

# History Happens

News from the



GLBT  
Historical  
Society  
museum & archives



## January 2019

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## Exploring the Innovative Graphic Work of San Francisco Queer Artist Rex Ray

by Gerard Koskovich

The current Front Gallery exhibition at the GLBT Historical Society Museum surveys the graphic work of internationally renowned San Francisco queer artist and designer Rex Ray (1956 - 2015). "A Picture Is a Word: The Posters of Rex Ray" features posters reflecting the Bay Area music scene

from the 1990s to the 2010s, along with a selection of the artist's book and ephemera designs.

Curators Cydney Payton and Amy Scholder draw attention to Ray's signature graphics, first developed using a Mac Plus in the 1990s long before design applications changed the course of artwork created using digital tools. The exhibition examines Ray's use of repeating symbols and iconography appropriated from sources as varied as Andy Warhol, midcentury typography and design, gay culture and everyday objects.

Scholder has been editing and publishing progressive and literary books for more than 20 years; currently she serves as president of [Lambda Literary](#). Payton founded and directed the Cydney Payton Gallery and the Payton Rule Gallery, both in Denver. Her current focus is the relationships between contemporary art and the histories of architecture. They jointly responded to our questions about their Rex Ray exhibition.

**What connections do you see between Rex Ray's work and his involvement in queer culture in San Francisco and beyond?**

There's no way to separate Rex Ray's work from his queer identity and life in San Francisco. Everything about his life was about making work, and all his work was about finding beauty and meaning in life as a gay man. Like many of us who survived the 1980s and 1990s in America, life became forever defined by the AIDS crisis. Rex was very much impacted by the suffering and loss of so many dear friends, and the movements to resist cruelty and neglect.

**How did you go about selecting the artist's graphic works to include in the exhibition?**

To date there have been numerous exhibitions of Rex Ray's art, but very few that included graphics. None of those efforts highlighted Rex's unique artistic vocabulary. This is primarily because Rex's work is often viewed foremost for its beauty. The exhibition at the GLBT Historical Society Museum gave us an opportunity to make a case for a deeper reading of his art through the most accessible form that he created: posters. We wanted to make visible the images and iconography that were the basis for his life's work and to trace those ideas across three decades. We hoped that by organizing the posters by themes -- OK Computer, Storybook, Mandala and Ecstasy -- and by including a select grouping of books and ephemera, that those connections could easily be seen. We sought this focus so Rex Ray's visual language can enter the art historical record where it can continue to be examined.

**What do you most hope visitors to the show will learn about Rex Ray, his work and his era?**

We hope that visitors who are discovering Rex's work for the first time will be moved by his euphoric aesthetics. There is so much work of Rex's to enjoy -- in various San Francisco collections and beyond the Bay Area, and in books, music packaging and products -- we hope that visitors will be inspired to look for Rex Ray fine art and graphics wherever they can find them. We hope that visitors who come in to the museum already knowing Rex's work will enjoy seeing his posters, which are rarely viewed as a collection. And we hope all visitors will enjoy reflecting on the iconography we're highlighting by the way we group the posters.

**Note:** "A Picture is a Word" runs through February 3, 2019. The exhibition catalog is available from our online store [here](#).

*Gerard Koskovich is a founding member of the GLBT Historical Society, where he currently serves as senior advisor for public history projects.*

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## From the Staff

### Fulfill Your Volunteer Goals This New Year



by Nalini Elias

The New Year is here, and it's never been a better time to make a resolution to volunteer with the GLBT Historical Society! Collaborating with our staff and other volunteers is a mutually beneficial and worthwhile experience. As some of our most enthusiastic, talented and committed members, our diverse, multigenerational volunteers are

essential to accomplishing our mission. We offer a variety of opportunities at the GLBT Historical Society Museum, at the archives and at special events that match our volunteers' availabilities, interests and abilities. Here's what volunteering at the GLBT Historical Society means:

**Working on a personally meaningful cause.** At the GLBT Historical Society, we understand the value of being involved in activities that strengthen a person's soul, intellect and well-being. Our volunteers include students, working professionals and retirees, but they all share the opportunity to further their studies, deepen their knowledge of queer history, feed their interests and develop new skills.

**Being immersed in the community.** Our volunteers become part of a greater community promoting and supporting the preservation of LGBTQ history. You too can make an impact while meeting new people and interacting with visitors from all over the world. You'll be able to share your knowledge, help others find their passion and have fun!

Preserving the richness of LGBTQ history, culture and arts in all their expressions. Among the tasks our volunteers undertake are assisting with special projects, exhibitions and programs; digitizing extensive archival collections; participating in citywide events; and ensuring that the GLBT Historical Society Museum is open to the public seven days a week. Time commitments of as few as two hours a week help us preserve and promote LGBTQ history, increase public access and community engagement, and enable our continued growth.

For more information and to sign up, visit our online [volunteer page](#).

*Nalini Elias is the program manager at the GLBT Historical Society.*

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## In the Archives

### The Life of an African American Servicewoman



by Patricia Delara

In early 2018, the GLBT Historical Society received a unique gift: the Lorraine Hurdle Papers (collection no. 2018-12), donated by a longtime volunteer, Elisabeth Cornu. The materials document the life of one of the donor's dearest friends, Lorraine Hurdle (1922 - 2014), who served in Germany in the Women's Army Corps during World War II.

Hurdle's papers provide exceptional insight into the life of an African American lesbian in the 1940s and 1950s.

The collection contains records that detail Hurdle's military career, during which she worked in such positions as property clerk, technician and even medical librarian. Other records from her service include identification cards, correspondence and ephemera from the locations where she was stationed.

#### A Moving Narrative

A highlight of this extraordinary collection are the photographs that capture moments from Hurdle's childhood, service abroad and later life in Berkeley and Stockton. They offer a moving narrative that documents the everyday lives of an African American family during pivotal moments in U.S. history.

The GLBT Historical Society maintains a strong commitment to documenting the diverse lives of the LGBTQ community and is especially interested in receiving and preserving archival collections such as this

one that focus on the intersectional experiences of such individuals as cisgender women, people of color, transgender and nonbinary people. If you have materials such as these and are interested in donating them, please consider contacting our director of archives and special collections, [Kelsi Evans](#).

*Patricia Delara is the assistant archivist at the GLBT Historical Society.*

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## At the Museum

### [Front Gallery](#)

#### A Picture is a Word: The Posters of Rex Ray



Through February 3, 2019  
The GLBT Historical Society Museum  
4127 18th St., San Francisco

"A Picture is a Word: The Posters of Rex Ray" surveys graphic works dating from the 1990s to 2014 by San Francisco queer artist Rex Ray (1951 - 2015). The exhibition draws attention to Ray's unique style, which went on to influence generations of artists, clients in

music and publishing, and their audiences. His poster designs are documents of the Bay Area music scene, and his book covers for City Lights and High Risk offer a brief history of LGBTQ literature. Vibrant and subversively accessible, Ray's art effortlessly mixes high and low culture, classic beauty and postmodern conceptualism.

### [Community Gallery](#)

#### The Briggs Initiative: A Scary Proposition



Through January 20, 2019  
The GLBT Historical Society Museum  
4127 18th St., San Francisco

In November 1978, Californians decisively voted down Proposition 6, a ballot initiative that would have given the state the power to fire both LGBTQ teachers and supporters for LGBTQ rights. "The Briggs Initiative: A Scary Proposition" documents the campaign to

defeat the measure, which was promoted by California State Senator John Briggs. It celebrates a unified effort by many Californians, and San Franciscans in particular, to mobilize support for LGBTQ rights.

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# Upcoming Events

## Community Forum

### Stop AIDS Now or Else: Protest as Community Catalyst



Thursday, January 24

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

[Free Tickets](#) | \$5.00 Donation Welcome

The latest in our monthly "Fighting Back" series exploring contemporary queer issues in a historical context, this community forum commemorates the 30th anniversary of the

Stop AIDS Now or Else sit-in on the Golden Gate Bridge during morning rush hour on January 21, 1989. Bringing traffic on the bridge to a halt, the activists insisted there would be "no more business as usual" until the government and society as a whole addressed the AIDS crisis. SANOE brought together a diverse group of individuals from a range of organizations to carry out innovative and highly visible protests centered on nonviolent direct action. A panel of allies, organizers, activists and historians will reflect on what it meant to be an AIDS activist and organizer then, and how that activism has shifted over time according to our needs today. Reserve your free ticket online [here](#).

## Exhibition Opening

### Two-Spirit Voices: Returning to the Circle



Thursday, January 31

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

[\\$5.00](#) | [Free for members](#)

A new exhibition celebrating the 20th anniversary of [Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits](#), an organization committed to activism and service to the two-spirit and ally

communities of the San Francisco Bay Area. Curators Roger Kuhn, Amelia Vigil and Ruth Villaseñor focus on four main themes: gay and two-spirit pride, the annual BAAITS Two-Spirit Powwow, indigenous medicine and responses to HIV/AIDS, and two-spirit meaning within indigenous communities. Drawing on regalia and textiles, medicines and herbs, and photography and video on loan from community members, as well as materials recently donated to the GLBT Historical Society archives, the exhibition highlights the resiliency of two-spirit people. The

opening reception will feature brief remarks by the curators. Light refreshments will be served. Tickets available online [here](#).



**Your New Year's Resolution is Here!**

Learn a new skill, meet new people and give back as you help preserve queer history at the GLBT Historical Society.

**I want to volunteer!**

## Visit Us

### THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

#### Exhibitions & Programs

4127 18th St.

San Francisco, CA 94114

(415) 621-1107

[www.glbthistory.org/museum](http://www.glbthistory.org/museum)

Monday - Saturday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Sunday: Noon - 5:00 PM

#### MUSEUM CLOSURES

January 1 (New Year's Day)

January 22 (Installation of New Exhibition)

## DR. JOHN P. DE CECCO ARCHIVES & RESEARCH CENTER

### Archives & Public History Center

989 Market St., Lower Level

San Francisco, CA 94103-1708

(415) 777-5455

[www.glbthistory.org/archives](http://www.glbthistory.org/archives)

Call to schedule a research appointment or make an appointment online by [clicking here](#).

**CREDITS. FEATURE:** Details of posters by Rex Ray; Rex Ray Graphic Art Collection, GLBT Historical Society, gift of the Estate of Rex Ray. **FROM THE STAFF:** Photo courtesy Nalini Elias. **IN THE ARCHIVES:** Lorraine Hurdle playing pool (circa 1950); Lorraine Hurdle Papers, GLBT Historical Society. **AT THE MUSEUM. Front Gallery:** Detail of a poster for a Paul McCartney concert (2014), Rex Ray Graphic Art Collection, GLBT Historical Society, gift of the Estate of Rex Ray. **Community Gallery:** "Never Again! Fight Back!" (1978); poster collection, GLBT Historical Society. **UPCOMING EVENTS. Community Forum:** Activists from Stop AIDS Now or Else sit-in on the Golden Gate Bridge (1989); photo by Rick Gerharter; used with permission. **Exhibition Opening:** Members of BAAITS form a drum circle at the GLBT History Museum; photo by Gerard Koskovich.

**Editor:** Mark Sawchuk **Associate Editor:** Gerard Koskovich **Design:** PEPE Creatives

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