



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Corbett Reynolds Papers

NMAH.AC.1390

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Corbett Reynolds Papers
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1390
Date:	1962-2015 (bulk 1979-2000)
Extent:	2 Cubic feet (5 boxes, 16 map-folders)
Creator:	Reynolds, Corbett
Language:	English .
Summary:	Artwork, photographs, and papers of Columbus, Ohio artist and founder of the Red Party (circuit party) Corbett Reynolds. These papers include materials related to Rudely Elegant, Reynolds's bar and dance club in Columbus.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian by Andrew and Tawna Jensen, 2016.

Processing Information

Processed by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archives specialist, 2016; supervised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Corbett Reynolds Papers, 1962-2015, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions

Collection open for research on site by appointment. Unprotected photographs must be handled with gloves. Researchers must use reference copies of audio-visual materials. When no reference copy exists, the Archives Center staff will produce reference copies on an "as needed" basis, as resources allow.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Corbett Reynolds was born in Tacoma, Washington on April 7, 1944. He was educated at the Columbus College of Art and Design and graduated in 1966. For many years he was an artist and designer specializing in wall coverings and textiles. He made his home in Columbus, Ohio and purchased a late nineteenth century mansion, 1153 Neil Avenue, in the Victorian Village section of Columbus. In 1975 he purchased the Avondale Theater on West Broad Street in the Franklinton neighborhood of Columbus. With the help of his friends, Corbett turned the Art Deco theatre into a gay-centric nightclub and named it Rudely Elegant. Rudely Elegant officially opened in 1977 and was inspired by the discos in New York and Chicago. The decor of Rudely Elegant was changed regularly for thematic parties and events. Guest performers at the club included Grace Jones, Sylvester, and Divine.

It was with the circuit party that Reynolds gained a national following for Rudely Elegant. Circuit parties, also known as disco parties, began in the late 1970s. These dance parties lasted one night only, and were generally tied to one unifying theme or color. The parties were mainly found in cities with a large gay male population. With the advent of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s many parties became fundraisers for local service organizations and charities associated with HIV/AIDS. The parties became popular, more elaborate, and more expensive into the 1990s. Some patrons would follow the parties from city to city as the year progressed. By 2000 the popularity of the circuit parties had seemingly peaked and their number has been in steady decline.

Reportedly, Reynolds began his circuit party, know as the Red Party, in 1977, one of the first in the United States. Reynolds chose the color red as his theme because it was his favorite color, and "It is the color of passion, both in love and creativity." The parties had themes such as: Red & Black (1993), Red House Saloon (1998), and Big Top Red (2000). Reynolds's other themes included Tropicana, Halloween, Black, and Uniform. Rudely Elegant closed in 1985 but Reynolds continued to have themed circuit parties at other locations, eventually locating for good at the Valley Dale Ballroom near Westerville. The parties are said to have drawn 3,000 persons from around the United States. Many of the parties had guest hosts, among them Holly Woodlawn, Mink Stole, and Tammy Faye Baker Messner. David Borchers assisted Reynolds with many of these events, and they have been described as ". . . part installation, part performance art, much dancing, and magic and spectacle like no one had seen in Columbus before (or since)." The last Red Party, Red Fetish, occurred in 2001.

Additionally, Reynolds continued his artistic activities. He created many works of art and art installations in Columbus and New York City. He also received grants and corporate commissions from a number of agencies and individuals. He died suddenly on May 1, 2002 and is buried at the Crawford County Memory Gardens, Galion, Ohio. Reynolds had one son, Andrew Jensen.

Scope and Contents

The collection documents the life and activities of artist and gay-oriented nightclub impresario Corbett Reynolds of Columbus, Ohio. The collection includes correspondence; photographs; press releases, exhibition catalogs, publicity materials and flyers relating to exhibitions of Reynolds's work; articles and clippings; a VHS videocassette; and posters. The collection also includes posters, photographs, and ephemera related to Reynold's gay-centric bar Rudely Elegant and his circuit party, the Red Party. The papers were donated by Reynolds's son, Andrew Jensen, who writes, ". . . taking many items from his home and, in some cases, throwing them in the trash. I knew the historic importance of these posters, some of which may be the only ones to survive intact, so I took it upon myself to save them from this same fate."

The collection is organized in three series and four subseries.

Series 1: Posters and Artwork, 1979-2001, undated. This series includes original posters for recurring theme parties and many of the Red Parties. This series also includes original artwork and designs by Reynolds.

Subseries 1.1: Rudely Elegant, 1980-2001, undated. This subseries contains original poster art done in silk screen, collage, and other types of media, and reproduced poster art created by Reynolds to advertise his annual Red Party as well as other themed parties. This subseries also includes the poster for the final Red Party, Red Fetish, held in September 2001. This artwork was used at Reynolds's bar, Rudely Elegant, as well as in other venues.

Subseries 1.2: Posters and Artwork, 1980-1999, undated. This subseries contains original artwork either created by Reynolds or given to him. It includes materials associated with Reynolds's art installations as well as a wallpaper design and images of his artwork.

Series 2: Photographs, 1962-2001, undated. This series contains photographs from Reynolds's home in Victorian Village, Columbus, Ohio. It also contains photographs from many of the Red and themed parties. It includes photographs of Reynolds himself and as his drag persona, Cora, Miss Bat-N-Rouge. There are photographs of his art and some of his art installations.

Series 3: Personal Papers, 1980-2015, undated. This series contains papers relating to Rudely Elegant and Reynolds's theme parties including the Red Party. It also contains personal papers and news accounts.

Subseries 1.1: Rudely Elegant, 1992-2000, undated. This subseries contains ephemera and material relating to Rudely Elegant and various Red parties.

Subseries 1.2: Personal Papers and News Accounts, 1980-2015, undated. This subseries contains a scrapbook, correspondence, biographical material, resumes, exhibition material and ephemera, material related to various works of art by Reynolds, and many news accounts about Reynolds, his art, and his contributions to Columbus society and the local LGBT community.

Arrangement

The collection is organized in three series.

Series 1: Posters and Artwork, 1979-2001, undated

Subseries 1.1: Rudely Elegant, 1980-2001, undated

Subseries 1.2: Posters and Artwork, 1980-1999, undated

Series 2: Photographs, 1962-2001, undated

Series 3: Personal Papers, 1980-2015, undated

Subseries 3.1: Rudely Elegant, 1992-2000, undated

Subseries 3.2: Personal Papers and News Accounts, 1980-2015, undated

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Homosexuality
- Lesbian and gay experience
- Lesbianism
- Nightclubs
- Sexual orientation
- Transgender people -- Identity

Types of Materials:

- Correspondence
- Posters

Names:

- Divine -- 20th century
- Jones, Grace -- 20th century

Container Listing

Series 1: Posters and Artwork, 1979-2001, undated

Subseries 1.1: Rudely Elegant

Box 5, Folder 1	Rudely Elegant, Black Party, 1980 March 22
Map-folder 11	Rudely Elegant, Egypt with Klaus Nomi, 1980 May 24
Box 5, Folder 1	Rudely Elegant, Red C, 1999 September 18
Box 5, Folder 2-3; Map-folder 3	Rudely Elegant, Red House Saloon Red Party, Holly Woodlawn hostess, 1998 September 26
Map-folder 12; Box 5, Folder 2	Rudely Elegant presents Grace Jones, 1980 October 12
Box 5, Folder 3	Rudely Elegant, Tropicana, 1980 July 25
Box 5, Folder 4	Rudely Elegant, White Party, 1980 September 20
Box 5, Folder 5	Rudely Elegant, Uniform Party, 1980 December 6
Box 5, Folder 5	Rudely Elegant, Whooper Roundup, 1980
Box 5, Folder 6	Rudely Elegant, Sylvester (autographed by Sylvester), 1982 August 21
Box 5, Folder 6; Map-folder 6	Rudely Elegant, encapsulated logo, undated
Box 5, Folder 7	Rudely Elegant, Red Party, 1983 February 26
Box 5, Folder 7	Rudely Elegant, red9four, 1994 September 17
Map-folder 4; Box 5, Folder 9; Box 5, Folder 11	Rudely Elegant, Red Party 1995, 1995 September 30
Box 5, Folder 10	Rudely Elegant, Jungle Red, 1996 September 21
Box 5, Folder 12	Rudely Elegant, Big Top Red, 2000 September 30

Box 5, Folder 12	Rudely Elegant, Red Party, undated
Map-folder 2	Rudely Elegant, Black, 1981 March 21
Map-folder 2; Map-folder 7	Rudely Elegant, Red MXM, 1990 September 22
Map-folder 14; Map-folder 5	Rudely Elegant, 20 Red, 1997 September 29
Map-folder 5	Rudely Elegant, Red Fetish (the final Red Party), 2001 September 29
Map-folder 7	Rudely Elegant, Red Black, 1979 April 14
Map-folder 16; Map-folder 8	Rudely Elegant, Red & Black, 1993 September 25
Map-folder 8	Rudely Elegant, Tropicana, 1979 July 26
Map-folder 10	Rudely Elegant, Tropicana, 1981 July 24
Map-folder 11	Rudely Elegant, Tropicana, 1983 July 30
Map-folder 13	Rudely Elegant, Red Party, 1982 February 20 Image(s)
Map-folder 13	Rudely Elegant, Halloween, 30 October 1982 Image(s)
Map-folder 14	Rudely Elegant, Black Party, 1982 March 27
Map-folder 15	Rudely Elegant, Black Party, 1983 April 23
Map-folder 16	Rudely Elegant, Living Color Skate Party, 1982 May 22

Subseries 1.1: Posters and Artwork, 1980-1999, undated

Box 5, Folder 2	<i>Pink Flamingos</i> , featuring Divine, 1980 April 10
Map-folder 4; Box 5, Folder 4	Divine, original silkscreen portrait, undated
Box 5, Folder 8	Divine, autographed portrait, 1986

Box 5, Folder 9	Silkscreen on vinyl, undated
Box 5, Folder 10	The Hair Ball, poster designed by Reynolds, 1997 March 22
Box 5, Folder 11	Holly Woodlawn, photographic portrait (autographed by Woodlawn), undated
Map-folder 1; Box 1, Folder 2; Map-folder 16; Map-folder 9	"Through My Eye: A Corbett Reynolds Intallation,", 1987 December 5
Box 1, Folder 2; Map-folder 16	"Through My Eye: A Corbett Reynolds Installation,", 1989 March 4
Map-folder 3	Lavender Bobbybuilding Championships, 1989 September 3
Box 1, Folder 26; Map-folder 3	"Cold War: Corbett Reynolds Area Installation,", 1986 November 1
Map-folder 4	Anti-drug poster (GHB), 1999
Map-folder 6	Michael Millison, portrait, undated
Map-folder 7; Map-folder 10	"Nora", undated
Folder 9	"Classical Collage", undated
Map-folder 11	The Governor's Awards for the Arts in Ohio, undated
Map-folder 11	"Corbett," artist's proof, by A. Kinnard, 1980
Map-folder 12	Wallpaper design by Reynolds, undated
Box 1, Folder 1	"Eye-Spy," sculpture, 1987-1988
Box 1, Folder 27	Images of artwork, undated

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Series 2: Photographs, , 1962-2001, undated (bulk 1978-2000)

Box 4, Folder 14	Reynolds, Corbett, photographic portrait, 1962
Box 2	Reynolds, Corbett, 1978-2000, undated
Box 2	Rudely Elegant, 1977-1985, undated
Box 2; Box 2	Corbett Reynolds home, 1153 Neil Avenue, Columbus, Ohio, 1985-2000, undated
Box 2	"Halloween Party at House", undated
Box 2	"Zephyr's Brow," "I-Spy," Fountain, and untitled, 1986-1990
Box 2	Kentucky, 1988
Box 2; Box 3	"Thru My Eye", 1989, undated
Box 2	Red 92, 1992
Box 2	Jungle Red, 1996 Image(s)
Box 2	20 Red: To Seventh Heaven, 1997
Box 2	Red House Saloon, hostess Holly Woodlawn, 1998
Box 2	Red C, 1999
Box 2; Box 2	Big Red Top, hostess Mink Stole, 2000
Box 2	Red Fetish, hostess Tammy Faye Baker Messner, 2001
Box 2	Unidentified Red Party, undated
Box 2	"Glass Menagerie," art installation, 2001
Box 3	"The Journey," art installation, undated
Box 3	"Cold War," art installation, undated

Box 3	"Lawson installation", undated
Box 3	"Heads black & white", undated
Box 3	Unidentified, undated
Box 4, Folder 16	Photographs by Ron Johnson, undated

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Series 3: Personal Papers, , 1980-2015, undated (bulk 1980-2000)

Subseries 3.1: Rudely Elegant, 1992-2000, undated

Box 1, Folder 14	Red MXMII, 1992
Box 1, Folder 9	Rudely Elegant, 1993-1994, undated
Box 1, Folder 15	Red Black, 1993
Box 1, Folder 16	Jungle Red, 1996
Box 1, Folder 17	20 Red, 1997
Box 1, Folder 18	Red C, 1999
Box 1, Folder 19	Red Fetish, 2000

Subseries 3.2: Personal Papers and News Accounts, , 1980-2015, undated (bulk 1989-1997)

Box 4, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1980-1989
Box 1, Folder 22	Correspondence, 1989-1994
Box 1, Folder 3	Exhibition ephemera, 1988, undated
Box 1, Folder 4	"Total Liberation of the Unconscious," 1989
Box 4, Folder 2	<i>Dialogue Arts in the Mid-West</i> (Columbus, Ohio), 1990
Box 1, Folder 5	Artwork for Columbus Arts Festival, 1991
Box 4, Folder 3	<i>Columbus Art</i> (Columbus, Ohio), 1991
Box 1, Folder 28	<i>American Fabulous</i> , 1991
Box 1, Folder 6	<i>Columbus Monthly</i> (Columbus, Ohio), 1992 February
Box 1, Folder 7	<i>The Village Vibe</i> (Columbus, Ohio), 1992
Box 4, Folder 5	<i>The Columbus Dispatch</i> (Columbus, Ohio), 1992-1993

Box 1, Folder 8 *Art Mag* (Columbus, Ohio), 1993

Box 4, Folder 4 *Columbus Alive* (Columbus, Ohio), 1993-2002

Box 4, Folder 6 *The Challenger* (Columbus, Ohio), 1993

Box 1, Folder 10 *Creating in Crisis: Making Art in the Age of AIDS*, exhibition catalogue, 1994

Box 4, Folder 7 *Columbus Gay People's Chronicle* (Columbus, Ohio), 1994

Box 4, Folder 8 *Columbus Guardian* (Columbus, Ohio), 1994

Box 4, Folder 9 *Gay Beat* (Ohio), 1994

Box 4, Folder 10 *Lambda Rising News* (Washington, DC), 1994

Box 4, Folder 11 *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), 1994

Box 4, Folder 12 *This Week in Grandview* (Columbus, Ohio), 1994

Box 4, Folder 13 News Clippings, 1989-2013, undated

Box 4, Folder 14 "Cold War" and Red Black, 1993, undated

Box 1, Folder 11 "Last Supper", 1996

Box 1, Folder 12 "Bereft", 1997

Box 1, Folder 13 "Glass Menagerie," art installation, 2002

Box 1, Folder 23 Reynolds, Corbett, memorial service invitation, 2002

Box 1, Folder 20 Red Columbus, fundraiser, 2013

Box 1, Folder 21 *Quorum*, Columbus Pride issue, 2015

Box 1, Folder 24 Reynolds, Corbett, biographical information, undated

Box 1, Folder 25 Reynolds, Corbett, resumes, undated

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