EMERGENCE: INTERSECTIONS AT THE CENTER – EPHEMERA LIST
South Side Community Art Center, April 15 – July 2

Ephemera Case I: Early Years

This vitrine presents materials relating to the SSCAC’s early years, reflecting exhibitions and other aspects of the broader community around the Center. Richmond Barthé, who had already left Chicago by 1942, returned for a solo exhibition in that year. The famed writer and Howard University Professor Alain Locke provided an essay that was included in the exhibition brochure.

Texts and images could be coded to allow for different meanings for different audiences. In a 1945 or 1946 letter from Ellis Wilson to then-Executive Director Rex Goreleigh, Wilson introduces a dancer from New York, Randolph Sawyer, who was staying in Chicago while dancing in Carmen Jones (see Stagebill from 1945). Wilson asks Goreleigh to make introductions for Sawyer, who “doesn't know too many people there that is the kind he knows here - he has a lot of artist friends here.” In this way Wilson might have alluded to Sawyer’s sexuality without stating anything about it outright. Wilson also had a solo exhibition at the Center in 1946, depicted in the photograph from the Archives of American Art, in which he appears to discuss his work with Goreleigh.


Ephemera Case II: Entertainment, Nightlife, Identity

The Center’s own Artists and Models Balls were huge productions involving innumerable artists, dancers, choreographers, musicians, and fashion designers and vast quantities of organizing labor from the Center’s large community. Their printed programs were works of art in and of themselves and incorporated advertising from bars and nightclubs, including the Hurricane, “Chicago’s Gayest and Smartest Theatre Bar,” and the Cabin, which called itself the “Oddest Nite Club in Town” and advertised female impersonators. Jet magazine also did occasional features on drag balls. This case also displays one of the photocollages included in Ralph Arnold’s 1982 Black Music Box.

1. “Hurricane” ad from Artists and Models Ball Program, 1946. Archives of the South Side Community Art Center.


Ephemera Case III: Oblique Bodies

Berry Horton’s work was deeply embedded in the flourishing gay and lesbian scene in Bronzeville. His practice merges elements of mid-century design with visual aesthetics of chimeric hybridity, and allusions to the decorative as a means of queering the subjects in his work. Although Horton is little known today, he worked closely with William McBride, a well-known Black Chicago artist and gallerist. This case includes smaller, sketch-like works that may have served as Horton’s private explorations of the polymorphously perverse, along with small works by McBride that resonate with Horton’s mid-century design aesthetic and two sheets representing collaborative project the two worked on together, possibly designs for festive shop windows. All works from Archives of the South Side Community Art Center.


6. William McBride and Berry Horton, notes on a collaborative project for Polk Brothers (shop window display?). Pen on paper, mid-20th century. Archives of the South Side Community Art Center.


Ephemera Case IV: Politics, Community, and Collaboration

This case presents materials that reflect political identities and struggles of the 1970s and beyond, including Huey P. Newton’s letter on Black solidarity with the women’s liberation and gay liberation struggles, an article on the women’s movement that refers to Lesbian participation in the movement, and materials that reflect Ralph Arnold’s engagement with the Center and its community of artists as an out Gay man from the 1970s on.

Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs, the best–known member of the Center’s founding generation, was always a force for solidarity with diverse liberation struggles. In 1986 Burroughs gave a lengthy interview to Think Inc., forerunner of Thing, a groundbreaking Black queer Chicago zine founded by Trent Adkins and Robert Ford.


