

# **Finding Aid to the Carol Leigh/Scarlot Harlot Garments**

**(#2022-142)**

**Repository:** Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

**Collection Title:** Carol Leigh/Scarlot Harlot garments

**Collection Number:** 2022-142

**Physical Description:** 11.5 linear feet (1 carton, 3 garment boxes)

**Creator:** Carol Leigh/Scarlot Harlot

**Date (inclusive):** circa 1990-2005

**Language of Material:** English

## **Abstract:**

Carol Leigh, also known as, The Scarlot Harlot, was an artist, filmmaker, writer, and sex workers' rights activist. She is credited with coining the term "sex work" and was the co-founder of the Bay Area Sex Worker Advocacy Network. This collection includes some of Leigh's garments including dresses designed by Gilbert Baker, wigs, purses, and her guitar.

## **Preferred Citation:**

[Identification of item], Carol Leigh/Scarlot Harlot Garments (#2022-142), The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

## **Conditions Governing Access:**

Collection is open for research.

## **Publication Rights:**

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## **Acquisition Information:**

The collection was donated to the GLBT Historical Society by Erica Berman in December 2022.

## **Processing Information:**

Finding Aid created by Megan Needels in 2023.

This finding aid uses terminology for LGBTQ people that was in current use at the time of its creation. Descriptive language for queer identities evolves quickly and some of these terms may now be dated or even offensive. Finding aids are themselves historical documents; they reflect the moment in which they were written and often reflect the terms that subjects used for themselves. Please contact the GLBT Historical Society Archivist with questions or comments.

### **Biographical/Organizational History Note:**

Carol Leigh (1951-2022), also known as, The Scarlot Harlot, was a bisexual artist, filmmaker, writer, and sex workers' rights activist. She is credited with coining the term "sex work" and was the co-founder of the Bay Area Sex Worker Advocacy Network. Leigh was born on January 11, 1951 in New York City. She received an MFA in creative writing from Boston University. In 1978, she moved to San Francisco and became engaged with sex work as a way to support herself as a young artist. Two years later, she was raped at the establishment she worked at. This experience was a defining moment in Leigh's life that led her to begin organizing for sex workers' rights.

In the early 1980s Leigh began performing a one-woman play called, *The Adventures of Scarlot Harlot*. Scarlot Harlot became an onstage persona that she performed regularly at clubs, theaters, rallies, and protests. Leigh began making videos in the mid 1980s and went on to found the San Francisco Sex Worker Film and Arts Festival in 1999. She was an active community organizer and was involved with several groups including COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), BAYSWAN (Bay Area Sex Worker Advocacy Network), Citizens for Medical Justice, and ACT UP.

Carol Leigh met Gilbert Baker in 1987 at a protest held outside of the home of Dianne Feinstein against the visit of Pope John Paul II to San Francisco. Baker offered to design a costume for Leigh and the two became close friends who collaborated regularly. Over the years Baker made roughly 20-30 costumes for Carol Leigh/Scarlot Harlot to wear during performances, protests, and other public appearances.

### **Scope and Content:**

This collection includes a number of Carol Leigh/The Scarlot Harlot garments that were worn during activist demonstrations and other public appearances. The costumes in this collection were designed by Gilbert Baker, who was a lifelong friend of Leigh and the designer of the rainbow flag. There are also a number of bags designed by Dee Dee Russell, wigs, a guitar, and other accessories worn by Leigh.

### **Indexing Terms:**

LGBTQ

Sex work  
Feminism  
Bisexual people  
Activism  
Art  
San Francisco Bay Area (Calif.)

### Container Listing

Carton 1, item 1	Pink vinyl purse with heart mirror, undated
Carton 1, item 2	Black police cap, undated
Carton 1, item 3	Handcuffs with key, undated
Carton 1, item 4	Special deputy badge, undated
Carton 1, item 5	St. James Infirmary condoms, undated
Carton 1, item 6	Banana shaker, undated
Carton 1, item 7	Red wig with rhinestone barrette, undated
Oversize box 1, item 1	Red sequined dress with robe by Gilbert Baker, undated
Oversize box 1, item 2	Red skirt with collar by Gilbert Baker, undated
Oversize box 2, item 1	“Be nice to sex workers” purse by Dee Dee Russell, undated
Oversize box 2, item 2	Red Scarlot Harlot purse by Dee Dee Russell, undated
Oversize box 2, item 3	American flag top by Gilbert Baker, undated
Oversize box 2, item 4	Blue gloves, undated
Oversize box 2, item 5	American flag skirt by Gilbert Baker, undated
Oversize box 3, item 1	Scarlot Harlot guitar with case, undated
Oversize box 3, item 2	Red lace parasol, undated
Oversize box 3, item 3	Pink curly wig, undated
Oversize box 3, item 4	Brunette curly wig, undated
Oversize box 3, item 5	Red beaded belt, undated
Oversize box 3, item 6	Gold sequined wrist cuffs, undated
Oversize box 3, item 7	Red and blue sequined wrist cuffs, undated
Oversize box 3, item 8	Red sequined belt, undated