Robert Pruzan collection

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2020
Descriptive Summary

Title: Robert Pruzan collection
Dates: 1950-1992
Collection Number: 1998-36
Creator/Collector: Pruzan, Robert
Extent: 60 linear feet (3 cartons, 58 manuscript boxes, 7 half-size manuscript boxes, 5 small oversize boxes, 2 large oversize boxes, 1 extra-large oversize box)

Online items available: [https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/glbh/4171](https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/glbh/4171)

Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103

Abstract: Robert Pruzan (1946-1992) was a photojournalist, horticulturist, and mime whose vast library of photographs documented the queer history of San Francisco throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The Robert Pruzan Papers are arranged in two groups, Papers and Photographs.

Language of Material: English

Access
Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Robert Pruzan collection. GLBT Historical Society

Acquisition Information

Biography/Administrative History
Robert Pruzan (1946-1992) was a photojournalist, horticulturist, and mime whose vast library of photographs documented the queer history of San Francisco throughout the 1970s and 1980s. His work was published in Drummer, Manifest, Sports Illustrated, and the San Francisco Examiner's Image magazine, as well as in Geoff Mains' book Urban Aboriginals; it also ran regularly in the Bay Area Reporter. Pruzan was born in Seattle. After graduating from Roosevelt High School, he went to New York for college at Columbia University. While in New York, he began studying the art of mime, first at Sterling Jensen's Ecole de Mime of New York and then with Etienne Decroux at his Ecole de Mme de Paris. Pruzan taught mime under Decroux and became his assistant and occasional translator. He moved back to New York in 1967, returned to classes at Columbia, studied ikebana floral arrangement, and worked as a florist while teaching at the Ecole de Mme de New York. He also acted, playing the Duke of Burgundy and later the Fool in a Roundabout Theatre production of King Lear. It was at about this time that Pruzan began to pursue photography seriously. In 1973, Pruzan moved to San Francisco, where he began working as a horticulturist and photographer. He photographed the first Haight Street Fair in May of 1978, and continued to document it, the Castro Street Fair, early Pride Parades, and the Folsom and Up Your Alley Fairs through 1991. He also began to exhibit his work, first in small cafes and then in the Involution Gallery. The majority of his photography after 1980 centered on friends and gay events, especially cultural programs, street fairs and celebrations, and the leather world. Other favorite subjects were famous people visiting San Francisco, local politicians, drag queens, sailors, leather title contests, cityscapes, clouds, sunsets, and fireworks displays. Pruzan died of AIDS complications in 1992.

Scope and Content of Collection
The Robert Pruzan Papers are arranged in two groups, Papers and Photographs. The Papers include all documents that are not photographic images. Papers The first series of papers is a small set of biographical documents. Included here is a one-page chronology by Pruzan of his activities and places of residence during the first twenty-five years of his life. This is particularly helpful for following his activities during the later half of the 1960s. The next series is composed of Pruzan's writings, including a series of journals and notebooks covering the years 1965-1985, primarily from the period 1968 through 1973. A small set of writings from high school days, and undated poetry, notes, and drafts of letters entail much of the remaining writings. Significant dated writings include his professional correspondence, opera reviews, and compositions related to Buena Vista Park. Also included are a number of notes from his readings of the I Ching. The Buena Vista Park (BVP) files document Pruzan's efforts to oppose "thinning" of BVP flora by the city in order to prevent sexual contact from taking place there. This was a major neighborhood controversy in the 1980s, with both gay and straight residents split on
the issue. Despite all efforts to prevent what Pruzan thought of as a desecration to the natural park environment, a good deal of the park was pruned and even denuded over time. Pruzan’s photographs document these changes. The series titled “Mime-Related Records” holds several significant items, including Pruzan’s notes from classes at the Ecole de Mime, Pruzan’s translations of Decroux’s Etienne Decroux Speaks With You, and his annotated copy of Paroles sur le Mime. There is also a sub-series of black and white prints of Decroux, his classes, student rehearsals, and performances taken by Pruzan that reside in the Photograph Section. Some of Pruzan’s photos, two audiotapes, and other materials have been sent to Europe to provide better access to Decroux’s European followers (see Materials Removed from the Collection below). Under Professional Photography Records are correspondence from other photographers and exhibit notices, and copies of published photos (see especially Geoff Mains’ book Urban Aboriginals, the Logan’s Run feature from Drummer, and the two Bare Chest Calendars). Also under this section is an assortment of professional correspondence and legal records. These include correspondence with publishers, orders for prints from a few individuals, model releases, contracts, and publishing permits. Among his many photographer friends, Rink Foto and Jan Uribe were the only ones who left many letters, and Uribe mostly wrote after leaving San Francisco. Foto sent numerous notes, often with prints or photocopies of prints. Those papers listed under Subject Files are generally self-explanatory.

**Indexing Terms**
- Gay men
- Leather
- Kink
- Photography
- Music
- Theater

[Inventory of the Robert Pruzan papers]