



Smithsonian

*National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Magie Dominic Caffe Cino Collection

NMAH.AC.1596

2024

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Magie Dominic Caffè Cino Collection
<b>Date:</b>	1948-2023, undated
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.1596
<b>Source:</b>	Dominic, Magie (Donor)
<b>Extent:</b>	1 Cubic foot (3 boxes)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The collection documents Caffè Cino in Greenwich Village, New York, founded in 1958 by Joe Cino as a coffee shop and art exhibition space. The collection has materials related to and written by author and artist Magie Dominic, Caffè Cino alumni and chronicler.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Collection donated by Magie Dominic, 2024.

### Processing Information

Collection is unprocessed.

### Preferred Citation

Magie Dominic Caffè Cino Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

### Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

### Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

An Overview with Personal Reflections, Timeline 1958-1968, and The Archives-Key Moments were supplied by donor, Magie Dominic in April 2024

An Overview with Personal Reflections by Magie Dominic

Early Years: 1931-1958

Joe Cino was born on November 16, 1931 in Buffalo, NY. His parents, Mary and Joseph were both Sicilian. There were four brothers, Gabby, Richard, Joe, and Steve. Joe's father, Joe Cino senior, died at a very young age and Mary worked to support the family. She worked at a candy factory at night and wrapped candy in tissue and throw it out the window for the boys to catch. As a child, Joe did little shows in the backyard for the neighbors.

Michael Smith, Village Voice critic, interviewed Joe in 1965 and asked him why he came to New York City. "The opportunity arose because four friends of mine were running away from home, and two of them had some money." (1948; Joe was sixteen; his friends were Tony Vaccaro, Angelo and Stephen Lovoulo (brothers). "I had to make a decision within two hours. It was snowing. My mother was visiting a neighbor, and she came home calling me as I was leaving the house. I ran into the street and jumped into a passing car. I heard my mother calling, and I said, "I'll be back soon, there's a note on the kitchen table." The note said, "I'm going to Rochester to visit some friends."

He arrived in New York City on February 7, 1948, during a blizzard, and broke. "I had a job within three days at the YMCA in Penn Station as a counterman for \$110 a month. February to summer. I was making ice cream sodas at Howard Johnson's. Hotel Statler reservations department."

Eight weeks later, April 12, he sent a long, handwritten letter to his mother explaining why he'd run away and his dream to study acting and dance, "Dear Mom, Don't read this letter until tonite when you're relaxed—don't read it half-fast—go through it quite carefully. There are 12 pages (24 sides) Love "Junior"

"When I got the job at the Statler I enrolled in the Henry Street Playhouse and took courses in everything. I was there for about two years. I went home (Buffalo) in July. She (his mother) gave me her blessing. When I left at the end of the week everything was O.K. from then on."

In 1953 Joe was given a dance scholarship to Jacob's Pillow; danced with the Mary Anthony Dance Theater and toured with Maxine Munt and Alfred Brooks.

Michael Smith asked him when he got the idea of opening a café, "I started thinking about the café in 1954. I would talk about it with close friends. My idea was always to start with a beautiful, intimate, non-commercial, friendly atmosphere where people could come and not feel pressured or harassed."

He worked two jobs, studied, and saved for ten years. In the summer of 1958, his friend Ed Franzen saw a For Rent sign on 31 Cornelia Street. He called Joe and introduced him to the landlady, Josie Leema, who was leaning out an upstairs window. Joe said "Oh you're Italian." Josie said, Yes, what are you. Joe said Sicilian. Josie said, "I don't have to come down," and threw him the key and gave him the first month's rent free if he did all the needed repair work. Josie was Joe's landlady for the Caffè's entire existence. She often brought down pots of soup when Joe was unable to pay the rent. Her reasoning was, if Joe didn't have rent money, he probably didn't have food money. Joe opened the Caffè Cino on a Friday in December 1958. There was room for about twenty mismatched ice cream parlor tables and chairs, and a tiny kitchen with his espresso machine. The room could accommodate about forty people.

#### MAGIE DOMINIC: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

In 1962 I left my home in Newfoundland, as a teenager, like Joe Cino. I was 18 and studied at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. In 1964 I moved to New York, worked in interior design, gave poetry readings in New York venues, stage managed productions at Lighthouse for the Blind and stage managed a play at La Mama. Ellen Stewart introduced me to Tom Eyan. Tom introduced me to Joe Cino. Joe asked me my sign, (Cancer) and we began a friendship and a dialogue that lasted in one form or another to this day. I entered the Caffè that day and never left. Joe was handsome, broad-shouldered, dark hair, a quick smile; his dark brown eyes were filled with passion. He could hold you with his eyes.

I stage managed for Lanford Wilson and Tom Eyan, created roles for new playwrights, created tiny collages for the Caffè walls and worked on the sets; created the large stars and flags for the Dames at Sea set and made Joe an apron from left over stars. I was assistant director to Marshall Mason; I occasionally ran to the store for groceries for the Caffè kitchen. There was no job description. We worked for free, passed the basket after each performance and if we collected fifty dollars by the week's end, and the production had five people, we received \$10. each for a week's work. We would have worked for a dollar. We would have paid to be there. The Caffè Cino ceiling was a maze of intricate lighting equipment. Lights were dimmed, stage lights appeared on a tiny performance area, and the room opened like a chakra. The walls were collages with photographs, posters, and twinkle lights. Music ranged

from opera to Shirley Temple to Kate Smith, belly dancing, Christmas carols and Billie Holiday. A curtain of crystals and bells stretched in front of the espresso machine; a musical explosion by Joe before each performance with the words, "It's magic time!" And each performance was dedicated to somebody's birthday.

Eventually there was a stage, a tiny eight-foot portable wooden platform. New playwrights emerged and used the free venue Joe offered. Joe would ask them their sign, (I think it was his way of reading people), give them a date, say, "This is your week," and politely refuse to read the script. Joe was generous to the extreme. People came to him for help - and he offered it.

For several years Joe operated the Caffè at night, while simultaneously working during the day as a typist for American Laundry Machinery Company. That salary probably sustained the Caffè. Every new playwright paving the way to the next century had roots there - Lanford Wilson, Tom Egan, Sam Shepherd, John Guare, Robert Patrick, Doric Wilson, Paul Foster, H. M. Koutoukas, William Hoffman, among many, many others. Bernadette Peters, Marshall Mason, and Harvey Keitel began there. Performances were done for the room, with or without an audience. In the words of theater critic John Gruen, — Caffè Cino presented the outrageous, the blasphemous, the zany, the wildly poetic, the embarrassingly trite, the childish, and frequently, the moving and the beautiful. A few years ago, someone asked me in an interview where the Caffè Cino administrative offices were located. I said they were in the kitchen, next to the espresso machine, because that's where Joe was standing. In the years following the Caffè's closing I wrote two books, co-edited a third with Michael Smith, gave several presentations on the Caffè, and raised a daughter. My artwork was exhibited in Canada and the United States, and my large fabric installation, *The Gown*, was presented at The United Nations. Two Caffè Cino people have fabric in *The Gown*, Robert Patrick and Jim Gossage. For many, the Caffè Cino was a second home. For others it was the only home they'd ever known. Awards received by those who began their careers at the Caffè Cino include the Pulitzer, the Emmy, the Grammy, the Tony, the Obie, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Robert Chesley Award, and the New York Innovative Theater Awards.

#### TIMELINE, PLAYWRIGHTS, KEY MOMENTS

"The one thing I never thought of was fully staged productions. I opened as the Caffè Cino Art Gallery, and we had openings every six weeks." Joe Cino

1958-1959 Primarily art exhibitions, poetry and readings of classic plays, Tennessee Williams, etc.

1960 First original play is written for the room, "Flyspray" by James Howard. In the beginning there is no stage. Tables are moved aside, and actors perform in the space between tables. The photographer, Rowland Sherman, has his first exhibition, with mainly Caffè Cino people as his subjects.

1961 Original plays are now written for the room. Doric Wilson presents his first three plays. The Caffè receives "The Coffee Cup Award" from Show Business newspaper. Al Pacino makes his Off-Off Broadway debut in the production of William Saroyan's *Hello Out There*. "It was a very important moment for me," Pacino, 2014, *New Yorker Magazine*.

1962 The official menu is designed by Michael Wiley. The \$1. minimum includes a show, coffee, and pastry. The one dollar minimum is never changed. Dramatic lighting effects are achieved through the ingenious work of lighting designer John P. Dodd. Adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*. "The play was one of the most beautiful things we had at the Cino. I think it was the first time we had that kind of magic." Joe Cino

1963 One-week performances. Claris Nelson writes three original plays. Lanford Willson produces his first plays. Harassment from New York City inspectors.

1964 Two week runs begin with 14 performances weekly. Caffè Cino becomes eligible for the Obie Award. There is continued harassment from New York City inspectors. They categorize the Caffè as a cabaret and insist that Joe obtain a cabaret license and sell alcohol, the requirement for obtaining the license. Joe has a valid restaurant license, wants only a caffè with espresso, and wants nothing to do with liquor. He offers to pay for the cabaret license but refuses to serve alcohol. In an attempt to stop the fines, he changes the name of the Caffè Cino to the Caffè Cino Arts Club and issues membership cards, but the fines continued, and the name change is abandoned. It is a café without a category. The staging of Lanford Wilson's *The Madness of Lady Bright* is a breakthrough hit as the play deals openly about homosexuality. The Caffè has become well known for its plays dealing with gay subject

matter. For the first time in New York, and perhaps in the country, LGBT people see depictions of themselves in a more multi-dimensional and realistic light.

1965 On the night of March 3, a fire caused by a gas leak, completely destroys the Caffè interior. Edward Albee and H.M. Koutoukas organize a benefit to rebuild the Caffè. Several benefits are held throughout the city. The Caffè is rebuilt and reopens on May 18. The Caffè receives special Obie Award. Playwrights include Diane di Prima, H. M. Koutoukas, David Starkweather, Lanford Wilson, Jean-Claude van Itallie, John Guare, Mary Mitchell, Robert Heide, Tom Eyan, William M. Hoffman, Sam Shepard.

1966 In May, *Dames at Sea*, a 40-minute musical, opens on the tiny stage, is directed by Robert Dahdah and runs for three consecutive months. It is the first New York play for a teenage Bernadette Peters and, is probably the most successful play in Off-Off-Broadway history. Unfortunately, a producer moves *Dames* from the Caffè Cino to an Off-Broadway theater and Joe and the Caffè are never acknowledged for its creation.

1967 In January, Joe's lover is electrocuted in an accident in upstate New York and Joe is devastated. City fines and harassment increase. At the end of 1966 and the beginning of 1967, a group of non-Caffè Cino people begin to frequent the room, bring a darkness and quantities of drugs, and although they are not welcomed by most at the Caffè, they continue to frequent the room. On the night of March 31, alone in the room, Joe Cino tries to end his own life. He survives for three days but is pronounced dead at St Vincent's Hospital on Sunday, April 2. Joe Cino cherished life. He cherished his family; the arts; and cherished his magical Caffè. He is devastated by the death of his lover, by the years of unrelenting fines, by the years of harassment, by exhaustion, and is overpowered by a lethal supply of drugs offered to him. They are all contributing factors.

On April 10th at Judson Church, the memorial program cover is wordless. Only a black and white photo of Joe smiling, and wearing an apron made from left over "*Dames at Sea*" stars.

Four people, led by Charles Stanley - Ken Burgess, Robert Patrick, and Magie Dominic are joined by a few others and work to keep the Caffè open, following the schedule Joe had planned. An unexpected classic comic book production of *Snow White*. Charles Stanley is the magic mirror; Ken Burgess is all the magical forest creatures; Robert Patrick, playwright, is both Doc and the haunted forest; H.M. Harry Koutoukas, the Greek playwright, is the evil queen; Magie Dominic is *Snow White*. At every performance the dwarfs are different, and the number is always changing. City harassment and fines intensify. Michael Smith and Wolfgang Zuckerman take over management of the Caffè.

1968 City harassment and fines reach a breaking point. "The summonses cost \$250 each. We could not get them to stop, and we could not afford to pay them. So in March, after a final, beautiful production of "*Monuments*" by Diane di Prima, directed by James Waring and Alan Marlowe, with lighting by John P. Dodd, the Caffè Cino closed for good." (Michael Smith) The Caffè Cino closes on March 17, 1968. Michael Smith, in the days after the Caffè's closing in 1968, takes pictures and programs from the Caffè walls and brings them to Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center.

#### THE ARCHIVES. KEY MOMENTS

1972. *Off-Off Broadway Book* by Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, published with a chapter on Caffè Cino, research and scripts. 1977. Magie Dominic contacted photographer Jim Gossage, a main photographer of Caffè Cino and 1960s OOB theater, regarding existing Caffè Cino photographs. Together, they began assembling documentation. 1979. The newspaper *Other Stages* published a series of articles about Caffè Cino. 1979. Dorothy Swerdlow, Curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division of New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (LPA) was shown Caffè Cino documentation by Magie Dominic, and established a 1985 exhibition date in the Astor Gallery, Lincoln Center. For the following six years, 1979-1985, and with the assistance of several Caffè Cino people; Ken Burgess - designer of Caffè show posters; the photographer Jim Gossage; the LPA curatorial staff and Richard Buck, Magie Dominic co-curated the exhibition *Caffè Cino and Its Legacy*. 1985 *Caffè Cino and Its Legacy*, March 5 - May 11, Astor Gallery, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center.

AIDS devastated the Caffè Cino people during the 1980s and into the 1990s. Over sixteen playwrights, actors and designers were lost.

2000: *The Queen of Peace Room*, memoir by Magie Dominic, published, with a chapter depicting Caffè Cino; and loss of people to AIDS; nominated for three literary awards. 2005. The New York Innovative Theatre Awards

established The Caffe Cino Fellowship Award. 2005: Caffe Cino: The Birthplace of Off-Off-Broadway, by Wendell Stone, published. 2006. Bernadette Peters, in Legends of Broadway Compilation, related working on Dames at Sea at Caffe Cino. 2006 CUNY TV, Conversations with William M. Hoffman: Caffe Cino/Off-Off Broadway interviews. 2007. In The Life: Channel 13 TV, fifteen-minute documentary on Caffe Cino's impact on New York theatre and gay theatre in New York. 2007. Return to the Caffe Cino, co-Edited by Steve Susoyev and George Birimisa, published. 2008. Thirty-minute video by Library for the Performing Arts, documenting Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation's tribute to Caffe Cino's historic importance; plaque designed by playwright Robert Patrick installed. 2010. H.M. Koutoukas Remembered by His Friends, co-edited by Michael Smith and Magie Dominic, published. 2011. Caffe Cino documentation entered into Library for the Performing Arts permanent archives including the show posters designed by Ken Burgess. 2011. Fales Archives, NYU, enters Magie Dominic writing and art documentation into their permanent archives. 2016. New York Press Association awarded Second Place for Coverage of the Arts to The Villager newspaper for their story, "Magie Dominic - Magic Time at the Caffe Cino". 2017. Caffe Cino placed on The National Register of Historic Places for its significance to LGBT history. It was placed on The State Register of Historic Places the same year. 2019. Caffe Cino designated a New York City Landmark by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. 2019: Lifetime Achievement Award from New York Innovative Theater Awards awarded to Magie Dominic for her contribution to the arts, and Caffe Cino archival work. 2022. Nov 16. A plaque honoring Caffe Cino's placement on The National Register of Historic Places installed on 31 Cornelia Street. It was also Joe Cino's 91st birthday. Research and documentation are ongoing. In 2017, the Cino family found among Mary Cino's papers, the 24-page letter Joe had written to her in 1948.

The Caffe Cino brought theatre into the modern era, created Off-Off Broadway, and from its humble, little eight foot by eight-foot wooden stage, forever altered the performing arts worldwide.

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## Content Description

The materials consist of printed materials, photographs, scripts, advertisements, ephemera, and theater programs.

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## Arrangement

Collection is unarranged.

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Experimental theater

Types of Materials:

Advertisements  
Ephemera  
Magazines (periodicals) -- 20th century  
Off Off Broadway  
Photographs  
Theater programs -- 20th century

Names:

Cino, Joe, 1931-1967

Dominic, Magie

Places:

Broadway (New York, N.Y.)

Greenwich Village (New York, New York)



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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Caffè Cino (New York, New York), 1948-1969, undated

#### Subseries 1.1: Programs, Correspondence, and Ephemera, 1948-1967, undated

Box 1, Folder 1	Cino, Joe to Cino, Mary, correspondence, 1948-04
Box 1, Folder 2	Theatre Arts, magazine, 1949-04
Box 1, Folder 3	Room of Roses, Barrett, Nathan N., program, 1965
Box 1, Folder 4	Caffè Cino Benefit, 1965-03-05
Box 1, Folder 5	Caffè Cino Benefit, The Writer's Stage Theatre (New York, New York) program, 1965-03-15
Box 1, Folder 6	#3 A Benefit for Caffè Cino, Sullivan Street Playhouse (New York, New York) program, 1965-04-26
Box 1, Folder 7	Caffè Cino at Art D'Lugoff's Village Gate (New York, New York) benefit program, 1965-04-15
Box 1, Folder 8	Smith, Michael to Cino, Joe, letter (reference copy), 1965
Box 1, Folder 9	Times Square Stage Lighting Company, Inc., catalogue, 1965
Box 1, Folder 10	News clippings, 1965-1977, undated
Box 1, Folder 11	The Theatre Guild-American Theatre Society (San Francisco, California), 1966-1967
Box 1, Folder 12	Moondog and Magie, 41st Street Theatre (New York, New York) news clippings, 1966-07
Box 1, Folder 13	Status, magazine (New York, New York)(article on Caffè Cino page 30), 1966-10
Box 1, Folder 14	Eyen on Eyem, program, 1966
Box 1, Folder 16	Poetry and music, Moondog, 1966
Box 1, Folder 17	To Tell the Truth (Magie Dominic as Petra Burka), 1966
Box 1, Folder 18	Dahdah, Robert, actor, advertisement, 1966

Box 1, Folder 19	Dodd, John from Koutoukas, letter, 1967-03-20
Box 1, Folder 20	Joe Cino Memorial Program (Judson Memorial Church, New York, New York), 1967-04-10
Box 1, Folder 21	Correspondence, 1967-04-15
Box 1, Folder 22	Caffè Cino, The Clown, Nelson, Claris, program, 1967-04
Box 1, Folder 23	Donovan's Johnson, program, Caffè Cino, 1967-05
Box 1, Folder 24	New Works, Patrick, Robert, program, 1967-06-06-1967-06-18
Box 1, Folder 25	Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1944) Magie Dominic's book, 1967
Box 1, Folder 26	Snow-White, print, 1967-08
Box 1, Folder 27	The Warhol Machine, program, 1967-08
Box 1, Folder 28	Caffè Cino Arts Club, ephemera, undated
Box 1, Folder 29	glitter, undated
Box 1, Folder 30	A Christmas Carol, Agenoux, Soren, Caffè Cino, program (New York, New York), undated

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Subseries 1.2: *Dames at Sea*, 1966-1993, undated

Box 1, Folder 31	Dames at Sea, advertisements, 1966
Box 1, Folder 32	Dames at Sea, reviews and news articles, 1966-1993, undated
Box 1, Folder 33	Dames at Sea, costume plots, props, drops, 1966
Box 1, Folder 34	Dames at Sea, original script, 1966
Box 1, Folder 35	Dames at Sea, Australia , 1969
Box 1, Folder 36	Dames at Sea, Fire Island Pines (New York), undated

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### Subseries 1.3: Photographs, Photographic Negatives, Compact Discs, undated

Box 1, Folder 15

Spectrum Gallery (New York, New York) Dominic, Magie and Moondog, copy  
photographic negatives, compact disc, 1966

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## Series 2: Dominic, Magie, 1966-2023, undated

Box 2, Folder 1

Be In, invitation (New York, New York), 1966

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