election, LGBTQ people and our allies have been looking for models of resistance. The AIDS activist group ACT UP was one of the most effective such movements in recent history. In this workshop, ACT UP/San Francisco veterans Rebecca Hensler, Crystal Mason and Ingrid Nelson share stories about how they moved into direct action, how they got organized, their strategies and values, their successes and challenges, and what current resistance movements can learn from AIDS activists of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Sponsored by [Godless Perverts](#), a Bay Area organization that advocates feminism, diversity, inclusivity and social justice and that seeks to create welcoming environments for nonbelievers and respectful believing allies. The panel discussion takes place at the [Center for Sex and Culture](#) in San Francisco and is cosponsored by the GLBT Historical Society. Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

Staged Reading

Rhino in the Castro: Tenn by Kathy Boussina

Monday, January 9

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

Free | \$5.00 donation welcome



[Theatre Rhinoceros](#), San Francisco's groundbreaking queer stage company, has teamed up with the GLBT History Museum to present "Rhino in the Castro," a series of readings of plays reflecting the LGBTQ community and our allies. The museum provides the space, and Rhino provides the scripts and actors.

This month's offering is "Tenn" by [Kathy Boussina](#), an evocation of celebrated gay playwright Tennessee Williams and his longtime lover, Frank Merlo, viewed through the lens of the unconventional therapeutic relationship that develops between Williams and his psychoanalyst. As the story unfolds, Williams's haunted past surfaces and Frank struggles to save his partner and keep their love intact.

[Open House](#)

Behind the Scenes in the Historical Society Archives



Saturday, January 21

2:00-4:00 PM

The GLBT Historical Society

989 Market St., Lower Level, San Francisco

Free admission | Registration required

The GLBT Historical Society preserves one of the world's largest collections of LGBTQ historical materials. The archives are used by

historians, writers, filmmakers and others researchers, yet they remain little known to the wider community. This special open house will offer members of the public a behind-the-scenes tour, including a rare opportunity to visit the archival reserve normally accessible only to Historical Society staff.

Managing archivist Joanna Black will provide an introduction to the collections and the function of the archives. Visitors also will have a chance to see highlights from the holdings that have never before been displayed publicly. Guided tours of the archives will take place at 2:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. Light refreshments will be served. To reserve a ticket, RSVP no later than 3:00 p.m. on January 20: [click here](#).

[Meet the Artist](#)

A Bear Community Pioneer: Cartoonist Fran Frisch

Wednesday, January 25

7:00-9:00 PM



Lone Star Saloon
1354 Harrison St., San Francisco
Free admission

In conjunction with "[Beartoonist of San Francisco: Sketching an Emerging Subculture](#)," an exhibition opening this month at the GLBT History Museum, artist Fran Frisch will welcome his fans and sell and inscribe prints of his work from the 1980s to the present at an informal reception at the Lone Star Saloon. Curator Jeremy Prince will be on hand to discuss the exhibition, and popular DJ Bearzbub will provide the musical mix. Cosponsored by the [Bears of San Francisco](#) and the [Lone Star Saloon](#). Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

[Exhibition Opening](#) **Beartoonist of San Francisco: Sketching a Subculture**



Friday, January 27
2:00-5:00 PM
The GLBT History Museum
4127 18th St., San Francisco
\$5.00; free for members

A new exhibition featuring the work of cartoonist Fran Frisch as a starting point for exploring the history of the bear community, a subculture that developed in the 1980s to celebrate older, larger, hairier, ruggedly masculine gay men who had been largely excluded from standards of attractiveness in gay popular culture.

Covering the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s, the show will focus on San Francisco, one of the places where the bear community first emerged. "Beartoonist of San Francisco" will include original art by Frisch, along with photographs, objects and ephemera from the collection of curator Jeremy Prince and the archives of the GLBT Historical Society. Drinks for the reception will be sponsored by [440 Castro](#). Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

[Exhibition Talk](#) **Fran Frisch: Beartoonist of San Francisco**

Saturday, January 28
4:30-6:30 PM
The GLBT History Museum
4127 18th St., San Francisco



\$5.00; free for members

Curator Jeremy Prince will join cartoonist Fran Frisch in presenting an informal gallery talk about "[Beartoonist of San Francisco: Sketching an Emerging Subculture](#)," the new exhibition at the GLBT History Museum. The show features Frisch's drawings as a starting point for exploring the community of bears, a gay subculture that developed in the 1980s. Join

the Facebook conversation [here](#).

[Volunteer Orientation](#) **Relaunching the LGBTQ Oral History Project**



Wednesday, February 1
7:00-9:00 PM
The GLBT History Museum
4127 18th St., San Francisco
Free admission

The GLBT Historical Society is relaunching its Oral History Project -- an initiative to record interviews with community elders who'll share their recollections of the LGBTQ past. Such interviews often provide the only record of aspects of everyday life in decades gone by, particularly for LGBTQ people from underrepresented groups. The project will offer numerous volunteer opportunities, from conducting interviews and researching background histories to providing technical assistance or offering general support. This volunteer-orientation evening will provide all the details you'll need to get involved. Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).



Thank you to all who donated in 2016 to [Vision2020](#), our campaign to create the New Museum of LGBTQ History and Culture in San Francisco. We're happy to report that we reached our \$100,000 year-end fundraising goal.

We're only just beginning this multiyear effort, so please join us in this vital work by [making a tax-deductible donation today](#)-- and please invite your friends and colleagues to donate, as well. To support Vision2020, [click here](#).

Visit Us

EXHIBITIONS & PROGRAMS

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St.

San Francisco, CA 94114

(415) 621-1107

www.glbthistory.org/museum

Monday & Wednesday - Saturday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Tuesday: Closed
Sunday: Noon - 5:00 PM

ARCHIVES & RESEARCH CENTER

The GLBT Historical Society

989 Market St., Lower Level

San Francisco, CA 94103-1708

(415) 777-5455

www.glbthistory.org/archives

Call to schedule a research appointment.

CREDITS: Photo of Fran Frisch by [Rick Gerharter](#). Details of bear cartoons courtesy [Fran Frisch](#).

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