

May 2020



The view of the 2008 Pride celebration from the top of the San Francisco City Hall dome.

Queering the Way We Celebrate & Embracing Our Identities: 50 Years of San Francisco Pride

by Mark Sawchuk

Dykes on Bikes zooming by on motorcycles wearing leather jackets. A little boy holding a sign professing his love for his trans parent. Hundreds of thousands of people crowding into San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza. These are but three of the images on display in a new photography exhibition, "[50 Years of Pride](#)," opening online on May 15 on the GLBT Historical Society's [website](#). The exhibition is presented by the society and the San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries with the support of San Francisco Pride, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. In addition to its online incarnation, the exhibition will ultimately be displayed on the ground floor and North Light Court of City Hall.

"50 Years of Pride" is one of two online exhibitions the society is organizing to commemorate Pride's golden jubilee. This colorful and exuberant show features nearly 100 photographs, drawn both from the society's archives and contributed by over a dozen independent queer

photographers. The exhibition has been curated by Lenore Chinn and Pamela Peniston, two San Francisco artists with deep roots in the city's queer arts and culture milieu. As we approach the virtual unveiling of "50 Years of Pride," *History Happens* interviewed Chinn and Peniston, who provided joint responses, about their curatorial vision.

What was your conception for "50 Years of Pride" when you began planning the exhibition?

When we set out, we knew only a few things that we wanted to establish and bring forward. First, that by "Pride" we meant what has developed into an entire weekend of events made up of Pride and Pink Saturday, the Dyke March and the Trans March. Although these are run by independent boards and in entirely different ways, they are all showcasing the breadth of the LGBTQ communities.

We also wanted as large a representation of diversity in the photographers as in the photographs. Finally, we also decided that we would choose each photo initially on its ability to convey how people were experiencing the events, as well as the beauty of the image itself.

How did your curatorial choices evolve as you researched in the archives and reached out to photographers?

As we examined the archives of the GLBT Historical Society and solicited photographs from many photographers in the community, we saw that the work was naturally dividing into two main categories: people participating in the parade and people watching. So we mirrored that by separating photographs of participants and spectators. Whether marching or waiting for the parade to begin, the excitement on both sides is palpable!

Also, we chose not to organize the entire exhibition along a chronological timeline, but rather to focus on the "onstage" and "offstage" aspects of the events. We had certain focal points in mind: politicians of or in support of our community, or heroes within it; issue-oriented contingents and affinity groups. We wanted to show how all of our people and organizations constantly queered the way we celebrated!

What do you want viewers to take away from this exhibition?

We would like people to view this as an experience of Pride as it has evolved over the years, from a relatively small, grassroots event that has grown, along with the LGBTQ community, into a celebration. But we also wanted to chart the growth of a movement politically and culturally from an era marked by resisting homophobia, to challenging the treatment of HIV/AIDS, and through the victory of marriage equality. We want people to know that through politics, alliances, celebrations, demonstrations, drag or the arts, queers embrace all our identities.

NOTE: "50 Years of Pride" opens on the GLBT Historical Society's [website](#) on May 15. The installation at San Francisco City Hall will follow when the state's shelter-in-place order has been relaxed.

Lenore Chinn is a painter, photographer and cultural activist, and was a founding member of Lesbians in the Visual Arts.

Pamela Peniston is a founding member and artistic director of the Queer Cultural Center, and has won numerous awards for her work designing and painting sets for national and Bay Area theatrical and dance companies.

Mark Sawchuk is the communications manager at the GLBT Historical Society.

From the Board

Supporting and Documenting LGBTQ Gathering Places



by Nick Large

LGBTQ nightlife spaces across the country are shuttered due to shelter-in-place orders, and many are at risk of closing permanently.

For some queer people, nightlife venues are essential safe spaces that allow us to be and explore ourselves. They bring us together as we celebrate in pride with the glitter on our face that came out of the purse of a stranger, and they give us room as we collectively mourn after a shooting. They are where we love and find love. We live our best lives — or sometimes, we find out through embarrassing photos the next morning that we in fact lived our worst.

The GLBT Historical Society's archives and museum document the diversity and historical importance of LGBTQ establishments. The José Sarria Papers tell us about the Black Cat Café, the legendary bar and performance space in North Beach where Sarria performed regular drag shows and planned his 1961 political campaign for a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors — becoming the first openly gay candidate to run for public office in the United States.

Essential Gathering Places

Rare archival materials and titles in the society's Periodicals Collection led a former executive director of the society, Susan Stryker, to rediscover the significance of Compton's Cafeteria, a 24-hour diner in the Tenderloin whose patrons included many queer and transgender people. Compton's was the site of a 1966 riot that became a catalyst for transgender and gender-nonconforming liberation.

Bars and entertainment venues have helped build a community, but they are under threat as we adjust our lifestyles to a pandemic. Many employees have lost their jobs and are unable to work from home; many are people of color. It's time for us to support these establishments and their employees. Donate to their GoFundMe campaigns, send tips

after their digital shows, buy their gift cards. And [donate to the GLBT Historical Society](#), so that we can continue our work documenting the history of those historic LGBTQ establishments that have already disappeared. (Follow our social media for an ongoing [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) series on historic queer bars for which we have archival documentation.)

Our nightlife spaces both facilitate and represent the LGBTQ movement. And our history tells us that during a pandemic, we are powerful when we support each other. Now is the time.

Nick Large is a member of the society's board of directors and regularly performs as Kristi Yummykochi (pictured) at the Lookout.

In the Archives

Personal Histories in Enamel



By Paige Wilcox

A pink triangle. The words “Gay Life” surmounted by a crown. And rainbows, so many rainbows. Enamel pins are scattered across my desktop, their colorful faces glinting under the lighting.

During much of my time as an archives intern, I have organized and inventoried a portion of a large and varied assortment of material all filed under the umbrella of “Art and Artifacts.” One-of-a-kind handmade art pieces mingle with mass-produced items, like these pins, in a collection as eclectic and diverse as the community of individuals that contributed to it.

Thanks to a 2018 grant from the Historic Preservation Fund Committee of the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development, the GLBT Historical Society has been working on a processing project for its Art and Artifacts Collection for the past two years. It has been remarkable to come face to face with objects in the archives that exude a kind of “star power”: a pair of novelty sunglasses once worn by Harvey Milk, or a stage costume designed by disco diva Sylvester, for instance. But taking a peek into the lives of unknown, everyday people is just as powerful.

The greatest delight of last summer was my work cataloging the collection of enamel pins commemorating the events and organizations of San Francisco’s gay community in the 1970s and 1980s. Their sheer number and temporal scope made me feel as though I was peeking through a window not only into another era, but to the life of the man who carefully curated this collection.

Mysteries Big & Small

Working with objects from the past is replete with mysteries big and small. The pin collector’s name is unknown, as are many of the people

who hand-painted picket signs and protest posters, the activists who proudly wore early rainbow-themed merchandise, and the unknown drag queens whose elaborate costumes are now meticulously conserved in the archives. In the absence of their words, these people's stories are transmitted to us through their belongings — their collections, their creations, the long-ago decisions of what they chose to keep and what they chose to donate to us.

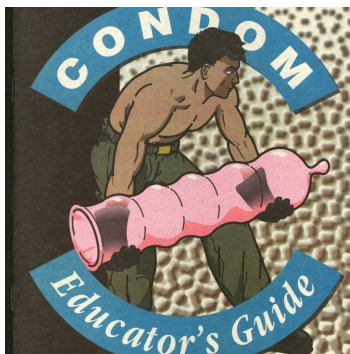
History, and the tangible traces it has left behind, are especially precious to members of marginalized and frequently forgotten communities. The individuals who created or collected the materials in the Art and Artifacts Collection, be they artist or appreciator, celebrity or anonymous donor, have each helped to paint a vibrant picture of San Francisco's LGBTQ past.

Paige Wilcox was the society's registration intern from May 2019 through March 2020. She recently received her M.A. in museum studies from the University of San Francisco.

Upcoming Online Events

[Fighting Back](#)

Love in the Time of COVID-19: Pandemic Sex



Wednesday, May 6

6:00–7:30 p.m.

Online forum

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

What about sex? The AIDS epidemic transformed the way that members of the LGBTQ community — and indeed people around the globe — discussed and practiced sexual activity. Technology has radically

changed the ways that people meet. And now, COVID-19. A panel of sex educators, activists and a historian will consider how we find connection, sex and love in the era of coronavirus, applying lessons learned from HIV/AIDS prevention efforts to help strategize safer-sex options in the present. Some questions to be considered include: What does the pandemic mean for single queers or people in open or polyamorous relationships? What is the future of hookup culture and phone apps? What about bars? How is the pandemic affecting sex workers?

Our “Fighting Back” series is an intergenerational discussion that brings together community leaders, experts, historians and activists to explore lessons from the past that might be useful in formulating “resistance” efforts today. Register online [here](#).

[Fighting Back](#)

The Role of Art & Artists in a Pandemic, Part II



Wednesday, May 13

6:00–7:30 p.m.

Online forum

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

What about art? This second panel on the role of art and artists in a pandemic continues the discussion of our April 8 event. An intergenerational panel of Bay Area artists and curators will gather to explore ways in which artists responded to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and how these experiences might inform artistic responses to COVID-19 today. Panelists will also discuss the personal and cultural impacts of living through a pandemic, and how these impacts might constrain or inspire the creative process. Register online [here](#).

Author Talk

Unruly Desires: American Sailors & Homosexualities



Friday, May 15

6:00–8:00 p.m.

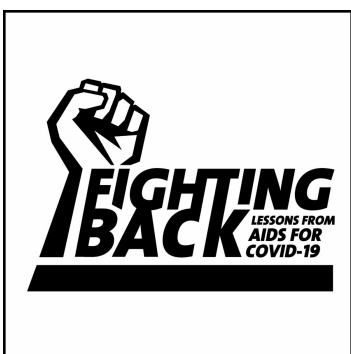
Online forum

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

In early nineteenth-century America, the rapid expansion of the maritime industry created an all-male environment where sexual activity was tolerated, and at times even ritualized. The United States Navy adopted rules of conduct based on those of Britain's Royal Navy, but specifically deleted proscriptions against sodomy and buggery. Drawing on a wide variety of archival resources, including diaries, memoirs, business correspondence, court-martial reports, pornography and religious tracts, author William Beneman's new book *Unruly Desires: American Sailors and Homosexualities in the Age of Sail* reconstructs this rare nineteenth-century queer space. Benemann will discuss his research and read selections from the book. Register online [here](#).

Fighting Back

Housing Insecurity & Public Health



Wednesday, May 20

6:00–7:30 p.m.

Online forum

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

What about the homeless? The crisis of homelessness is nothing new in the Bay Area and throughout the U.S., and has paralleled the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with many people with

HIV/AIDS also experiencing homelessness. An intergenerational panel of housing advocates, policymakers and historians will discuss how society responded to homelessness in the context of the AIDS epidemic, and how these experiences might inform the response to the COVID-19 homeless crisis. Register online [here](#).

[Author Talk](#)

AIDS Activism & Writing About Sex



Thursday, May 21

6:00–8:00 p.m.

Online forum

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

In spite of the attendant stigma, Asian and Pacific Islander AIDS activists in the 1990s brazenly talked about gay sex, even in immigrant communities that were supposedly averse to discussing such topics. In this program, writer Eric C. Wat will discuss how AIDS activism influences his writing, read from his novel *SWIM* (Permanent Press, 2019), and share his ongoing work on a community memoir about API AIDS activism in Los Angeles. This program is cosponsored by API Equality-Northern California, Kearny Street Workshop and Uncles Social Club. Register online [here](#).

[Fighting Back](#)

Disease Treatment & Research Activism



Wednesday, May 27

6:00–7:30 p.m.

Online forum

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

In the 1980s and 1990s, the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the U.S. — and the federal government's woefully inadequate response — led to a new paradigm of empowerment led by people with HIV/AIDS and supporters. They fought for and won radical improvements to everything from research funding and improved design of clinical research, to early access to investigational therapies, to more equitable treatment-access programs. A panel of activists, policymakers, researchers and historians will examine how the lessons learned from fighting for HIV/AIDS treatment and research might help in the fight against COVID-19. Register online [here](#).

Online Exhibitions

The GLBT Historical Society has made the following exhibitions available online. See our [online exhibitions](#) page for more information.

Performance, Protest & Politics: The Art of Gilbert Baker

View the exhibition [here](#).

Pioneering Periodicals, 1940s–1950s

View the exhibition [here](#).

Picturing Kinship: Portraits of our Community by Lenore Chinn

View the exhibition [here](#).

50 Years of Pride

Opens online on May 15.



Visit Us & Online Resources

The museum and archives are closed until further notice due to San Francisco's shelter-in-place order. The archives staff is still available to work with researchers; please contact us at reference@glbthistory.org.

We have expanded our resources on our website. Click the title to go to the page.

Exhibitions: An overview of our exhibitions is available [here](#).

Online collections: Browse over a dozen digital collections.

Upcoming events: More information about all of our online events.

Fighting Back series: More information about this online event series.

Past events: Footage of a large number of our past programs.

THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

Exhibitions & Programs

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CREDITS. FEATURE: Photo by Rick Gerharter, 2008; used with permission, all rights reserved. FROM THE STAFF: Photo of Nick Large as Kristi Yummicochi, courtesy of same. IN THE ARCHIVES: A sampling of enamel pins in the GLBT Historical Society's Art and Artifacts collection; photo by Paige Wilcox, used with permission. UPCOMING EVENTS. Fighting Back 5/6: Cover of the *Condom Educators' Guide*, Version Two, ca. 1994; Beowulf Thorne Papers (2003-10), GLBT Historical Society. Fighting Back 5/13: A set of Boy/Girl With Arms Akimbo "SAFE/UNSAFE" posters on a wall in San Francisco in June, 1990; photographer unknown, Boy With Arms Akimbo/Girl With Arms Akimbo Records (1996-41), GLBT Historical Society. Author Talk 5/15: Detail of cover of *Unruly Desires: American Sailors and Homosexualities in the Age of Sail*, courtesy of William Benemann. Fighting Back 5/20: Fighting Back logo. Author Talk 5/21: Portrait of Eric C. Wat; photo by Eugene Lee Visuals, used with permission. Fighting Back 5/27: The "People With AIDS" contingent in the 1983 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day parade; photo by Marie Ueda, Marie Ueda Photographs (2006-12), GLBT Historical Society. House Ad: Gilbert Baker holds the rainbow flag against a pink background, 1989; photo by Robert Pruzan (1998-36), GLBT Historical Society.

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