



GLBT
Historical
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museum & archives

January 15, 2019

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Photography Exhibition Highlights 1980s-1990s Queer Nightlife in San Francisco's South of Market District

San Francisco -- A new exhibition opening February 15 at the GLBT Historical Society Museum highlights the extraordinary vitality of queer nightlife in San Francisco's South of Market (SoMa) district during the darkest years of the AIDS crisis, an era that simultaneously marked the peak of AIDS activism and queer militant organizing in the city.

"SoMa Nights: The Queer Club Photography of Melissa Hawkins" focuses on the work of Melissa Hawkins, a young photographer for the San Francisco gay weekly *The Sentinel* and other publications from 1986 to 1994. Her black-and-white images vividly capture the scene with a combination of frankness and intimacy reflecting her dual roles as journalist and nightlife participant.

"It was such an incredible time of creativity and expression, even in the midst of the tragedy of AIDS," Hawkins says. "In the daytime, you'd read an entire section of the paper filled with the names of people who had died. Then at night, you would go to the craziest parties on earth. It truly was about living every moment as if it were your last."

In an era before digital photography and at a time when some LGBTQ people were still hesitant to make their identities public, Hawkins had both the gear required to shoot first-rate photos and the connections needed to gain the trust of her subjects. The results are powerful images documenting parties at 177 Townsend, 1015 Folsom, The Eagle, The End Up, The Rawhide and The Stud in SoMa, as well as The Box in the Western Addition.

Co-curated by Hawkins and nightlife historian Marke B., the GLBT Historical Society Museum show will feature dozens of these never-before-displayed photos, along with memorabilia including flyers, posters, clothing and decorative artifacts selected to recreate an indelible moment in San Francisco and queer nightlife history. Special events associated with the show will include dance parties and celebrity panel discussions.

"SoMa Nights" opens Friday, February 15, at the GLBT History Museum, 4127

18th St., San Francisco, with a public reception set for 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The curators will offer introductory remarks, and light refreshments will be served. Admission is \$5.00; free for members of the GLBT Historical Society. Tickets are available online at <https://bit.ly/2Da1Gly>.

For more information, visit the GLBT Historical Society website at www.glbthistory.org.

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About the Curators

Melissa Hawkins is a photographer and [multidisciplinary designer](#). Her photographic oeuvre of the 1980s and 1990s captured San Francisco's queer community. Many of the images were taken in the South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood in clubs popular during the era.

Artwork by Hawkins has appeared in group and solo exhibitions in San Francisco at Cell Space, Flash Art, Frisbee Street Galleries, LincArt and New Langton Arts. She received a "best idea" prize from the San Francisco Renaissance Center and was a finalist in the *SF Weekly* Mastermind Competition. Hawkins holds a degree in industrial design from San Francisco State University and studied product design at Brunel University in England.

Marke B. is a nightlife historian who specializes in queer dance music and club history. He has written about Bay Area queer nightlife for more than two decades. He serves as the publisher and arts editor for 48 Hills and the *SF Bay Guardian*. He is a member of the Stud Collective, which owns the 52-year-old San Francisco queer bar The Stud.

Marke is the co-author of [Queer: The Ultimate LGBTQ Guide for Teens](#) (Zest Books, 2011) and the forthcoming *Into the Streets: A History of Protest in the United States*. His writing has appeared in magazines and newspapers including *The Advocate*, *The Guardian*, *The New Yorker* and *Vice* and has been featured on NPR and affiliates of ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS.

About the Museum

Open since January 2011, **the GLBT Historical Society Museum** (formerly known as the GLBT History Museum) is the first full-scale, stand-alone museum of its kind in the United States. Its Main Gallery features a long-term exhibition on San Francisco LGBTQ history, "Queer Past Becomes Present." Its Front Gallery and Community Gallery host changing exhibitions. The institution also sponsors forums, author talks and other programs.

The museum is a project of the GLBT Historical Society, a public history center and archives that collects, preserves and interprets the history of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and the communities that support them. Founded in 1985, the society maintains one of the world's largest collections of LGBTQ historical materials.

For more information, visit the GLBT Historical Society website at www.glbthistory.org.

Editor's Note

Melissa Hawkins and Marke B. are available for interviews about the exhibition. Send requests via media contact Gerard Koskovich at gerard@glbthistory.org.

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The following photographs may be reproduced free of charge only in conjunction with coverage of the "SoMa Nights: The Queer Club Photography of Melissa Hawkins" exhibition at the GLBT Historical Society Museum. Credits cited in the captions are mandatory. For high-resolution files, contact Gerard Koskovich at gerard@glbthistory.org.



Melissa Hawkins, *Phatima and MichaelAngelo* (undated); used with permission.



Melissa Hawkins, *Duo With Cigar, The Eagle* (undated); used with permission.



Melissa Hawkins, *Dancer at 1015 Folsom* (1991); used with permission.



Melissa Hawkins, *Sister of Perpetual Indulgence With Revelers, SoMa* (undated); used with permission.

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