

September 2020

Four photographs of San Francisco drag queens in the 1970s by Roz Joseph.



Striking a Pose & Building a Community: Reflections on the Photographs of Roz Joseph

By Nick Large & Kyle Levinger

One grins knowingly at a friend over the camera's shoulder, caught up in the joy of the moment. Another strikes an imposing pose in a pink beard. A third fixes the camera with an inscrutable gaze, daring us to ask a forbidden question. These are three of the iconic photographs of drag queens taken by San Francisco photographer Roz Joseph (1926–2019) that will be on display from September 21, when the GLBT Historical Society unveils an online selection of images drawn from its 2015 exhibition "[Reigning Queens: The Lost Photos of Roz Joseph](#)."

Joseph, who passed away in December of last year, moved to San Francisco in 1970. Her series of remarkable photographs documenting the city's drag balls of the 1970s was rediscovered when she donated her work to the GLBT Historical Society in 2010. As we put the finishing

touches on the online show, board members and drag performers Nick Large and Kyle Levinger share their reflections on the photographs.

Nick Large: Looking at these photographs, many of them depicting drag queens associated with San Francisco's Imperial Court, causes me to reflect on how much drag has changed in the past 40 years and even in my own lifetime. When I first started doing drag, I had never heard of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. There were no makeup tutorials on YouTube, and you could get your entire look locally. My first drag purchase at Forever 21 was a sleeveless fake-leather jacket, which at the time represented \$30 of the total sum of \$150 I had in my bank account. It's easy to forget that in the grand scheme of things, the existence of *Drag Race* is a very recent phenomenon.

The "lost" photographs of Roz Joseph are a reminder of earlier times. Joseph's photos represent a moment when drag was more a form of expression than a competition. As the photographs document, San Francisco's thriving drag community is decades old. Many people came together and formed their own families through the medium of drag, even though they were sometimes shunned by the larger LGBTQ community. I wonder what these queens of days gone by would think if they witnessed a drag performance today. What would they say we have gained, and lost? What advice and stories would they have for us? In the age of COVID-19 and online streaming shows, I wonder how we can replicate that feeling of family-building in a virtual world.

Kyle Levinger: In 2020, many members of the LGBTQ community are unaware of or uninterested in the Grand Ducal Court and Imperial Court here in San Francisco. Roz Joseph's photographs transport us back to an era when the Courts were key in helping to shape the LGBTQ community. Drag queens were central in the fight for equality, and the Courts played a vital role in founding and supporting nonprofit organizations to fight AIDS, feed the hungry and meet many other community needs. The Ducal and Imperial Courts also served as families for people when their relatives turned their backs.

Today, the Courts do not have the same appeal as they once did. As acceptance of the LGBTQ community continues to broaden and drag becomes an increasingly popular form of entertainment, they have had difficulty attracting and maintaining membership. How can the Ducal Court and Imperial Court adapt to remain relevant in the community?

NOTE: "[Reigning Queens: The Lost Photos of Roz Joseph](#)" opens on September 21 on the GLBT Historical Society's website.

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

Kyle Levinger is a member of the society's board of directors and performs as Kylie Minono, who was Grand Duchess 39 of the Grand Ducal Court.

From the Executive Director

Nurturing San Francisco's LGBTQ Cultural Heritage



By Terry Beswick

Given the state of the world today, it is critical that we establish policies and priorities to “honor the legacy, celebrate the culture, nurture the well-being, promote economic opportunity and ensure the longevity of San Francisco’s LGBTQ community,” in the words of the recently completed [San Francisco Citywide LGBTQ+ Cultural Heritage Strategy](#).

[Cultural Heritage Strategy](#).

For the last three years, I have worked directly with [community members](#), [city staffers](#) and [multiple LGBTQ organizations](#) to develop this document. It’s a groundbreaking effort that creates a model for urban cultural preservation, and I’m happy to report that the Cultural Heritage Strategy Working Group sent it to Mayor London Breed and the Board of Supervisors in August for review and adoption.

We started writing this report in 2016 against the backdrop of rapid gentrification and displacement in San Francisco. We submitted it last month in the midst of a global pandemic, a deepening recession and growing national outrage at systemic police brutality — and murder — of Black and Brown people, including transgender women of color. We are witnessing the rise of hopeful social justice movements against systemic racism, white supremacy and anti-trans discrimination.

This is the time to think not just about the world of today, but also about the world of tomorrow. What world do we want to see after the COVID pandemic? What organizations do we want to see thriving a year, five years, ten years from now? How can we take these tragedies and turn them into opportunities to promote our values and effect the kind of social, political and economic changes we need?

If, like me, you believe that this is the time to invest in our community’s long-term survival, I encourage you to read through the report, available on our website [here](#), and [make a donation](#) to support our work today. Every dollar we raise will help the GLBT Historical Society implement key recommendations outlined in the Strategy.

Terry Beswick is executive director of the GLBT Historical Society.

In the Archives

Terminology & Identities in a Latinx Research Guide

By Aaron Aruck

As a public fellow at the GLBT Historical Society



for the summer of 2020, I surveyed the archives' collections related to Latinx people to compile a [new research guide](#). As part of this process, the archives staff and I had multiple conversations about whether the guide should use the term "Latinx" as an appropriate, clear and respectful identity category.

In recent decades, the term "Latino/a" has been used to identify people from Latin America and those with Latin American heritage living in the U.S. This term has functioned as a more inclusive replacement for the outdated and problematic label "Hispanic," which carries colonial and racialized connotations and privileges the Spanish language as a marker for belonging. "Latinx" has emerged more recently as a way of noting a connection to Latin America without the problem of reductive gendering implicit in the terms "Latino/a," from Spanish-language grammatical rules.

Language, Location, Locality

However, as with any identity category, "Latinx" is not without representational shortcomings. Many people of Latin American descent feel that "Latinx" does a particular violence to the Spanish language. Furthermore, several of the archival collections, such as the [Collection of Materials on Costa Rican Lesbians](#) and the [Clark L. Taylor Papers](#), document the lives of people in Latin America who were not living in the United States. For these collections, the signifier Latino/a or Latinx seems tenuously applied at best.

Another important point is the fact that many groups primarily identify regionally, nationally or historically and not with such a decidedly broad term. Those collections that relate to Mexican Americans, for example, might be best served by the term "Chicano/a," particularly as they document histories of labor, internal colonialism and the civil-rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

After careful consideration and deliberation, though, we have decided to employ the term Latinx because we feel it is the most inclusive and reflective of present-day identity constructions. I am struck by archivists' painstaking efforts to constantly evaluate the respectfulness and inclusiveness of their language choices in grouping, cataloging and recording collections.

Identity categories — for better or worse — are tools we use as researchers wading through thousands of documents, and I am humbled to have partaken in a significant, if necessarily imperfect effort to describe collections that occupy the fuzzy and unstable edges of these categories of belonging.

Aaron Aruck is serving as a public fellow at the GLBT Historical Society in summer 2020 through the Humanities Institute at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he is working on his Ph.D. in history.

Upcoming Online Events

Workshop

Leaving a Legacy: Financial Estate Planning

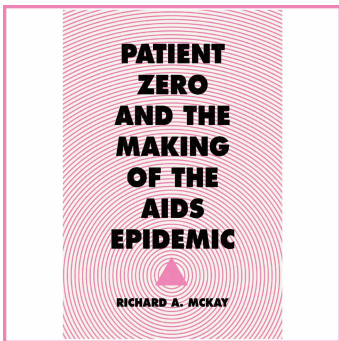


Friday, September 4
12:00–1:00 p.m.
Online program
Free

Careful financial planning ensures that our legacies live on by providing for our spouses, partners, children, relatives and friends. The second event in our two-part series offering estate-planning tools and resources for LGBTQ people, this workshop focuses on a range of financial-planning strategies and instruments. Attorney Alma Soongi Beck will discuss wills, living trusts, powers of attorney, marriage and domestic-partnership considerations, document language for nonbinary and transgender people, property tax, and co-ownership issues for unmarried couples who are not domestic partners. This event will include a Q & A session. Learn more about this series and how to plan for the future [here](#). Register online [here](#).

Author Talk

Patient Zero & the Making of the AIDS Epidemic



Saturday, September 12
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Online program
Free | \$5 suggested donation

The search for a “patient zero” — popularly understood to be the first person infected in an epidemic — has been key to media coverage of major infectious-disease outbreaks for more than three decades. Yet the term itself did not exist before the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. At this event, historian Richard A. McKay will read selections from his book *Patient Zero and the Making of the AIDS Epidemic* (Chicago University Press, 2017) which examined how this idea came to exert such a strong grip on the scientific, media and popular consciousness. The book, which used materials in the GLBT Historical Society’s archives, focuses on the life of Gaëtan Dugas, a gay man who received widespread posthumous infamy when he was incorrectly identified as patient zero of the North American AIDS outbreak. McKay will also engage in a conversation with historian Gerard Koskovich about his archival research and take audience questions. Register online [here](#).

Community Event

Mighty Real: A Celebration of Sylvester



Wednesday, September 16
6:00–7:30 p.m.
Online program
Free | \$5 suggested donation

To celebrate the birthday of the iconic San Francisco disco diva Sylvester (1947–1988), join us at this event that will highlight the GLBT Historical Society's archival holdings documenting the singer's life and times. The society's museum registrar and curatorial specialist, Ramón Silvestre, will present some of the Sylvester-related objects in our Art and Artifacts Collection. We will also be presenting clips of some of our archival footage, including a rare video of the diva's 40th birthday celebration in 1987. This footage features some moving clips of Sylvester performing sentimental standards backed by a jazz band. Register online [here](#).

[Frameline Festival](#) GLBT Historical Society Copresents Two Queer Films



Sunday, September 20
4:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 27
1:00 p.m.
Online programs
Tickets available from [Frameline](#)

The GLBT Historical Society is serving as a copresenter for two films focused on queer history at the 44th Frameline Festival, the world's oldest and largest LGBTQ film festival. The full festival runs from September 17 to 27; each film is scheduled for a formal virtual screening, but will be available for viewing during the entire duration of the festival. For more information and to buy tickets, click on the film titles below or visit the Frameline Festival [home page](#).

Killing Patient Zero. Right-wing bigots exploited AIDS to demonize gay men, and no one was more villainized than Gaëtan Dugas, the Canadian flight attendant dubbed "Patient Zero" of the North American AIDS outbreak. In this groundbreaking documentary, director Laurie Lynd explodes the myth of Patient Zero using beautifully framed interviews with Dugas's friends and the scientists who were unlocking the mystery of what was still known as the "gay cancer." *Killing Patient Zero* is an important work of queer archaeology that shines an empathetic light on a generation traumatized not just by a virus but by society's blame and vitriol. Screening: The formal screening takes place at 4:00 p.m. on September 20 and will be followed by a Q & A.

Cured. For most of the 20th century, homosexuality was formally diagnosed as a mental illness and LGBTQ people were subject to drastic medical interventions posing as "cures." But in 1973, in one of the most significant turning points in LGBTQ history, the American Psychiatric

Association removed the stigma of mental illness from its medical manuals. This riveting documentary by Patrick Sammon and Bennett Singer goes behind the scenes to reveal the inspiring, courageous efforts of the scrappy band of gay and lesbian activists in the 1960s and 1970s, both within and outside the psychiatric field, who took on the mainstream medical establishment's views about homosexuality. Screening: the formal screening takes place at 1:00 p.m. on September 27 and will be followed by a Q & A.

REUNION

MAKING HISTORY

Friday, October 16
6:00 – 7:30 PM PDT
glbthistory.org/gala



Tickets are now on sale for our virtual Gala, “Reunion: Making History.” Visit glbthistory.org/gala to learn more and register.

Current Online Exhibitions

Performance, Protest & Politics: The Art of Gilbert Baker

Examine how rainbow-flag creator Gilbert Baker blurred the lines between artist and activist, protester and performer.

50 Years of Pride

This photography exhibition documents the evolution of San Francisco Pride, the event that most powerfully represents and celebrates the Bay Area's LGBTQ community, over the past half century.

Labor of Love: The Birth of San Francisco Pride

Learn how San Francisco forged the internationally renowned annual celebration that would come to be known as Pride.

AIDS Treatment Activism: A Bay Area Story

Explore the rise of and growth of the treatment-activism movement in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s and 1990s.

Angela Davis: OUTspoken

Rare posters and ephemera from a private collection highlight the journey of black lesbian activist Angela Davis: from radical scholar, to political prisoner, to revolutionary icon, to public intellectual.

Visit Us & Online Resources

The museum and archives are online only until further notice, but archives staff members are still available to work with researchers; please contact us at reference@glbthistory.org.

Online exhibitions: Our online exhibitions are available here.

Online archives: Browse digital collections, source sets and more.

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

Past events: Video footage of a large number of our past programs.

THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

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CREDITS. FEATURE: Four photographs of drag queens in San Francisco in the 1970s; photographs by Roz Joseph, Roz Joseph Photographs (2010-08), GLBT Historical Society. FROM THE ED: Cover of the Citywide LGBTQ Cultural Heritage Strategy. IN THE ARCHIVES: Screenshot from video of the 1977 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade; footage by Crawford Barton, Crawford Barton Papers (1993-11), GLBT Historical Society. EVENTS. Workshop 9/4: Photo of Alma Soongi Beck courtesy of same. Author Talk 9/12: Cover of *Patient Zero and the Making of the AIDS Epidemic*, courtesy of Isaac Tobin and the University of Chicago Press, 2017. Community Event 9/16: Disco singer Sylvester performs at the 1980 Castro Street Fair; photo by Robert Pruzan, Robert Pruzan Collection (1998-36), GLBT Historical Society. Frameline Festival: Frameline 44 logo, courtesy of Frameline.

Editor & Communications Manager: Mark Sawchuk
Director of Development and Communications: Andrew Shaffer
Executive Director: Terry Beswick

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