



February  
2019



Co-curators Roger Kuhn and Ruth Villaseñor prepare the BAAITS exhibition.

## We Are Not Invisible: New Exhibition Celebrates Survival and Resilience of Two-Spirit Community

by J. Miko Thomas

*Two Spirit* can be defined as an umbrella term for LGBTQ Native Americans — a pan-Indian term coined in the 1990s for use across the various languages of indigenous communities. Many tribal nations also give Two-Spirit people specific names and roles in their own cultures. A new exhibition that opened January 31 at the GLBT Historical Society Museum celebrates the survival and resilience of Two Spirits.

“Two-Spirit Voices: Returning to the Circle” marks the 20th anniversary of Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits. BAAITS is an organization committed to activism and service for Two-Spirit people and their allies in the San Francisco Bay Area. It grew from the indigenous urban community out of a necessity to build spaces for queer Natives. It was

inspired by Gay American Indians, founded in 1975, and the International Two-Spirit Gatherings held annually in the U.S. and Canada.

The exhibition is co-curated by Roger Kuhn, Amelia Vigil and Ruth Villaseñor. Kuhn is a former chair of BAAITS and a member of the Porch Band of Creek Indians. Vigil is a Two-Spirit and Latinx performance artist and poet who currently chairs BAAITS. Villaseñor is a Chiricahua-Apache Mexican woman who identifies as Two Spirit; she serves on the board of BAAITs. Roger Kuhn responded to questions from *History Happens*.

### **What impact has BAAITS had in the Two-Spirit, LGBTQ and native communities?**

For 20 years BAAITS has worked to recover and restore the role of Two-Spirit people in American Indian and First Nations communities. In partnership with various organizations, we have created the world's largest public Two-Spirit powwow, now in its eighth year. It was the first of its kind. Since that time it has inspired other Two-Spirit powwows, one in its second year at Haskell Indian Nations University, another in Canada and more in development.

It can be said that we are helping shape the new generation of Natives by creating spaces for all people. Besides that, BAAITS has participated in community healing efforts around HIV/AIDS and substance use and has created a forum for the spiritual, cultural and artistic expression of Two-Spirit people. What I have noticed since being a BAAITS member for the past seven years is the sense of community and shared cultural identity I feel.

### **What theme ties the exhibition together and why is it important?**

The theme that ties this exhibition together is resilience. We gently stand on the shoulders of the Two-Spirit ancestors and elders who came before us. Their spirit, determination and resilience against colonial endeavors inspires us to do the work we do today. We are a part of the history of Native people, and this exhibition represents us in a modern world. We have not vanished and are not invisible. The exhibition shows the work we have done to ensure that we are not relegated to anthropology, but instead represent a vibrant and living community.

### **What is the one thing you hope people will learn about BAAITS from the exhibition?**

I hope that the larger LGBTQ community recognizes the importance of including Two-Spirit people in the leadership and dialogue of social justice activism. This exhibition is a representation that indigenous people are still here and still queer. For the Two-Spirit community my hope is this exhibition inspires you to live your best life. We are returning to the circle. We are our ancestors' wildest dreams.

*J. Miko Thomas, also known as [Landa Lakes](#), is a member of the board of directors of the GLBT Historical Society and a former co-chair of BAAITS.*

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## From the Board

# Preserving and Presenting Our Queer Histories



by Tina Valentin Aguirre

I joined the GLBT Historical Society's board of directors in 2015, when the organization needed new energy. Since then, the board has overseen the hiring of our current executive director, ensured that our yearly financial audits are completed in a timely fashion and drafted a five-year strategic plan to guide the society's development in future years. Today, I'm proud

that the organization has grown to nine staff positions and that our board of directors has grown increasingly diverse.

My work on the board is meaningful to me because it's important that we preserve and present our rich cultural histories as LGBTQ communities. The need for our work has been underscored by the AIDS epidemic and by the scourges of poverty, disease and gentrification that our communities continue to face. I have been a part of San Francisco's responses to these challenges through my work in social services and the arts. In the process, I have become determined to celebrate and document our histories for future generations because our people and stories are so easily lost.

### Critically Needed Dialogues

With the 2016 presidential election, the LGBTQ community has endured a precipitous rise in racist, homophobic, transphobic and misogynistic attacks. Our work has become more important than ever in light of these threats. While our archives continue to serve as an unparalleled resource for academics and community members alike, our museum has expanded its role as a hub for exhibitions and community panels that embrace critically needed dialogues on culture, history and the social justice work we need to do.

To keep this work alive, our board will continue to dedicate itself to its primary mission: ensuring that the organization is financially sound and that our policies reflect effective governance. Board members also help fundraise to support our wide-ranging museum exhibitions and the processing of new archival collections. On this front, I'm very happy to share that our year-end Vision 2020 fundraising campaign was a huge success, achieving the goals set by our \$50,000 matching challenge. Thank you for your ongoing support!

*Tina Valentin Aguirre is chair of the GLBT Historical Society's board of directors.*

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# In the Archives

## Experiencing “Ah!” Moments in the Archives



by Michael Reyes

I spent the fall of 2018 as an intern in the Dr. John P. De Cecco Archives and Special Collections of the GLBT Historical Society. The internship was exciting on many levels. Not only was I happy to have my personal “Ah!” moments while working with the collections, but I also was happy whenever I witnessed patrons having those moments as well. It is an indescribable feeling when you are in an archive and find that missing link to your research or find yourself and your community being represented and preserved in these collections.

### Building Blocks of History

The collection I worked with the most was the William P. Gaddis Jr. Papers, which enabled me to draft my capstone project entitled *Queering the Archives: The Value of Culturally Specific Institutions with Hidden Histories*. This was my final requirement to earn my M.A. in museum studies from the University of San Francisco.

My project detailed the significance of accessioning this particular collection to the GLBT Historical Society's archives, because it highlights an era of queer history that remains unfamiliar to many. I also explained the importance of culturally specific institutions such as the society, which safeguards and makes rare materials accessible to the public. These materials form the building blocks for historical narratives.

At times the many daunting steps that go into collection management — rehousing materials, labeling, ensuring proper storage and drafting documentation — were challenging. Thankfully, the staff and volunteers were always positive and upbeat, willing to lend a hand or provide advice when needed.

My internship at the GLBT Historical Society enabled me not only to gain experience in my field of study, but also to become a more empathetic individual and to understand the complex ties between archival collections and the communities they represent.

*Michael Reyes was the registrar intern for the GLBT Historical Society in the fall 2018 semester. He received his master's in museum studies from the University of San Francisco in December 2018.*

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## Upcoming Events

### [Panel Discussion](#)

# Heritage City: A Future for the Queer Past



Saturday, February 2

10:00 – 11:00 p.m.

James C. Hormel LGBTQIA Center

San Francisco Main Library

100 Larkin St., San Francisco

[Free Tickets](#)

As San Francisco rushes ahead in the 21st century, the private and public memories of LGBTQ people, traditionally excluded from any place in history, are at risk of erasure. This panel will bring together historians and public history organizers to discuss ways to ensure that our queer past is preserved and our queer heritage is honored in the future. Presented by the GLBT Historical Society as a curating partner for [Night of Ideas San Francisco](#), a seven-hour marathon of debates, performances, readings and music featuring top thinkers coming together to envision the city of the future. The event takes place at the San Francisco Main Library in Civic Center; tickets are good for the entire evening and can be reserved [here](#).

## [Author Talk](#)

### [Judy, Oz and the Need for Shared History](#)



Wednesday, February 13

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

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

The iconic 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz* starring Judy Garland, has long held a special place in American gay male culture. In this presentation, author Dee Michel will discuss his recently published book *Friends of Dorothy: Why Gay Boys and Gay Men Love The Wizard of Oz*, with an emphasis on the ways folklores contribute to filling the need for a shared gay history and culture. Tickets are available [here](#).

## [Exhibition Opening](#)

### [SoMa Nights: 1980s-1990s Queer Club Photography](#)



Friday, February 15

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

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

A [new exhibition](#) features never-before-displayed photographs, memorabilia and ephemera recreating a golden age of San

Francisco underground queer nightlife and culture. As a photographer for *The Sentinel* newspaper in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Melissa Hawkins captured the uninhibited energy and unparalleled fashions of the LGBTQ venues and denizens of the city's South of Market District, known to locals as SoMa.

Curated by Hawkins and Marke B., the show emphasizes how nightlife was a focal point of the LGBTQ community at the height of the AIDS epidemic. The exhibition draws on striking black-and-white prints by Hawkins, along with posters, videos and other materials from the GLBT Historical Society archives. The opening reception will feature DJ Junkyard, some of San Francisco's best known nightlife personalities, and remarks by the curators. Light refreshments will be served. Tickets are available [here](#).

## [Fighting Back](#) Love, Marriage and Queers: 15 Years of Bliss?



Thursday, February 28  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
The GLBT Historical Society Museum  
4127 18th St., San Francisco  
**\$5.00 | Free for members**

The latest in our monthly "Fighting Back" series exploring contemporary queer issues in a historical context, this community panel will look back at the history and outcomes of the marriage equality movement in San Francisco and nationally, 15 years after Gavin Newsom — then mayor of San Francisco and now governor of California — mandated the issuing of marriage licenses for same-sex couples in San Francisco. Dubbed an act of "civic disobedience" in violation of state law, the short-lived authorization sparked San Francisco's "Winter of Love," when some 4,000 same-sex couples rushed to formalize their relationships. Reserve your ticket online [here](#).

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## Current Exhibitions The GLBT Historical Society Museum

### [Front Gallery](#) A Picture is a Word: The Posters of Rex Ray

Through February 3, 2019

"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).

### [Community Gallery](#)

# Two-Spirit Voices: Returning to the Circle

Through May 27, 2019

"Two-Spirit Voices" celebrates the 20th anniversary of Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits (BAAITS).

## Main Gallery Queer Past Becomes Present

Permanent Exhibition

"Queer Past Becomes Present" features photos, documents and artifacts telling the stories of over a century of everyday queer life among the diverse populations of San Francisco.



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Museum Store**

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## 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 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.  
Sunday: Noon - 5:00 p.m.

#### MUSEUM CLOSURES

Tuesday, February 5 (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](#).

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**CREDITS.** FEATURE: Photo by Mark Sawchuk. FROM THE BOARD: Photo by Ed Bell. IN THE ARCHIVES: Photo of Michael Reyes by Brienne Wong. UPCOMING EVENTS. Panel discussion: logo of Night of Ideas. Author Talk: Photo courtesy of Dee Michel. Exhibition Opening: Phatima and MichaelAngelo (undated) by Melissa Hawkins, used with permission. Fighting Back: San Francisco Pride Parade, 2008, courtesy of Ruth Villaseñor; used with permission.

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