

"It is my wish that tomorrow,
when a viewer looks into the
eyes of the subjects of these
pictures, he or she will say in a
spirit of wonder, 'These people
were here; like me, they lived
and breathed.' So too will the
portraits and the words which
accompany them respond,
'We were here; we existed.
This is how we were.'"

- Robert Giard,
Particular Voices

Archeion

JOURNAL OF QUEER ARCHIVES
STONEWALL NATIONAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

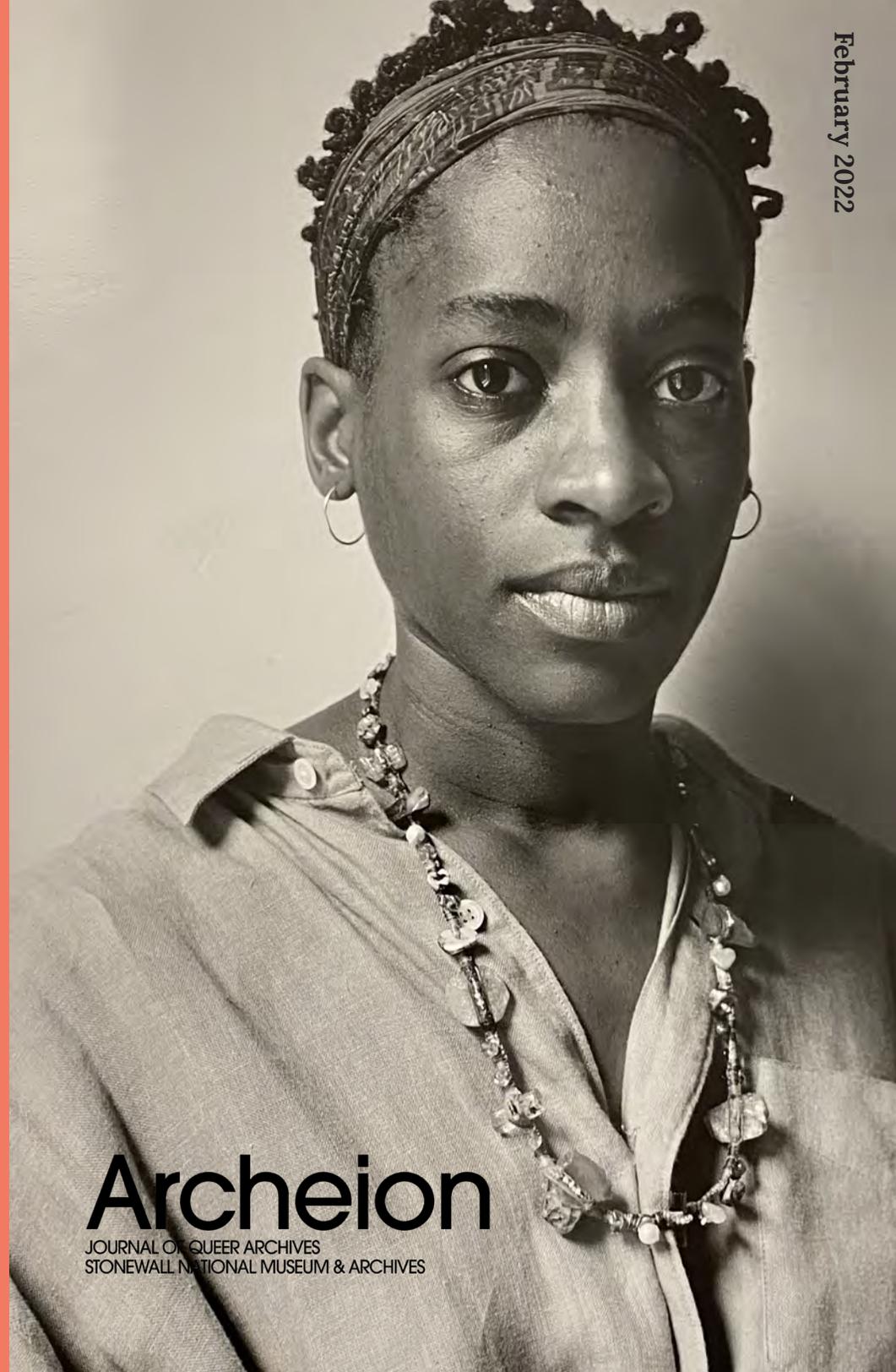


Table of Contents

- 6 **Robert Giard**
 - ▶ Curated by Hunter O'Hanian with Jackson Davidow

- 12 **Reflections on Particular Voices with Sarah Schulman**
 - ▶ Sarah Schulman

- 14 **Untitled**
 - ▶ Clifford Prince King

- 16 **Access & Archives: A Researcher's Roundtable**
 - ▶ Alina Van Ryzin, Jay Watkins, Tyler Carson, Margaret Galvan, and Bobuq Sayed

- 24 **Grassroots Archiving: An Institutional Roundtable**
 - ▶ Gerber/Hart Library and Archives, Rainbow History Project

- 32 **Dispatches**

- 33 **S'Wall News**

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STONEWALL NATIONAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

February 2022

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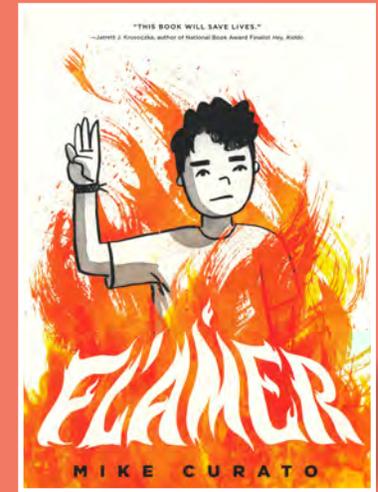
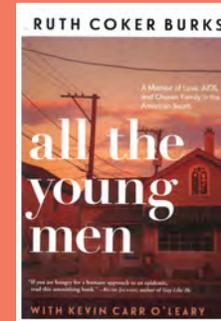
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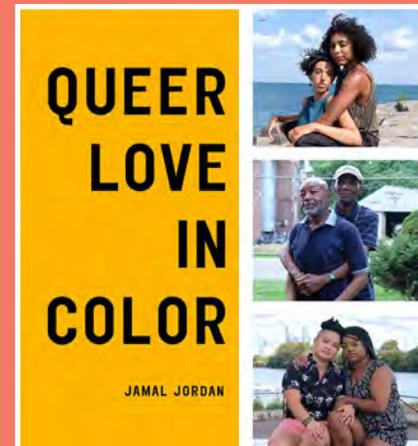
Cover: Robert Giard, *Jacqueline Woodson*, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, vintage gelatin silver print.

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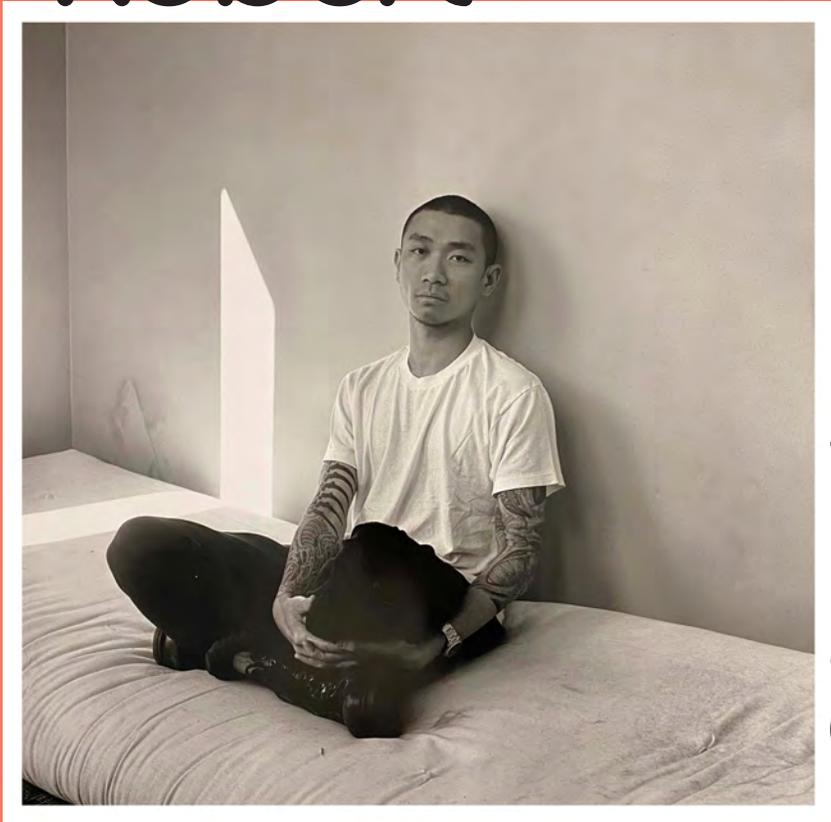


New Acquisitions

Recent arrivals to the
SNMA Library & Archives



Robert



Giard

◀ Justin Chin, San Francisco, CA, 1999, vintage gelatin silver print.

A path-breaking queer Asian American poet, Justin Chin was born in Malaysia, raised in Singapore, and educated at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. In 1991, after college, Chin moved to San Francisco and immersed himself in the city's vibrant worlds of queer literature and performance. His critically acclaimed poetry books include *Bite Hard* (1997), *Harmless Medicine* (2001), and *Gutted* (2006), all of which concentrate on complex questions of race, racialization, sexuality, desire, and shame. *Gutted* received the prestigious Thom Gunn Award, a prize that honors a work of gay male poetry. He died at the age of forty-six in 2015.

In June 1985, after having attended New York City's Lesbian and Gay Pride march with his lover Jonathan, Robert Giard (1939-2002) and friends headed over to the Public Theater to see the evening performance of Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*. As the curtain opened, revealing names of the dead projected on the wall, some Giard recognized, he was moved to a sense of urgency. As he notes, "The general euphoria of the march earlier in the day was coming up against this dramatization of present suffering and loss."¹

1. Robert Giard, "Self-Portrait of a Gay Reader," in *Particular Voices: Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), p. xiii.

That evening, Giard made a pivotal decision about his photographic practice: It should be of use to other gay people by recording something of note about the queer experience, queer history, and queer culture. A few weeks later, for his birthday in July, Giard attended a performance of William Hoffmann's play *As Is*. Soon after, Giard developed the foundations

of what would become *Particular Voices*—his most important photographic body of work—which memorialized and historicized the most influential lesbian and gay writers, poets, playwrights, academics, and scholars.

Including over 500 portraits, *Particular Voices*—the source SNMA selected images from, is

a project of legacy building, of naming, of identifying, and of claiming space for lesbian & gay writers who have shaped the course of history. By setting out on a mission to photograph gay and lesbian writers and leaders in 1985, Giard created a trove of powerful images of people willing to come out as members of the LGBTQ community at a time when it could have harmed their reputations and safety.

Giard's photographic practice, particularly in relationship to *Particular Voices*, sought

recognition and remembrance. Similar to projects such as the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the marginalization and erasure of queer communities and queer individuals from our cultural record propelled a generation of artists, writers, and thinkers to form our own history, our own legacy, and to stake a claim for the proof of our existence. Joan Nestle—a Lambda Literary award winning writer and editor, and a founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives—in her contribution to *Particular Voices*, concluded the essay with a notion of longevity

and community, two pillars intimately connected to Giard's photography. She wrote, "Will our words be allowed to live? Will our children be able to find us? As long as these photographs exist, with their queer, complex, and different faces, the world will know that at one point in time, with our words and our bodies, we chose revelation."²

Queer communities are positioned such that our history and genealogy must be sought out, discovered, made, and re-made. Artists such as Robert Giard underscore the need and importance of finding and forming community.

Robert Giard was on view at SNMA in Winter/Spring 2022

2. Robert Giard and Joan Nestle, "I Wanted to Live Long Enough to Kiss a Woman": *The Life of Lesbian Literature," in *Particular Voices: Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), p. xxv.



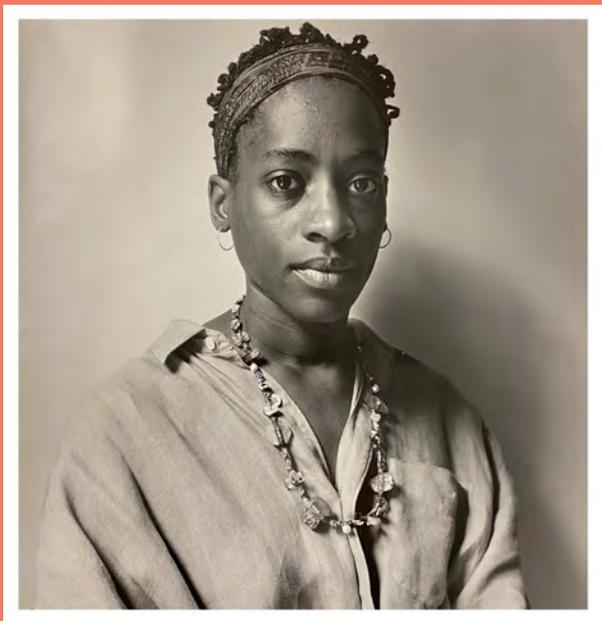
◀ Sylvia Rivera, Brooklyn, NY, 1999, vintage gelatin silver print.

Sylvia Rivera was a pivotal transgender and gay-liberation activist who was an integral catalyst of the Stonewall Inn uprising in 1969—a turning point in the queer rights movement. Born in 1951 to a Puerto Rican father and a Venezuelan mother in New York City, Rivera championed the rights of the people most marginalized from society, especially trans people of color. In 1971, along with her comrade Marsha P. Johnson, she founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a political group that provided lodging, food, and shelter to people in the trans community. She died in 2002 at the age of fifty. Robert Giard photographed her as part of his series "Gay Sites" or "Queer Voices," which depicted important queer activists.

Pomo Afro Homos, San Francisco, CA, ▶ 1994, vintage gelatin silver print.

The Postmodern African American Homosexuals—shortened to Pomo Afro Homos—was a trailblazing performance troupe founded in San Francisco in 1990 by Eric Gupton, Brian Freeman, and Djola Branner. Active until 1995, the collective created humorous, poignant, and empowering theater pieces about the relationship between Blackness and queerness in a heated age of identity politics and HIV/AIDS. Drawing from their own experiences and struggles, Pomo Afro Homos created work that combined song, dance, theater, and comedy. Their shows, *Fierce Love: Stories from Black Gay Life and Dark Fruit*, performed at national and international venues. Topics broached included racism, homophobia, sex, pop culture, tokenization, and activism.





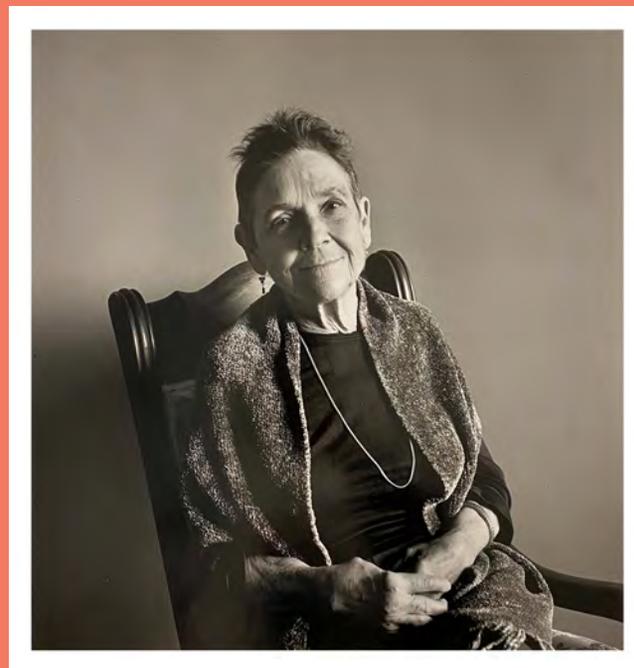
◀ *Jacqueline Woodson, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, vintage gelatin silver print.*

Jacqueline Woodson is an acclaimed writer of books for children and adolescents. Frequently incorporating elements of her own experience as a Black queer person, she has rocked the field of young adult literature by creating nuanced characters that find themselves in relatable situations. Her young adult novels include *Miracle's Boys* (2000)—the story of three brothers growing up without parents in Harlem—and her poetic memoir *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), both of which won the Coretta Scott King Award. She has previously served as the Young People's Poet Laureate as well as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. In 2020, she was named a MacArthur Fellow.



◀ *Joan Nestle, New York City, 1987, vintage gelatin silver print.*

Born in the Bronx in 1940, Joan Nestle wore many hats in the lesbian community: activist, writer, editor, educator, community historian, and archivist. As a Jewish lesbian feminist, she participated in several important intersectional social movements of her day, including the anti-war, women's rights, gay liberation, and pro-sex movements. Much of her influential erotica emphasizes butch-femme identities and relationships. In 1974, Nestle notably co-founded the Lesbian Herstory Archive. Now located in Park Slope, Brooklyn, the archive serves as an essential community space and vast collection of documents, periodicals, ephemera, memorabilia, and photographs related to lesbian history and culture. Her archival work is motivated by a firm conviction that preserving lesbian history is a vital political act.



▲ *Adrienne Rich, New York, 2001, vintage gelatin silver print.*

Adrienne Rich was one of the most significant poets, essayists, and intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century. With the publication of her first book, *A Change of World* (1951), which won the Yale Younger Poets Award, she became recognized as a leading voice in the world of American poetry. Her work combined formal ingenuity with radical politics, particularly feminist and lesbian concerns of the 1970s and 1980s. Published in 1980, her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" remains a classic text of radical feminism and lesbianism. In 1997, she famously refused the National Medal of Arts due to her disagreement with President Clinton's administration's lack of support for the National Endowment for the Arts. Her long-term partner was Jamaican American novelist Michelle Cliff.

Reflections on *Particular Voices* with Sarah Schulman

Andy Johnson (AJ): What do you remember about your collaboration with Robert? Was there anything that stood out?

Sarah Schulman (SS): So, I've been thinking about Bob. Did you know that there were actually two different photo sessions for his project? There was a whole earlier set taken in the stairwell of my building, at the place that I've lived for over forty years. By 1988, when Bob finished the second

session, I had been in print for four years, and I had published three novels. Even though I was very young, the first set of photos he did of me on the staircase was very Jack Kerouac-like. I live in a tenement. It was very urban.

By that point, that image had already been taken of me in that space many times by others, so it felt really cliché, and when he mailed me the contact sheet of the images, I told him that it felt

repetitive. So, he decided to do an entirely different shoot with me. He came up here again, and put me on the roof in that coat you see in the image. What's interesting is that this second photo has now become the cliché. I now have 35 years of photos of me on that roof, but his image was the first.

I remember that he was extremely affable. He really wanted a collaboration—something that we would both feel good about. I don't think I had any other contact with him after that.

AJ: Giard's project, *Particular Voices*, deals heavily with these notions of legacy and memory—who is remembered and how. Why do you think these ideas are so strongly held for LGBTQ culture and communities?

SS: Robert was one of the first white men to see the community as multi-racial and cross-gender. I can't think of anyone—at that time—who was as inclusive in their conceptualization of community as Bob was.

We had this very rich subculture that the mainstream culture ignored and it was so obvious to us. We all knew each other. When I came out to the lesbian community, the leaders in the field were poets. Robert captured something that was very authentic in that sense.

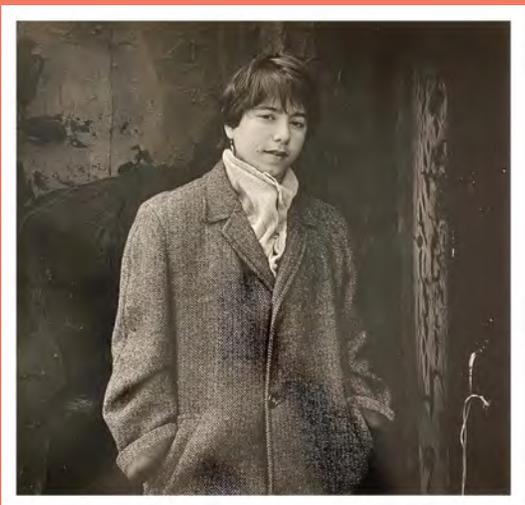
AJ: In your own work, do you think about that idea of legacy building? For example in your recent book, *Let the Record Show*.

SS: It's so hard because . . . my most recent book . . . I felt like I had to do it. It was a state of emergency. There was so much mis-historicization, and untrue history being created. I had no intention of writing

this book, but I felt that I had to. I'm in the generation that's very truncated because of AIDS, and so Jim Hubbard and I feel a lot of responsibility to our dead friends. When you have a situation like the one that we faced where AIDS activism was being misrepresented, it became this feeling like, if I didn't do it, it wasn't going to happen. The other people aren't here to tell those stories.

When you look at the legacy of lesbian history, it has completely disappeared. Even in publishing there still is not a single lesbian novel that's been allowed to be an emblematic American novel. It's still so marginalized. The representations are very limited. I'm not sure what exactly to do about that, but it's so frustrating. It's interesting that I wrote a book about men, and suddenly I got a lot of approval. After 37 years and 20 books, I got access on a certain level that I never had before. The responses were, *Wow you're such a good writer, so smart*. Now I've come back with a new lesbian novel, and I can't get it published. When I wrote my first novel in 1984, most of the lesbian writers who were well known at the time had dropped out. It was so brutal, very few of my peers are still active and publishing.

Sarah Schulman is an American novelist, playwright, nonfiction writer, screenwriter, gay activist, and AIDS historian.



▲ Sarah Schulman, New York City, 1988, vintage gelatin silver print.

Robert passed away twenty years ago. I was almost eight years old. Thinking about that time in my life—fascinated by cameras and camcorders.

My father had an over-the-shoulder VHS tape recorder, and I'd borrow it to film my toys and the rearrangement of my bedroom.

I think it was a safety net.

Almost like a backup memory in case I were to ever forget.

A fear of losing time. A photograph or film scene saved, tokened and cherished to prove that it did happen, or that it had once existed.

A fear of missing out on an exchange with someone within my community.

Maybe we weren't friends, or didn't hang out at the same place, or had just met; the time was...

Physical time stamps. A visual to remember where we were mentally and emotionally at that specific time. Marks on the wall to see how much we've grown.

Old report cards and tests to witness how much we've learned since then.

“Back then, I was seeing . . . ” “Back then I had just . . . ”

Creating my own memorial, the way I want. Leaving behind evidences of my loved ones, friends, relationships, and my inner self.

This is when I find myself in a full circle type moment while looking at Robert's work.

I can see his intentions.

I understand the longing to cradle time, treasure the people we were once surrounded by.

It's not forever, but perhaps it can be with a photo. Not only for me, but for the ones after me.

To prove that I and we were once here.



▲ Robert Giard, *Leslie Feinberg, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Jersey City, 1994*, vintage gelatin silver print.



Clifford Prince King is an artist living and working in New York and Los Angeles. King documents his intimate relationships in traditional, everyday settings that speak on his experiences as a queer black man. cliffordprinceking.com.

▲ Clifford Prince King, *Lovers II*.
Courtesy of the artist.

Access & Archives: A Researcher's Roundtable

Navigating archives, both in-person and digital, is a game of risk and of surprising discovery. We often have an idea or hope for what we will eventually find; however, the unexpected is often what to expect. *Archeion* hosted a roundtable with five scholars, artists, and researchers—Alina Van Ryzin, Jay Watkins, Margaret Galvan, Bobuq Sayed, and Tyler Carson—to learn more about the individual experience of encountering archives. What surprises are hidden in archives? What do archives overlook or misinterpret? What are best practices for not only approaching archives, but also how archives index their materials? How do we grapple with the emergence of the digital sphere? The roundtable, while narrow in its scope, hopes to invoke the question: What is our collective relationship to the archive?

** The following roundtable is edited for length and clarity. **

Andy Johnson (AJ): Let's begin with short introductions, including your pronouns, project/institutional affiliations, and what you're currently working on.

Alina Van Ryzin (AVR): My name is Alina (she/her). I'm not affiliated with an institution, I'm an independent artist, and I am currently researching for my own artistic practice around the queer history of South Florida, including the history of drag kings, and more.

Margaret Galvan (MG): I'm Margaret Galvan (she/her). I am affiliated with the University of Florida, although at the moment I am in San Francisco on a research fellowship with the Stanford Humanities Center. My research seeks out communities of queer cartoonists, particularly in the 80s and 90s, during which there was a growth of LGBTQ cartoons and comics. I think about how they make community together through different periodicals, anthologies, and series.

Jay Watkins (JW): I'm Jay Watkins (he/they). I am affiliated with William & Mary here in Virginia, and I am working on Southern queer theater.

Tyler Carson (TC): My name is Tyler Carson (he/him), and I am a PhD candidate at Rutgers

University and I study the history of the figure of the endangered white child from the 1970s up until the current day.

Bobuq Sayed (BS): My name is Bobuq Sayed (they/them). I am currently in the University of Miami MFA program and am in my final semester. I am currently doing a fellowship with Exchange for Change and working on building writing and reading proficiency among incarcerated folks in various South Florida prisons. However, with Stonewall I am currently working on an exhibition of queer Muslim migration through both South Florida and North America.

AJ: In thinking about your experience with archives around the US, and maybe even the world, do any stand out? Do you have a favorite archive that you like to visit?

AVR: I moved to Miami during the pandemic, about a year ago, so the most recent archive I have visited is Stonewall. Nonetheless, I have visited the William Way Archives in Philadelphia, and the Bryn Mawr College Archives because they did a long-term photography project about women's colleges in the modern day.

JW: Over the last few years I've spent time at Stonewall, ONE Archives in Los Angeles, the

GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, The Center in New York, and a couple of university archives including Emory University in Atlanta, and a little bit of Georgia State University. My favorite would have to be ONE Archives in Los Angeles. I don't know if it's the building or the space, but something about the archival space is comfortable in terms of material memory. They have a lot of the playwriting material from Atlanta in their archives, which is very helpful for my research.

"I had never seen a photo of [Don Melia], and so being able to see this person you are researching is really powerful."

TC: I've used three archives so far. I was at Stonewall Museum in July 2020, and since then I've visited the New York Public Library, which is a beautiful space to work in, and surprisingly open access in

terms of sensitive materials, which I work with a lot. I've worked at The ArQuives in Toronto, Canada. I recently booked a trip to the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota.

BS: The work I am doing with Stonewall is a bit unrelated to my primary research project, which is a novel set in Istanbul. During my trips to Istanbul, Turkey in the last couple of years, I've been looking through the archives at Boğaziçi University. The material isn't earmarked LGBTQ, so it's finding more subterranean approaches to finding similar communities. There's an organization there called Kaos which has a database of oral histories from the various refugee and asylum seekers who have passed through Istanbul since the group's formation.

MG: I've been able to research at the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, which is fantastic. I was at Stonewall Museum last summer in May 2021 and in the summer of 2019, before Covid, I spent a month in London at the Bishopsgate Institute, which is a queer history collection. I've spent a lot of time at The Center in New York, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, ONE Archives in Los Angeles, and more traditional university archives.

AJ: What was your experience like in the archives? Was there

anything surprising? What were you faced with in terms of combing through so much material, and how did that affect your thesis or approach, or not?

MG: When I was in London, I was looking to write a history of the cartoonist Don Melia, who had put together volumes to raise awareness and funding for HIV/AIDS in the 80s. He put together a comic called *Strip AIDS*. I wanted to understand his legacy, but he doesn't even have a Wikipedia page, there wasn't a collection for him or his work, so I ended up going through the major queer newspapers in London in 1987 to find information and piece things together. The most striking thing I found for him was a photograph taken of him from one of the book-signing events they held. I had never seen a photo of him, and so being able to see this person you are researching is really powerful.

What I've been finding at the GLBT Historical Society is a lot of evidence of trans cartoonists and trans cartoonist history. It wasn't until the late 90s and early 2000s that trans cartoonists were brought into the fold, but I'm finding a lot of stuff in the early 90s and even the 80s, and this history is not integrated into the larger, queer cartoonist community for obvious reasons, so these individuals often had to

find other community spaces and networks that were more trans specific.

AVR: When I was working in the Bryn Mawr archives, I didn't really know what I was looking for. As a photographer I was looking to be in conversation with images. What I found was that images of Black and Latino students were marked as "unidentified students," while most other photographs would have labels such "students at a party." I was persistently looking for students of color and it wasn't until I clicked on the tag "unidentified" that I found the largest amount. Essentially, the two search terms that returned the highest number of images were "maid" and "unidentified."

JW: One of the biggest surprises for me comes up across several archives. Southerners, about every ten years, have to keep reminding the national LGBTQ movement that we're here and we exist. I didn't realize how explicit that was until I was at the University of Florida archives. One playwright writes his character dialogue in such a way as to flag the way in which metronormative standards often exclude communities in rural spaces. When I was at Stonewall, right around 1990 to 1993, as there is increasing excitement over the Clinton presidency, Southern activists, not just playwrights, are looking at the

national movement and saying, “Hey, we are here. We are still here. The strategies that the HRC are employing don’t necessarily work for us.” Then of course several more times, the South is contending with HRC and national strategies. It was a surprise to see four of the Southern queer papers, between ’90 and ’93, feature a weekly article from a Southern scholar, Southern activist, Southern playwright, Southern artist, critiquing the national movement for being forgotten.

TC: I study the figure of the endangered white child, and so I thought where do I go for that? Anita Bryant, Save Our Children, 1977-78. I went in with the naïve expectation that there would be explicit language around white children, but of course there wasn’t, that’s not how racism works. I stumbled upon these two interviews, one in *Playboy* and the other in *Penthouse* where Bryant is talking specifically about homosexual practices and how outraged she was about it, which was sort of shocking to see so plainly. In another surprise, I found a special issue of a white supremacist newspaper called *The Torch*, which was billed as a revolutionary journal of white Christianity. It also had explicit material in it.

BS: I have marveled a lot at all of the racially explicit material

in Stonewall’s collection. It’s fascinating to realize how recent some of the language that we now consider extremely dated around race was. This wasn’t some 1970s smut periodical, it was a glossy, high budget publication from 2007. There was a magazine in the Stonewall archive that effectively marketed Asian communities to white men. I’m not sure that would exist today, but seeing it so explicitly rendered was enough.

*"Southerners,
about every ten
years, have to
keep reminding
the national
LGBTQ movement
that we're here
and we exist."*

The thing that surprised me about what I’m working on in particular was the warm reception of queer Cuban refugees around the time of the boat lift, because it quite clearly contradicts the reception of queer Muslim refugees only a

few decades later. You saw ads for free housing, ads for jobs. Then you fast forward and see a more moralistic, racist, and Islamophobic response to Muslim migration in South Florida. It’s so explicitly. You don’t have to dig deep to reach these conclusions.

AJ: In considering your experience with archives, from grassroots to institutional, I want to consider the question of where do we go? What are we still missing or lacking? What goes wrong? What role does affirmative outreach play? Are there any spaces that are modeling best practices for archives?

JW: I was at the American Historical Association (AHA) over the weekend, and the Committee for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History had their annual reception, sponsored by Gale. Their representative talked about their mission to bring collections to a larger field and make them more globally accessible, but no one was questioning the exorbitant paywall that is a barrier to access, and so your mission isn’t access, your mission is capitalism. In my dream world archives would have the staff they need to do the digitizing they need; it would be keyword searchable. The ideal world includes funding.

AVR: I think, within queer archives—outside of the Lesbian Herstory Archives—looking for lesbian history is really hard, right? There are more leads than full material. I found that there was a women’s community called the Pagoda, outside of Naples, Florida, that then relocated to Georgia, and I found an oral history interview with the woman who founded the community at the Duke University archives. I’ve found leads for the Rainbow House in Key West. So, I’ve found that the archive is more a jumping off point and the material ends. There was a magazine called *She* magazine founded in Miami, it eventually relocated to Los Angeles, but it was based in Miami for about ten or fifteen years. They would feature all types of events and there was one staff photographer who was listed as “Monica.” That’s what it says at the bottom of all the pages. I’ve tried to look for her. I have found other people. Many just names, and I am hoping to be able to find out more about these individuals.

MG: One thing I think a lot about for the future is digital access and what that means. I work with a lot of grassroots periodicals where there’s been a trend towards digitization. *Independent Voices* was digitizing from different university archives, and they had *On Our Backs* up for a while. However, people came forward

and asked, “Well, did the people consent to having their lesbian erotica magazine [made] available to a larger community?” So there is a question of the ethics of digitization, especially when it could open people up to a larger community beyond what they wanted. I’m not sure what the right answer is, or if there is a right answer.

“What’s been extraordinary is to see how two people who were friends—went to the same meetings, attended the same rallies—can provide two completely different accounts.”

At the same time, however, Lesbian Herstory Archives was saying that they wanted to be independent, and now they are a part of the Gale Archives of Sexuality and Gender, which is great, but it’s proprietary. I have access because of my affiliations, but it’s really unfortunate that it’s not open access. The idea of grassroots archives is to be open to the public. To digitize this material, but only have it available to those who can pay an exorbitant amount for it seems wrong. An example would be *Independent Voices*. They were fundraising for their digitization and had a subscription model for access. However, the intention was that eventually it would be open access, and is.

TC: I think Gale is evidence of a sort of shift that has happened where archives are having to make financial decisions rooted in precarity and scarcity, which ultimately can harm access to the collection. My hope for the future of queer archives is to begin and continue to tell the fuller story. The responsibility that we have to tell these stories . . . My research is interrogating the rise of anti-gay and homophobic history in the United States, and how that maps on to the rise of white supremacy—those same histories exist within the LGBTQ community and movement. We can’t hide these “sensitive”

materials that implicate queer white men in the history of white supremacy; we have to reckon with them as scholars or researchers. But also, the institutions that hold them should be actively interrogating what these collections mean.

BS: The question about the future makes me think of all the various under-resourced communities in the American South and in the US in general; communities who didn’t have the permanence of ephemera, who were living, thriving, fucking, but without the longevity that remains and is historicized in archives. However, one thing they do have and have always had is memory. Oral storytelling and audio archives capture that so well, and video archives too. It’s not even an abstract idea or hope, there is real evidence and excellent templates, including the hundreds of interviews that Sarah Schulman did with the survivors of ACTUP and the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 80s and 90s, which was released in the book *Let the Record Show* in 2021. These oral accounts are also not definitive. What’s been extraordinary is to see how two people who were friends—went to the same meetings, attended the same rallies—can provide two completely different accounts. It’s a real strength of the medium.

“...archives are having to make financial decisions rooted in precarity and scarcity.”

The last thing I’ll say is that one of the shortcomings of academia and academics is this fixation on the individual book project. There’s a real sense of narcissism and solipsism that comes about, a hyper focus on the individual as opposed to what is lucrative and important for a community—the longevity of our history and the archive. I think it’s really important to consider the collective. I am also working on individual projects, so this is certainly a self-read. Nonetheless, a shift in priorities can possibly help to address the shortcomings of the archives.

AJ: Thank you all for your time, this was a really lovely conversation.

Grassroots Archiving: An Institutional Roundtable

As archives, museums, and institutions grapple with the historical erasure ever-present in their collections and storage facilities, *Archeion* asks: What are grassroots queer archives doing to ensure their legacies seek truer, equitable representation? Together with Wil Brant from the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives (Chicago) and Vincent Slatt of Rainbow History Project (DC), our conversation attempts to unpack the matrix-like relationship between activism, activists, community, and archives. Where do archives fit in the lifespan of activist movements and do they serve as the connective tissue between such movements? What is the relationship between grassroots and institutional archives? How do we preserve and support grassroots queer archives?

** The following roundtable is edited for length and clarity. **

Andy Johnson (AJ): It's great to have you as part of this roundtable. Let's start off with a brief background, your work with archives, and your institutional affiliations.

Vincent Slatt (VS): I work as a full-time librarian for a federal museum here in Washington, D.C. Since 2011, I've been a volunteer with the Rainbow History Project, which is an all-volunteer non-profit. In that capacity, I serve as the Director of Archiving, and I am responsible for acquisitions, processing, and finding aids. We ourselves do not have an archival repository, all of our collections are transferred to the DC History Center, which was formerly known as the Historical Society of Washington DC. We wanted our materials to be available within the context of the communities we live in. The Rainbow History Project was started in 2000 by Mark Meinke, who was a local activist. He was doing research on the local drag communities but was unable to find any resources or collections. He took out an ad in *The Washington Blade* asking for information and calling for a meeting of like-minded individuals

who would be interested in this type of research. They all met at a coffee shop on 17th street, and thus was launched the Rainbow History Project. Their collections grew too large to properly care for. The organization sent a request for proposals (RFP) with some of our local agencies in DC, and the Historical Society of Washington DC was chosen. Rainbow History still collects the archival materials. We're still very robust with collecting oral histories, and we do a lot of walking tours.

Wil Brant (WB): I am the Executive Director of Gerber/Hart Library Archives here in Chicago, IL. I started back in the 90s in a variety of positions. I've been in this part-time directorship position for about the past four or five years. Gerber/Hart is a library, we have always had a circulating library, archives, collection, as well as an exhibition space. We do finding aids for archives collections and cataloguing for library items than can be checked out. We have people coming through at all stages of their research. We also have space for programs. All of our materials are on site. The downside is that we're getting very

large and we will need to move to a larger space. I've moved the library three times now.

"For me, there really is no end to activism—it's a circle."

Gerber/Hart is in its fortieth year—we were founded in 1981. We were founded as a joint project between the Gay Academic Union chapter in Chicago and the History Project, which—at that time—was called Gay Horizons and served the community. This was also in relation to the Gay and Lesbian caucus of the American Historical Association, where the conversation around collecting, preserving, and archiving really began to heat up amongst emerging gay historians. There have been discussions—as many archives have faced—about moving our collections to a larger museum or university collection. However, we've always wanted to be within a neighborhood where there was an LGBTQ presence. If we went to one of the universities, we would be farther from our constituents.

We always wanted people to be able to come to our site, be a part of the community, hold events with other sites and organizations. If we are going to identify ourselves as a community archive, we have to be within that so called community.

AJ: What role do you see archives playing in activism and activist movements? When you hear the phrase "archives are the last step in activism," what are your thoughts? Do you agree? Disagree?

WB: My response is that I would have a different interpretation of activism, or maybe the process of activism because my notion is more of a circle of praxis where you have an awareness of a situation, you analyze it, try to understand it, seek a response to it, engage in the response, then go back and interpret what impact you've made, then do that whole circle over again. For me, there really is no end to activism—it's a circle. So then, where do archives play a role in that? I see archives addressing the analysis part—to understand an issue in the present, you need to understand its past. How have other individuals or groups addressed or faced other issues that would give someone insight into how to address a present or future issue. There was an exhibition we mounted that addressed bar

raids. There was a County Sheriff who was really aggressive with bar raids in the early-to-mid 1960s. He then became the President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and ended up having a public building named after him. Should this person have their name on a public building considering their involvement and connection to violence against the LGBTQ community?

Back in the day of print media, activists would come into the archives and library to view the recent newspapers and gather information. Now that it's all online these days, more researchers are coming in to interpret the materials for their scholarship. All in all, I view archives as a foundation, inspiration, and a resource to be drawn from.

VS: My thoughts on that notion are very similar to Wil's. I don't see it as a last step, but rather the next logical step—where we begin to document our efforts, what we've done, where we've come from. Our board at Rainbow History Project all identify as activists. Some of our leaders are in their 70s and have been active in community activism for decades. Our mission is written as such that activism is built into our collecting methods. We're constantly looking for further understanding—lining up our archival collecting initiatives

with the activism that we have inherited, and to keep doing both simultaneously.

"Our biggest concern was getting lost in such a large archive. We wanted to maintain a focus on local issues, accessibility, and community ties."

AJ: Can you speak more about the community ties within your organizations and how that potentially sets you apart from other archives or museums who have institutional alignments that create barriers between the material and its audience?

VS: That's something our group talked about when we were looking for an archival repository—

there was the Smithsonian American History Museum, which began to collect on our issues; the Library of Congress; GW's Gelman Library; the Washingtoniana Division of the DC Public Library, and several others. Our biggest concern was getting lost in such a large archive. We wanted to maintain a focus on local issues, accessibility, and community ties.

WB: For Gerber/Hart, bridging the fence between an academic research institution and a community resource space has always been a concern. Like Rainbow History, we didn't want to lose that strong connection to our community, and geography really mattered.

AJ: I want to continue thinking about archives as these continued sites of activism. This activism is deeply rooted in politics, and as such the materials are inherently political themselves. How can archives push for further intersectional collecting practices and cultural interpretations of the material? Who are we missing? Why? How can we interrogate that why in a solution-oriented way?

VS: Andy, that is a very old question. Over 50 years ago, Howard Zinn, the great socialist intellectual, gave a pivotal speech at the Society of American Archivists in which he encouraged

archivists to become activists, and criticized archives for only collecting the stories of the military, business, government—the elites. At the time, he was talking about collecting from the liberation movements—women's liberation, Black liberation, gay liberation, but also the Vietnam War protests and all of the persecution that was occurring at the hands of the government against protestors, the working class, etc. It's always been a tension that we've had—the fear of leaving people out. I think it speaks to how far we've come that as modern liberal activist archivists we're even posing the question and being self-critical enough to interrogate who we're collecting and who we're excluding from our collections. We certainly have difficulty in certain areas of collecting, especially in the arts and culture sector. It's difficult for us to preserve the fleeting and ephemeral nature of plays, performances, drag shows, and these sort of events and moments that don't tend to leave documentation. We press hard for outreach efforts, to diversify our collection.

WB: I feel similarly. We want individuals and communities to donate their archives, but we also have to be aware of the fact that under certain circumstances they don't have it. It may be because they don't want to keep it, they

may not want a paper trail or be associated with it, they don't want their family finding it when they pass. We've found that certain groups also meet very informally, there is no formal archival structure built in where they keep ephemera, minutes, etc. We are currently seeking to undertake a larger oral history project, which is a major lift, in order to fill in some of those gaps of the record. In some scenarios, we have to find another route to the information and the material.

"What I think is really important for us to remember is that our enemies are still out there, and they're still actively working against us and our interests."

AJ: In looking towards the future, where do we see queer archiving moving towards? The digital sphere looms incredibly large in this discussion. Moreover, if we see more of an institutional alignment happening, what should we be leery of? What needs to be considered? What would be helpful to know for an organization who is thinking about partnering with someone larger and more well-funded?

VS: What I think is really important for us to remember is that our enemies are still out there, and they're still actively working against us and our interests. We have to safeguard our collections because, even at a big academic institution, they have people that want to erase us and our history.

The Library of Congress, in the early 20th century, had a huge issue of purging their stacks of anything they considered smut, or hiding and leaving uncategorized material they deemed inappropriate, and so access was firmly limited. When Rainbow History wrote their agreement with the DC History Center, they specifically created a right of return on refusal clause in relationship to deaccessioning materials. Though DC History Center has shifted their focus tremendously over many years, we still couldn't deny their past

of who they represented, who they collected, and what their priorities were back in the late 19th century. Don't get me wrong, the DC History Center has been a great partner for us and is dedicated to collecting broadly on all communities in DC.

The other one I'll raise is the financial burden of such a relationship with another organization because: Who is doing the fundraising? Who is paying for the archival folders, the boxes, the processing? We can bring forward volunteers as much as we can, but paid positions . . . paid programming? Money is often always the decision maker, right?

WB: I think at times there's an expectation that we have all of our collections digitized and widely accessible, which unfortunately isn't true. I don't think there's a realization of copyright issues in relationship to what we hold. So, the conversation around accessibility can only go so far—in that sense—since some material simply cannot be online and available to the public. All of that to say that we are in the process of continuing to digitize the parts of our collection that we can make digitally available. There are national efforts to create a database for archives across institutions and organizations. However, until that point, the

public would not know that there is a large ACT UP Chicago archives at the University of Chicago, or that there is a queer Asian archive at the University of Chicago, Illinois campus. Unless you have sites like Gerber/Hart, Rainbow History, or Stonewall that are targeting outreach to their communities and know how to access this type of information, the content is often left unknown. In addition, a lot of discovery actually happens once the researchers are in the space. Depending on what they are researching, I will pull other serials, papers, journals, etc. for them once they are here because they don't know we have holdings that tangentially relate to what they are looking for. It's a fun process of discovery.

AJ: Thank you both for time today, I really enjoyed the conversation.

Statement from Stonewall Museum in opposition to Florida Senate Bill 1834, referred to as the "Don't Say Gay" bill.



"Stonewall National Museum & Archives denounces efforts by certain Florida legislators to prohibit mentioning an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity or teaching LGBTQ history in public schools. Sexual orientation—gay, straight, and gender non-conforming—are facts of life. To not acknowledge these facts and intentionally omit them from children's education is doing them a disservice and creates an environment harmful to developing children. It is also detrimental to LGBTQ youth and adults who learn, teach, and work in Florida's public schools. People should voice their opposition to this bill."

Dispatches

Dispatches reflect notable moments and achievements within LGBTQ culture around the globe. With each issue, we feature important milestones in our collective story.

- ▶ Since the initial groundbreaking of the American LGBTQ+ Museum in New York City last fall, the museum has announced the appointment of its first executive director, Ben Garcia (he/him). Founded in partnership with the New York Historical Society, the American LGBTQ+ Museum preserves, investigates, and celebrates the dynamic histories and cultures of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, as well as those of the emergent and adjacent identities among our communities.
- ▶ Minneapolis council member Andrea Jenkins made history again in January 2022 by becoming the first Black trans official in the United States to lead a city council. Jenkins's victory comes amidst a continued rise in anti-trans and gender non-conforming violence in the United States, particularly for Black trans individuals. Jenkins hopes that with increased visibility and representation can come more understanding.
- ▶ Amy Schneider has become the first woman to break the \$1 million mark on "Jeopardy!" Schneider, an engineering manager in Oakland, California, made history last month as the first transgender contestant to qualify for the Tournament of Champions. Amy ended her forty-game winning streak in January 2022 with a total winnings of \$1,019,600.
- ▶ Dion Kagan's new book *Positive Images: Gay Men and HIV/AIDS in the Culture of 'Post Crisis'* is the first detailed examination of how the relationship between gay men and HIV has transformed in the past two decades. Published in January 2022 by Bloomsbury Academic, the book examines literature, film, TV, documentaries and news coverage from across the English-speaking world to unearth the socio-cultural foundations underpinning this 'post-crisis' period. Kagan's analyses provide acute insights into the fraught legacies of the AIDS crisis and its continued presence in the modern queer consciousness.

S'Wall News

S'Wall News highlights important updates, news, and achievements from within Stonewall National Museum & Archives.

- ▶ The Board of Trustees has recently grown, resulting in a total of seventeen members. We were pleased to recently welcome Hugh Ryan, Karen Kelley, Ernest (E.J.) Harrison, Ruperto Arvelo, and Ida Hood. Jacki Bennett continues to serve as Chair of the Board. Other officers include Gary Carlin as Vice Chair, Alan Uphold as Treasurer, and Jim Doan as Clerk/Secretary.
- ▶ Bex Mui is working hard at the 9th Annual Stonewall National Education Project (SNEP) conference which will be held in Fort Lauderdale, April 14-16, 2022. This year's conference will focus on developing an LGBTQ curriculum for K-12 schools. Visit stonewall-museum.org to register.
- ▶ Our virtual public programming continues to attract audiences throughout the US. Recent guests have included: Sarah Schulman, Adam Zmith, Steven Vider, and Beau McCall with Souleo.
- ▶ SNMA was happy to welcome Ben Smith as a part-time Collections Specialist and Christopher Carlos Montejo as SNMA's Community Data Curation intern. Ben, who is a candidate for their master's degree in Library and Information Sciences at the University of South Florida, will be working in both the archive and in the library. Christopher is a senior at Florida International University. He will be working closely with the digitization project, as SNMA prepares to make archival collections accessible online.
- ▶ Stonewall's programs would not survive without an active cohort of volunteers. We are very thankful for the work they do. Current volunteers include: **Research:** Harvey Abrams; **Events:** Lynne & Herb Fielder, Brett Watts; **Library Projects:** Ted Filteau, Robert Lee, Drew Osborne, Alan Parshley; **Archive Projects:** Luis Hernandez, Paul Holoweski, Patrick Ladden, John Moriarty, Stephen Nonack, Drew Osborne, Norman Pollock, Larry Prasse, Randy Williams; **Front Desk:** Wendell Reid, Bernie Silwinski; **Records:** Tom Santaniello.

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stonewall national museum & archives

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