Descriptive Summary

Title: Howard Grant papers

Dates: 1976-2009

Collection Number: 2020-09

Creator/Collector: Howard Grant

Extent: .5 linear feet

Repository: GLBT Historical Society

San Francisco, California 94103

Abstract: Howard Grant (born 1939) is an architect and gay man. He was part of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Conceptual Design Team and his architectural projects include a regional BART station (Civic Center), four MUNI METRO subway stations in San Francisco, three laboratories for Lawrence Livermore and Berkeley National Laboratories, and other projects. His transit plaza designed for the Castro MUNI METRO station was dedicated to Harvey Milk in 1985. Grant is also a photographer and artist. The collection includes published works about Grant’s architectural work, life, and art, and photographs by Grant of Pride Parades, Gay Games, and other subjects.

Language of Material: English

Access

Collection is open for research.

Preferred Citation

Howard Grant papers. GLBT Historical Society

Acquisition Information

Gift of Howard Grant, January 2020.

Biography/Administrative History

Biographical note written by Howard Grant: Howard Grant was born in Las Vegas, Nevada (1939), and graduated from Stanford University in 1961 with a Bachelor of Architecture, followed by an architectural degree from Rice University in 1963. His architectural career included the firms of Ernest J. Kump Associates, BART Conceptual Design Team at Wurster Bernardi & Emmons, and Senior Associate at Reid & Tarics Associates in San Francisco. He retired in 1994. Howard's architectural projects included a regional BART station (Civic Center), four MUNI METRO subway stations (Van Ness, Church, Castro, and West Portal), three laboratories for Lawrence Livermore and Berkeley National Laboratories, high school and community college projects, an AIR National Guard headquarters, Lemoor U.S. Navy F18 trainer facility, portals for the H3 Hawaii freeway tunnels, Moffet Field NASA flight simulator, and a handful of private residences, including an award winning home for his family in Orinda. His transit plaza designed for the Castro MUNI METRO station was dedicated to Harvey Milk in 1985. Howard spearheaded community resistance to its demolition and replacement plans by a group known as Friends of Harvey Milk Plaza. He created a website, saveharveymilkplaza.org, and a Facebook page, Advocates for Harvey Milk Plaza. As a student at Stanford-in-Italy in Firenze his senior year, Howard was first exposed to other artists' frank and passionate depictions of the male body. Learning that Michelangelo, Da Vinci, and other Renaissance artists had been inspired by greek masterworks and had, in turn been models for Rodin captured his imagination. Celebration of the nude male in art was more limited - and little known by him. As a suppressed homosexual (he graduated from college 8 years before Stonewall), Howard appreciated not only the inherent beauty of the male form but also its mysterious erotic charge that seemed oddly subversive and dangerous. Fast forward to practicing architecture in San Francisco during the 1970's: while designing Bay Area Rapid Transit and Muni Metro stations, burgeoning gay liberation produced a visible celebration of gay pride, resulting in parades attracting thousands - many of whom proudly displayed their bodies in shirtless splendor. After coming out as a gay man in 1978, Howard took delight in the visual surprises at SF gay pride parades and was moved to take up photography and document what he perceived to be a phenomenon. The attractive men crowding Market Street were perfect as unwitting models, and he found himself increasingly turning his lens toward them instead of the passing spectacle. Sometime during this period, Howard discovered the bath houses which had proliferated in San Francisco. As a result, Howard increasingly found himself in the company of men who spent a great deal of time sculpting their bodies and was free to observe them in locker rooms, showers, and sun decks. This led to acquaintances in these venues agreeing to pose for him, and his photographs were featured in one-man shows at Moby Dick and the Ambush bars and published in The Advocate and Bay Area Reporter. Images of male physiques exploded in popular culture during the next 20 years. Photographers such as Mapplethorpe and Bruce Weber, along with locals such as Victor Arimondi and Steve Savage, achieved national recognition and were widely published. Meanwhile, Howard resolved to recapture the pleasure he had enjoyed from sketching and painting during life drawing classes at Rice University. Mark Chester, a south-of-Market photographer, began to hold nude sketch classes in his apartment. It was satisfying to create something beautiful quickly,
in the moment, and without pressure to satisfy a client's wishes (which typified his architectural practice). Massage also became an intervening passion, and Howard's hands became intimately familiar with the male form. When he again took up painting and ceramic sculpture after retiring in 1994, he found that his sense memory of those experiences was so strong that he did not require a model! This also resulted in a more expressive - as opposed to naturalistic - depiction of the body. Working primarily in tempera and pastel, Howard could indulge his desire for vivid colors and exaggerated curves that had not occurred to him when in the presence of live models. "MALE ART" is a collection of Howard's photographs, sculpture, and paintings created during the years of 1980 to 2018 with men as subjects. Although his work includes abstracts and many other themes, Howard's focus on the male body has clearly fueled his creativity as no other subject has. Reviewing Howard Grant's body of work, it may seem as if he was a man obsessed. This is heightened by the deliberate separation of his work into two categories: male art and everything else. By doing so, he celebrated the impact his sexual identity has had on his art and his hope to honor all the men who inspired it. ARCHITECTURAL HONORS: William Ward Watkins Traveling Fellowship (Europe), Rice University, 1963; HUD Honor Award, Civic Center BART Station, San Francisco; AIA Bay Area Chapter Honor Award, Van Ness MUNI METRO Station, San Francisco; AIA Northern CA Chapter Honor Award, West Portal MUNI METRO Station, San Francisco; AIA San Mateo Chapter Award of Excellence, Advanced Light Source, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory; U.S. Plywood Association Merit Award, Grant Orinda Residence; National Endowment for the Arts, Research Grant, "Notes From Underground". PHOTOGRAPHY HONORS: 1981, Second Place Winner, Advocate Magazine "Images From Our Lives" photography contest; 1984, Best Entry, Under Exposed "Closets", Third Annual Exhibit of Lesbian and Gay Photographers; 2006, First Place Award, Reyataz National Photography and HIV Essay Contest.

Scope and Content of Collection
The collection includes published works about Grant's architectural work, life, and art, including: Howard Grant AIA Architecture, Howard Grant Male Art, Notes from Underground: An Architect's View of BART, and a Reid and Tarics Associates portfolio. Also in the collection are photographs by Grant (including negatives, prints, and contact sheets) of Pride Parades (featuring AIDS activism, spectators, parade contingents, and others), Gay Games, men, and other subjects.

Indexing Terms
Gay men
Art
Photography
Pride parades
Architecture