

Kewpie
DAUGHTER OF DISTRICT SIX



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This publication follows the exhibition, *Kewpie: Daughter of District Six*, curated by Jenny Marsden and Tina Smith, first held at the District Six Homecoming Centre, 21 September 2018 - 30 March 2019



1. Introduction



The exhibition *Kewpie: Daughter of District Six* explores the life of Kewpie (1941–2012), a celebrated queer figure and hairdresser in Cape Town’s District Six. Kewpie was part of a queer community that was highly visible and integrated into the broader community, playing an important role in the fabric and culture of District Six.

Members of this queer community sometimes identified as gay men and sometimes identified as women. From what we know, Kewpie’s gender identity was fluid, and she did not strictly identify as either male or female. Kewpie and her friends generally used feminine pronouns, and would refer to each other as ‘sisters’ and ‘girls’. Today, some of these people might identify as transgender, although this term was not used at the time. They were sometimes known as ‘moffies’, which can be an offensive term, but in District Six its use was not necessarily derogatory. However, many people objected to being called ‘moffie’, preferring ‘queer’. Kewpie herself recalled that “we weren’t called as gays, we were called as moffies then. But it was beautifully said, not abruptly.”

In telling Kewpie’s story, the exhibition features photographs from Kewpie’s treasured personal photographic collection, built up over several decades, which is held at Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). The Kewpie Photographic Collection is a valuable resource documenting a thriving and celebrated queer culture within a community that has since been scattered. In keeping with the wider work of the District Six Museum, Kewpie’s photographs show the value of personal archives to tell potentially lost stories. The collection reinforces historical understandings of District Six as a close-knit community where difference was embraced, while highlighting a lesser-known aspect of District Six history.

Many of the themes and ideas explored in the exhibition are relevant to contemporary activism and dialogue on LGBTQIA+++ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Allied) rights in South Africa. Histories of queer lives like Kewpie’s challenge the popular notion that homosexuality is un-African. They show a community and culture where gender non-conforming people, who often face prejudice and exclusion in contemporary South Africa, were largely accepted and loved as human beings with the right to express themselves as they wished. The struggle for LGBTQIA+++ rights continues and Kewpie’s story helps to show the way forward.

The exhibition is a collaboration between District Six Museum and GALA. It is funded by the Norwegian Embassy and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform.

“Oh it was gorgeous
glorious times”



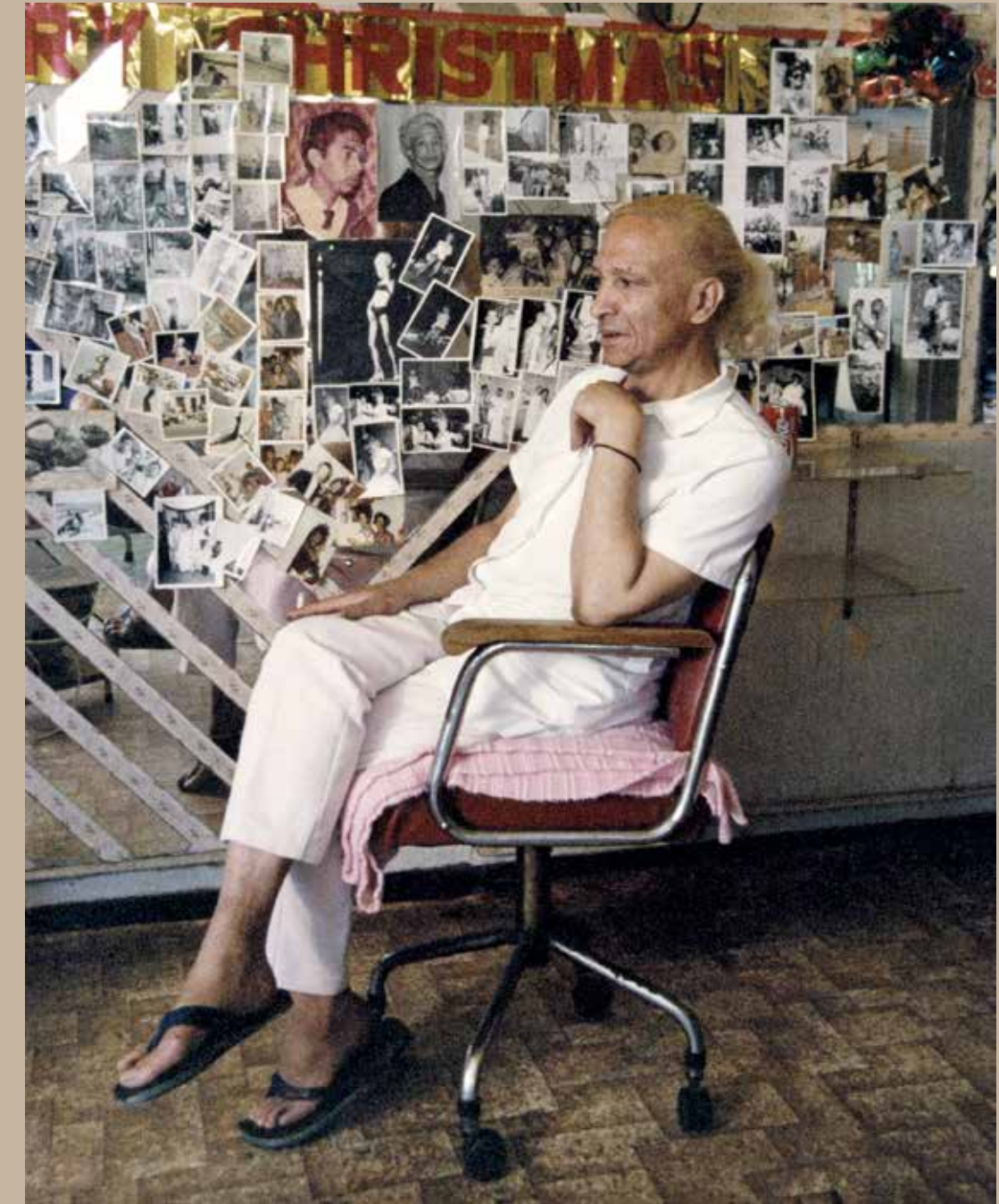
‘This was June in winter time in the city. Taken by one of the movie snaps.’ June 1967

2. Photographs From The Collection Featured In The Exhibition

Picturing a Life

Kewpie provided captions for the photographs when the collection was acquired by GALA in 1999*, and these accompany the photographs. Kewpie indicated that different friends took the photographs contained in the collection, but for the majority of photographs authorship is unknown. Many of the photographs would have been taken by professional photographer Billy Biggs, whose wife Sylvia was Kewpie’s good friend. Billy often photographed Kewpie in his personal capacity, recalling that “Kewpie always wanted me to take her when she’s happy. Like in making the split, sitting on the ground with her legs like this. Kewpie was *goed da in* [Kewpie was good at that].” The collection also includes photographs by studio and street photographers.

Additionally, the exhibition features photographs from the collection of Kewpie’s sister Ursula Hansby, and the District Six Museum archive.



Taken in 5th Ave at ‘Yugene’s Hairtique’

**While working on his documentary film about Kewpie, A Normal Daughter: the Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six, filmmaker Jack Lewis recognised the historical and aesthetic value of Kewpie’s personal photographic collection. Lewis facilitated GALA’s acquisition of Kewpie’s photographs and GALA’s Director at the time, Graeme Reid, then recorded Kewpie’s captions for each photograph when the material was handed over to GALA.*

Family Life

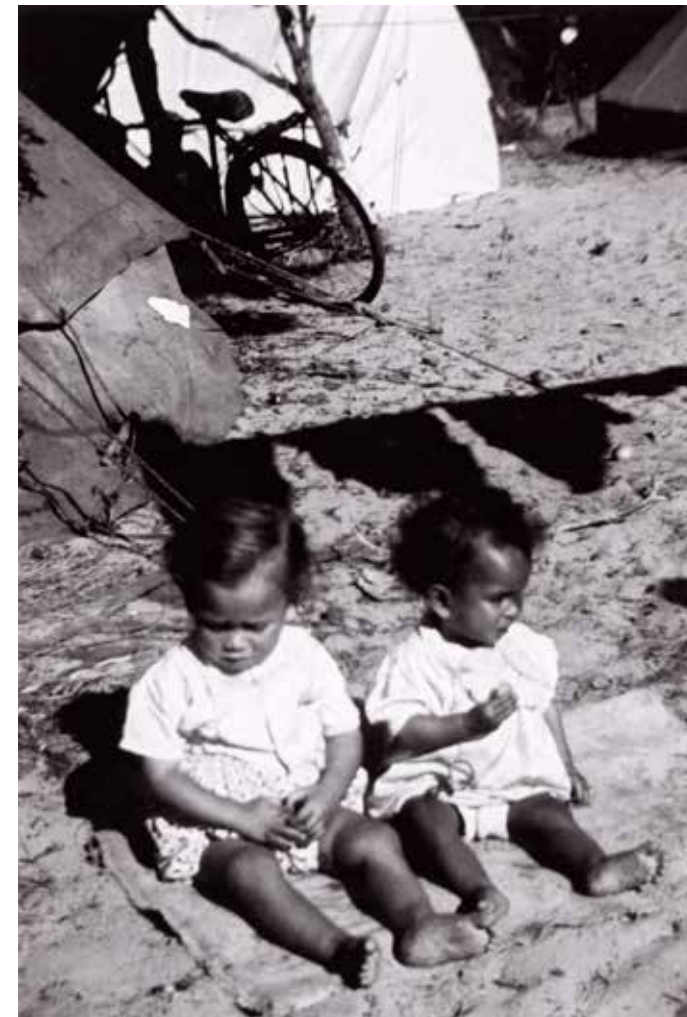
Kewpie, whose birth name was Eugene Fritz, was born in District Six in 1941. Kewpie's mother, Jean (née Ford), and father, Walter, had moved to District Six from Bellville. Walter worked at Duens Bakery, and Jean was a housewife. They had six children, but only three -Kewpie, Ursula, Trevor- survived into adulthood. The family lived at 13 Osborne Street, with Kewpie's maternal grandmother, and Kewpie remembered having "a beautiful childhood" in District Six. There was poverty and overcrowding, and people often lived from hand to mouth, but there was a lot of support for people from within the community: "...everybody was everybody's family... everybody ate from everybody. It was never a question." (Ursula Hansby).



Kewpie (left), Errol (right), and Ursula (front) with neighbours, the Manuel boys, in Trafalgar Park c. 1950. Photographs from the collection of Ursula Hansby



Walter and Jean Fritz, Kewpie's parents. Photograph from the collection of Ursula Hansby



Kewpie and brother Errol as babies, c. 1942. Errol died at the age of 12. Photograph from the collection of Ursula Hansby

Kewpie had a good relationship with Jean, who Kewpie said "came to love the gays", but Walter would not accept Kewpie's sexuality and gender identity, and their relationship deteriorated as Kewpie got older: "He was a very strict guy. He hated my gayness. What else could he do? Until eventually when he had to immune himself to it, get used to it." Despite a lack of closeness, Walter supported Kewpie professionally, arranging for Kewpie to manage a friend's salon, and fitting all the salon equipment: "Dad saw that there was a future, that Kewpie could become his own boss" (Ursula Hansby).

When Kewpie's parents moved back to Bellville in the early 1960s, Kewpie decided to stay on in District Six without them. Ursula remembered that "my mother of course was very heartbroken because of Kewpie not moving with us." Kewpie would visit Jean in Bellville, but always when Walter was out at work.



Kewpie at 9 or 10 years old, dressed for primary school (Berlin Mission School) c. 1950

"My mother was my queen"



Jean with Kewpie and Errol c. 1948. Photograph from the collection of Ursula Hansby

Kewpie's Aunt Joyce came up with the name 'Kewpie'. The young Eugene Fritz reminded her of a Kewpie Doll (a popular toy), and the name quickly replaced 'Eugene'.



“I was just me. And I used to dance around and sing around, and people came to love me for being that energetic person.”

Kewpie was a performer from a young age, and Jean and Walter would be invited to social events on the condition that they brought Kewpie along to entertain everybody. At the age of 6, Kewpie’s school principal introduced her to Dulcie Howes, the principal of the University of Cape Town (UCT) Ballet School. Following this meeting Kewpie embarked on eight years of dance training at UCT, taught by Dulcie Howes and David Poole, among others. Kewpie was a talented dancer, and was invited to study overseas at age 14, but her father rejected the invitation on Kewpie’s behalf. Kewpie’s reaction to this disappointment was to “bang back into my gay life”, attending gay parties and competing in drag queen competitions.



Kewpie, Ron and Liz. Invery Place, District Six

Friends and Neighbours

At age 13 or 14, Kewpie used to sneak out to dance at the Ambassador Club, at parties, weddings, “or wherever I could move around”. These parties were where she met some of her good friends, who appear in many of the photographs. They included Mitzi Gaynor, Patti (Patrick Jordaan), Dolores Gray (Sammy/Samantha Gray), Liz, Brigitte Bardot, Carol Baker (Ralph Abrahams), Olivia de Havilland (Olivia Bromwell/Miss Vi), Shirley Bassey (Kendrick), Ron (Veronica), Julie Andrews (Angie/Andrew), Cora, Sowda Osman, Cliffidia (Cliffie) Tabaccan and Leslie Caron. These friends were hugely important to Kewpie, who remembered them as “always around to help you as a sister”.



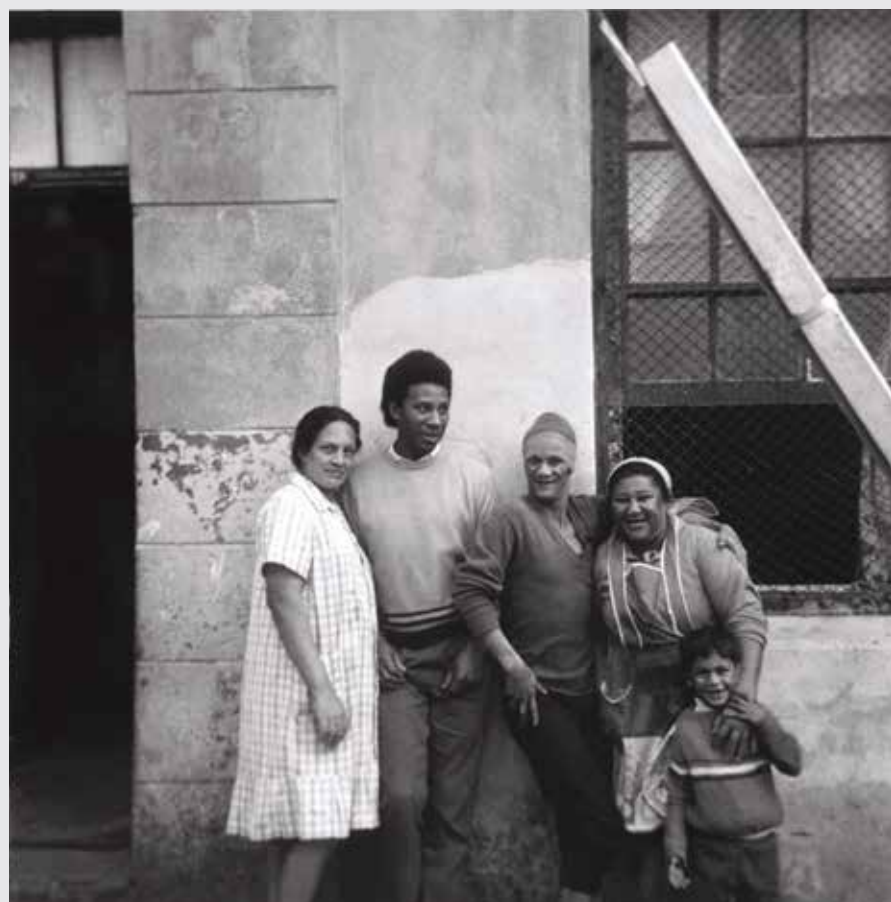
Christmas lunch in Rutger Street. Left to right seated: Kewpie, Carmen, Hayley Mills, Mitzi, Brigitte. Unknown person at the back, possibly Leslie Caron

Kewpie and the other sisters were probably the most visible queer people in District Six, but there were many other expressions of gender and sexual identity. Masculine-presenting gay men, the boyfriends and ‘husbands’ of the sisters, appear in the photographs but remain elusive in the broader historical record. Some of Kewpie’s friends had gender affirmation surgery, known at the time as ‘the sex change’. There were also queer women, including Kewpie’s friends Ron – who identified as a lesbian – and Cora, who were lovers. Kewpie recalled that people in the wider District Six community were accepting of this relationship.

When Kewpie’s family moved to Bellville, Kewpie was introduced to Aunty Clarey, who invited Kewpie to live with her and the Syms family on Francis street. Kewpie stayed there for 6 years: “family-wise I was very very very but happy there, always happy.”

Many people supported the sisters at this time, primarily through providing housing in exchange for domestic work and childcare. Kewpie and others often lived with nuclear families headed by a heterosexual couple, where they were treated as daughters and sisters, and their gender and sexual identities were accepted. Kewpie also spent some time living with Evelyn Petersen, who was referred to as a “moffie mother”, because she had a “moffie home” where “all the moffies” were accepted.

The sisters also had ‘gay mothers’ – older sisters who would look out for them and school them in the art of drag. Later in her life, Kewpie also became somebody who provided support and shelter to others: “she always used to open the doors to – to young gays like I was then at the time” (Ebrahim Faro).



“The Rutger Street family that loved the gays staying around there” (Kewpie): Asa, Carmen, Leslie Caron, Mona in Rutger Street



Left to right: Neighbours Tiema, Laygie, Waydie, and unknown person in Rutger Street



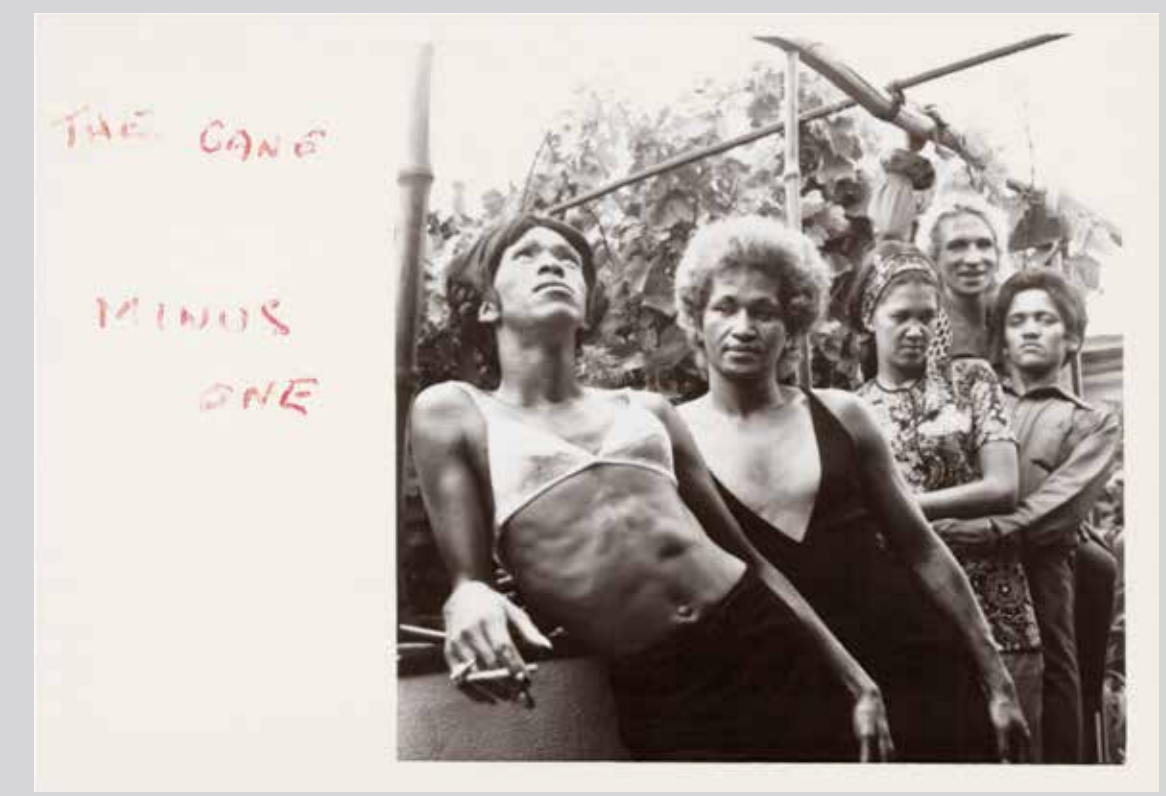
Ashraf, Cliffidia, Olivia, Cora, Ron, Brigitte, Leslie Caron (bucket on head) in the yard in Rutger Street

“That is how they adopted you with that love of being you.
Not as being that queer, that moffie or that gay then as now.
But they came to love you as that human being”



“Well my generation then they loved the queers.
They took them as normal children. As normal people”

Kewpie and other friends would spend weekends at Sylvia Biggs’ house in Kensington, which they called ‘Las Vegas’. Kewpie would accompany Sylvia, her husband Billy (a professional photographer who often photographed Kewpie), and their children Mark and Sally on holiday.



In Mrs Biggs’ yard in Kensington ‘The gang minus one’ (the ‘minus one’ is Patti). Left to right: Mitzi, Sammy, Liz, Kewpie, Angie. c. mid 1970s



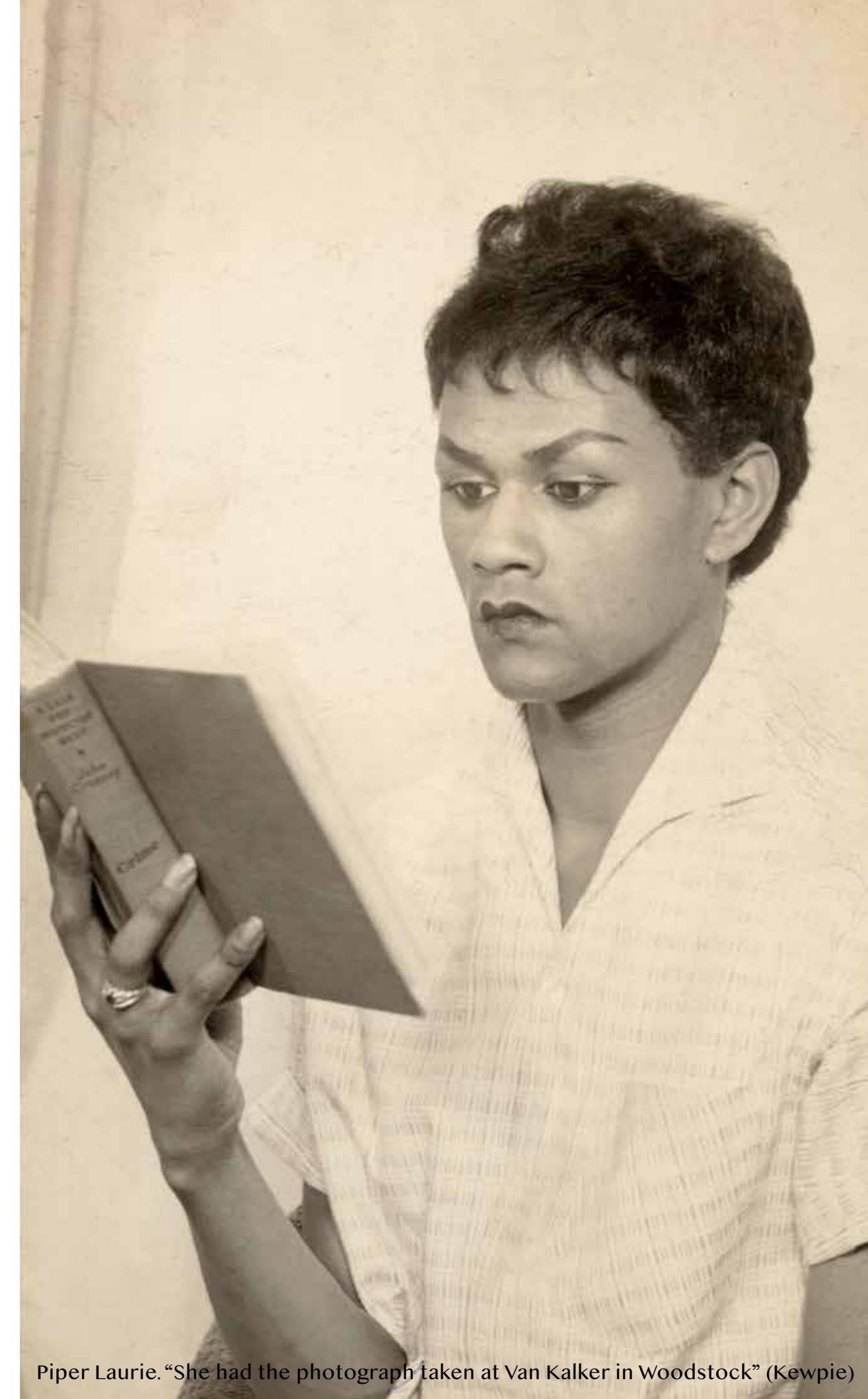
‘The Duchess’ (Mrs Biggs) “I named her the Duchess” (Kewpie)

Waydie (Asa’s daughter), Kewpie, Waydie’s sister



“I normally used to pop in after school, pop out again, visit them often. And that is how I got my eyes wide open around hairdressing”

Kay Kendall and Piper Laurie were well-known queer figures and hairdressers. Piper was the first qualified hairdresser to work in District Six, at Salon Andre in Hanover Street which was owned by Charles and Gladys Arendse. Charles described the salon as “the first modern hairdresser” in District Six. Kewpie was “amazed to see what people could do with hair”, and often used to hang out at the salon: “Instead of being at school he went to take lessons in Hanover Street” (Ursula Hansby). When Piper left, Kay came to Salon Andre, and again Kewpie was inspired, thinking “why can’t I become that beautiful hairdresser myself?”



Piper Laurie. “She had the photograph taken at Van Kalker in Woodstock” (Kewpie)

“A very, very good gay friend of mine. Her name is Kay Kendall, hairdresser” (Kewpie)

“We met one evening going to a party. And that is how we became passionately involved. I’ll say ‘involved’, but passionately. I just fell in love because he was handsome. He was attractive. ... He looked like an actor and he was something that I could write back home to now still.”



Brian and Kewpie in their 20s in Rutger Street c. early 1960s

Kewpie and Brian

Kewpie’s love life was dominated by her relationship with Brian Armino, a District Six resident, whom she knew for 35 years from around 1960. Kewpie admired Brian from afar, and they were introduced by a mutual friend. A few nights later, Kewpie went to the bioscope to watch Judy Garland in *A Star is Born*. As she left, she found Brian waiting for her, and he took her to a party where they had their first dance to ‘Harbor Lights’ by The Platters.

As their relationship progressed, Kewpie was introduced to Brian’s parents, who lived in Horstley Street. They accepted Kewpie as a woman and welcomed her into their family. Kewpie and Brian were together for 13 years, eight of which they spent living together in Rutger Street. Their lives were completely enmeshed, with Brian even working as a cashier in Kewpie’s salon. Eventually, Brian decided he wanted to have children and got married, ending their relationship.

Those days will never appear again, they will never come back again... I’ve treasured it all my life long. (Kewpie)



“My Brian”, Brian at 19 or 20 years old



“This is a photograph of me and Brian, the late Brian” (Kewpie). Taken at Piper’s house, on their way to the Luxurama to see Capucine

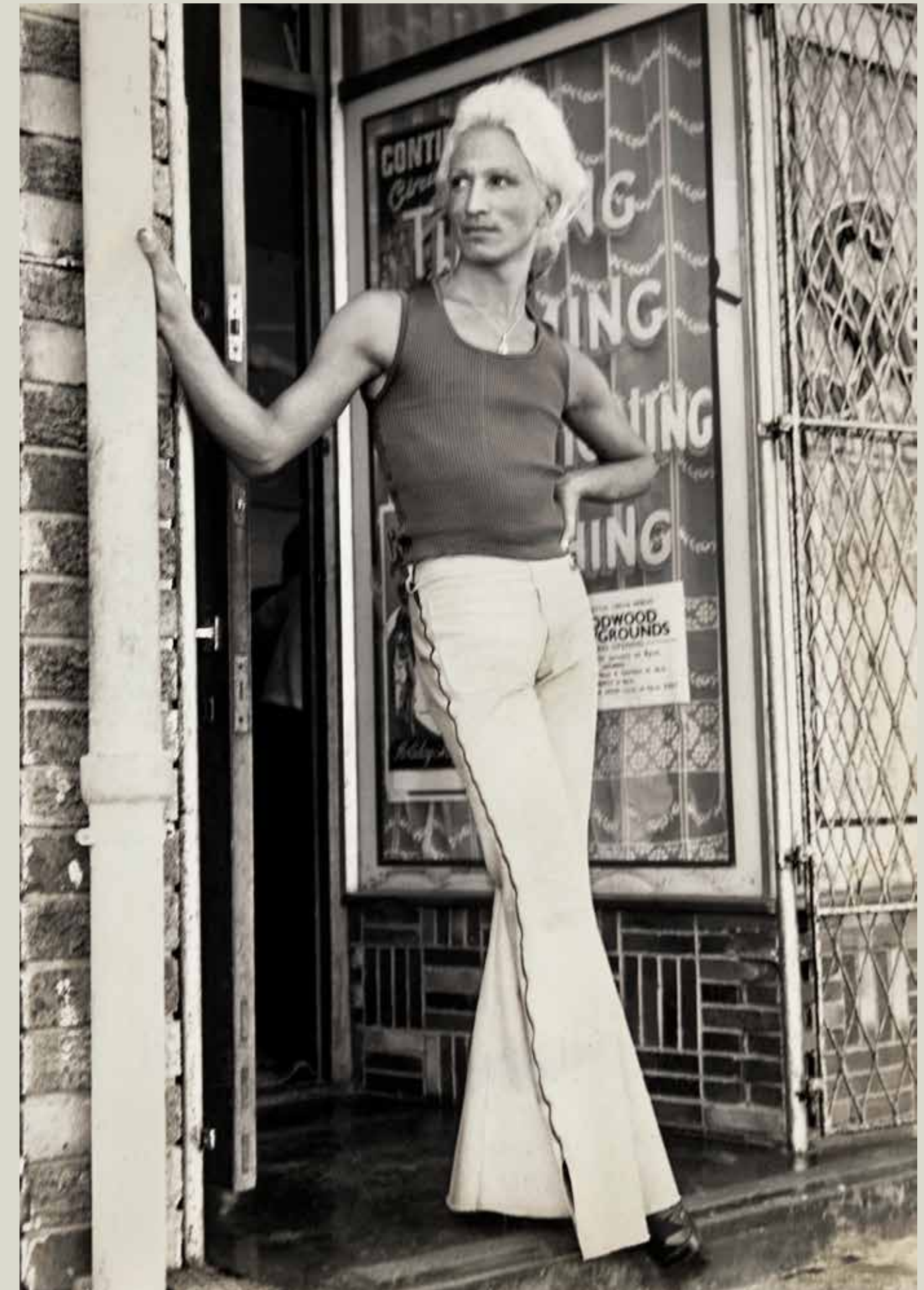
Salons and *Skinner*

Many of the gay men in Cape Town were employed in the hairdressing industry, and hairdressing salons played a central role in the life of both the queer community and District Six residents more broadly. Salons were concentrated on Hanover Street, and they were important social centres for *skinner* (gossip) as well as places of transformation. They were places to meet or have a party, and people would go on 'salon crawls', spending all day drinking and gossiping in different salons.

'n Hairdresser sonder 'n moffie issie 'n hairdresser nie.
A salon without a moffie is not a salon. (Cynthia Koopman)

At the time there was nowhere for people who were not white to study hairdressing, so prospective stylists had to do an apprenticeship. Despite such restrictions, many of the District Six hairdressers were in high demand, catered to a mixed clientele, and often won hairdressing competitions: "Ooh competitions was fantastic. And nobody could touch Piper and Kay and Kewpie and them" (Ismail Buffkins).

Kewpie started seeing clients at home at the age of 14, before training at Salon Andre. Mr Davy, a friend of Kewpie's father, then invited Kewpie to open a salon at 51 Fifth Avenue in Kensington, which became Salon Kewpie. Salon Kewpie was the first salon in Kensington, and Kewpie recalled that people were shocked to see a gay proprietor.



"Kewpie in front of the salon, 'Kewpie's hairdressers'" Kewpie. 1970s



Kewpie at home. 'This is myself having a phone call done' c. 1978/1979

“We became famous in Kensington,
known as those fabulous,
fantastic hairdressers”

Salon Kewpie

Kewpie opened a second salon, also called Salon Kewpie, on Sunderland Street in Kensington. Kewpie would spend alternate weeks at the two salons. The Sunderland Street salon eventually closed and around 1975 Kewpie left number 51 and moved to a new salon, Y Eugene's Hairtique, on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Sixth Street, also in Kensington.

During Kewpie's hairdressing years her core team was Patti and Mitzi. Patti was Kewpie's first apprentice, and Kewpie remembered her as “a fantastic hairdresser. She could just do each and every hairstyle from out of the clouds as well.” Mitzi was Kewpie's second apprentice, and she became the shampooist. Kewpie described her as “a very, very good worker” with “the longest nails around in the whole world” who was “in drag from out of bed into bed.”

The team manufactured their own relaxants using ingredients that included perming liquid, Fullers Earth (from the chemist), mud and cake flour. They also mixed their own hair colours with tea leaves, vinegar and henna.

Kewpie's salon was open for as long as people needed it to be – the salon would close when the last customer was done. On Christmas Eve this meant the salon would stay open until 4 o'clock in the morning. Kewpie never worked on Wednesdays however – that was the day she did her shopping, at the Parade in town.



The salon in Kensington



Kewpie at Y Eugene's Hairtique, 1978/79



Miriam Makeba in District Six



Kewpie, Kay Kendall and Mitzi (seated in front), salon interior



Kewpie's party at Rutger Street. Sowda, Kewpie's good friend, is on the left



“The hairdo will last in a South-Easter”

Kewpie in her late teens wearing a fashionable hairstyle of the time



“This was some party that all the gay friends went to in some salon in Claremont” (Kewpie). Piper Laurie is second from the left, front row.

Salon Style

Hairstyles in the salons were closely linked to hairstyles on screen. As Piper Laurie explained: “particular film stars will have a particular hairstyle... they will think of the movie and say ‘oh I want a *Butterfield 8* style’, you know, something like that. Or they’ll come and say ‘oh I want a Cleopatra hair style’. Then you automatically know what they were talking about.” People were attracted to those who could absorb, display and recreate the latest trends and fashions: “Everybody wants to look glamorous so let me try and do my best for this person you know” (Piper Laurie).

Popular hairstyles were bouffants, beehives, chignons, and the VIP curls. It could take an hour and a half to style the elaborate up-dos. Sometimes a hairdo would be done the night before a big occasion, and then the client would sleep with their head wrapped and propped up.

And of course the beehive was the most popular and as everybody said, there was no one but Kewpie that could do that hairstyle. (Ursula Hansby)

Working in the hairdressing industry, concerned as it was with fashion and innovation, perhaps bestowed a particular status that allowed non-conformity when it came to appearance. For example, Piper Laurie’s parents disliked her having coloured hair, but in the end “they thought it was just part of the hairdressing movement.”



Kewpie at Kewpie's go-go party in Rutger Street. 1974

“I was a bioscope fanatic”

Becoming Capucine

The sisters modelled themselves on the glamorous and internationally famous stars of film and stage, with each taking on the name, style and persona of their chosen diva.

Mogamat Benjamin remembered that sometimes queens would go and watch newly released films, and then compete with each other to see who could do the best performance of the female lead. Whoever performed best would win the right to use that stage name. Over time, many queens became known in everyday life by their drag name.

Kewpie started her performance career using the drag name Doris Day, but there was already an older drag queen using that name. As Kewpie became better known she began calling herself Capucine, after the French actress and model: “I took her name as I saw her pictures.” Younger queens would always address Kewpie respectfully as Miss Capucine, and each generation was inspired by the women in vogue at that time.

The sisters, named for screen icons, and sporting the latest fashions and hairstyles, were fêted among District Six residents for their association with the glamorous film stars and singers of the day. As former District Six resident Tony Naidoo recalled, “the sisters back then used to run this town socially.”



At a Beauty Pageant. Left to right: Carriem (a hairdresser), Sandra Fourie (Miss Greece), an unknown friend (a hairdresser)

Beauty Pageants

Drag queens regularly competed in beauty pageants and the annual 'Moffie Queen' competition, which sometimes had up to 50 entrants. Pageants provided the queens with an opportunity to present and perform their femininity to an enthusiastic and responsive public audience. Competitions and beauty pageants received coverage in the *Golden City Post* and also *Drum* magazine throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s. For many years the *Golden City Post* organised the 'Moffie Queen' competition at the Kismet Theatre in Athlone. Readers were fascinated by the 'world of the moffies', and the magazines provide a useful, if skewed, repository of information on the drag scene in District Six. However, the coverage often 'othered' members of the queer community, with photographs depicting performers as objects of titillation, whilst the text presented gay men and lesbian women as tragic social outcasts, leading bleak and desperate lives. In fact, some of the most sensational stories were entirely invented by magazine staff.

"Here's the name the moffies have been aching to know. It's Farah!" *Golden City Post*, 24 September 1967
Eighteen moffies from Cape Town came on stage at the Kismet Cinema last week to compete for the supreme title of Cape moffiedom, the Queen of the Moffies. With the audience splitting at the seams, the moffies paraded across the stage with all the pomp and splendour of an array of fashion models. Resplendent in expensive looking garments, they moved around with the grace of mannequins. Amid the tumultuous applause, the judges finally chose Farah Diba as the Queen and Capucine (Kewpie Doll) and Patti as her princesses.



Yvonne de Carlo and Hedy Lamarr

“It was fantastic to see what moffies could do on stage.
They were artists.
They were beautiful.
They were attractive.
And they could perform”



Louis, c. 1950s

Drag performances in District Six and Cape Town pre-dated Kewpie's era. Yvonne de Carlo, a singer, dancer and choreography teacher, was in her 40s when Kewpie was in her early teens. She performed in gay shows in the 1940s, at venues in Wellington and Paarl. In 1950 Yvonne de Carlo was invited to headline the Cape Minstrel Carnival, or *Kaapse Klopse* – a role she reprised for the next 10 years.

Yvonne used to love having feathers, feathers, feathers on stage. Bunches and bunches of feathers flying. (Kewpie)

Shows would be advertised on lorries and vans that drove through the city, carrying a piano played by pianist Diana Goliath whilst everybody danced and sang.



Competition (strip show) at the Kismet theatre organised by the Stellenbosch Winery

Performance Culture

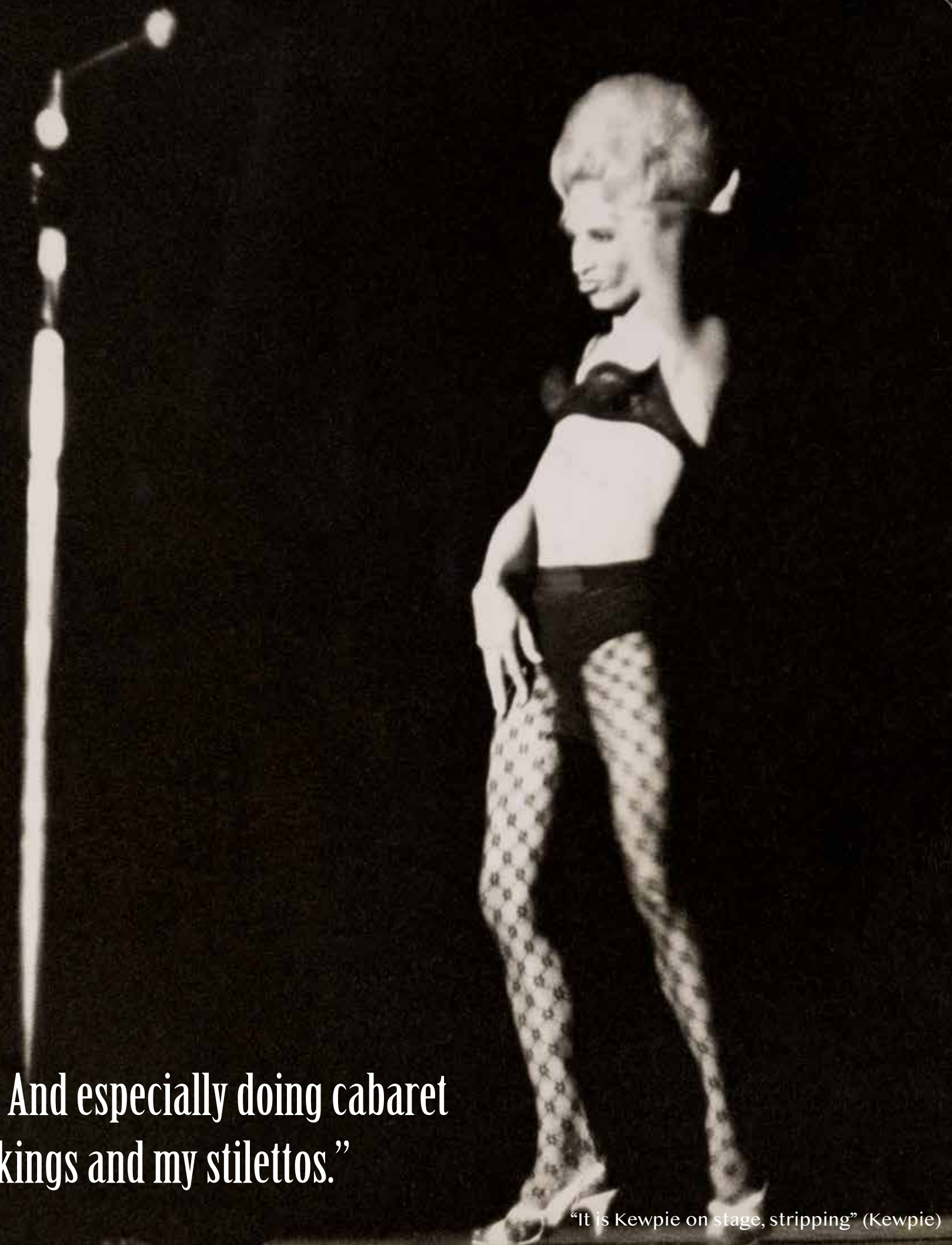
The queens of District Six became famous for their performances in ‘moffie concerts.’ These would usually be comprèd by Tony Naidoo, and took place in different venues including the Star, the Luxurama, the Kismet Theatre, the Broadway, the Drill Hall opposite the Parade, the Kensington Inn, the Maitland Town Hall and other halls around the peninsula.

Evelyn Petersen organised lots of the ‘moffie concerts’ and used to make good money from them, paying queens their wages after a show. Tickets were sold in the salons for 15 shillings, and were purchased by salon clients.

In her own performances, Kewpie made the most of her dance training, and would perform jazz, rumba, samba or cha-cha dance numbers. She was also famous for performing a strip-tease on stage: “Capucine, with the most sensational act in town. The crowd almost rioted as she threw the last of her clothes at them.” (“Strip sensation at moffie crowning’ *Golden City Post*, c.1962/63)

As Apartheid progressed, it was increasingly difficult to find halls in which to stage shows. Special exemptions were required and it became too onerous. The laws began to separate people.

“I loved doing it. And especially doing cabaret in my stage stockings and my stilettos.”



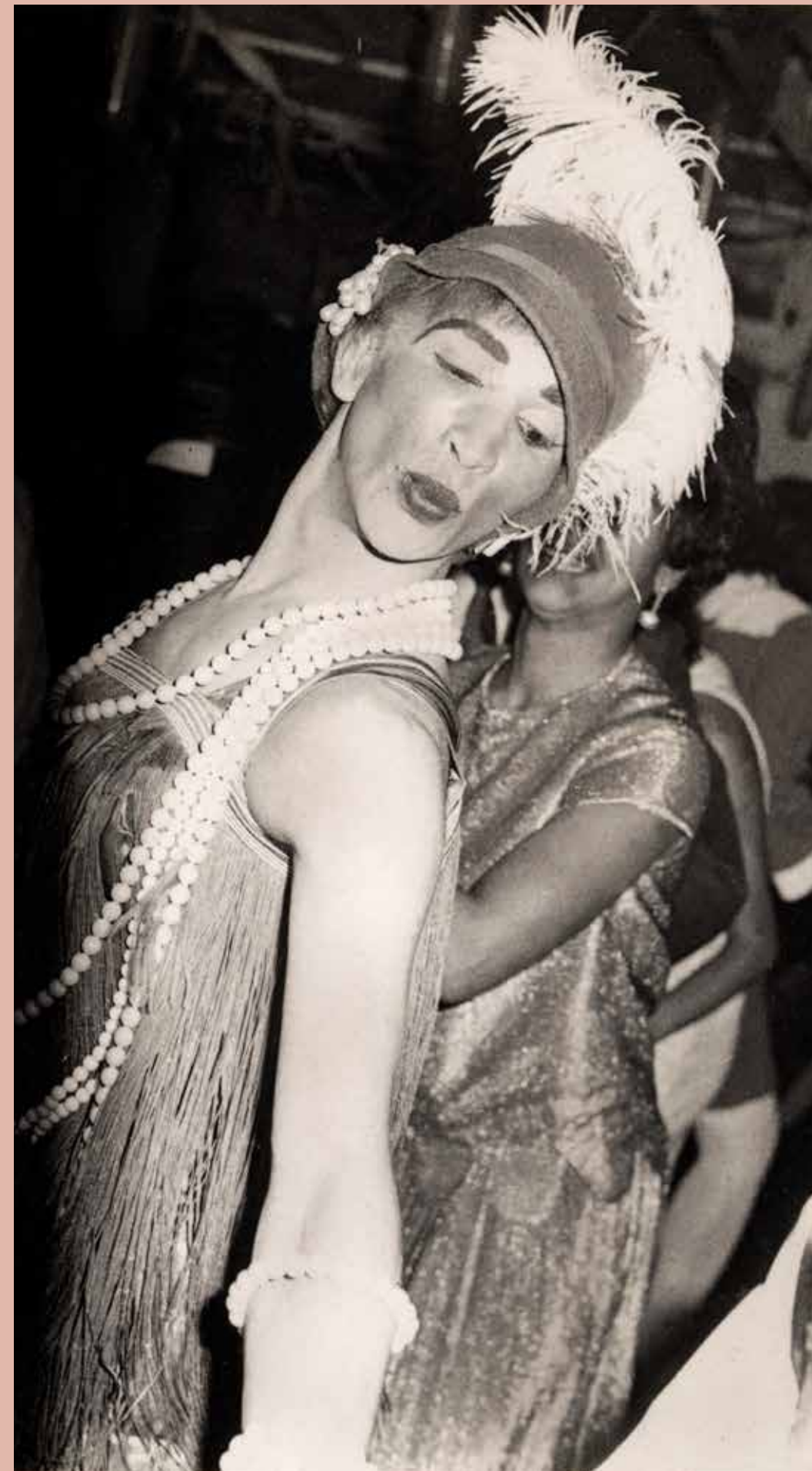
“It is Kewpie on stage, stripping” (Kewpie)



Kewpie at the Spanish Night at the Ambassador Club

The Ambassador Club in Sir Lowry Road, owned by Dave Saunders, was the venue for some of the biggest social events in District Six. Tony Naidoo recalled that it had a bigger mixed audience than any other club in the city, and its fancy dress balls became famous across the peninsula.

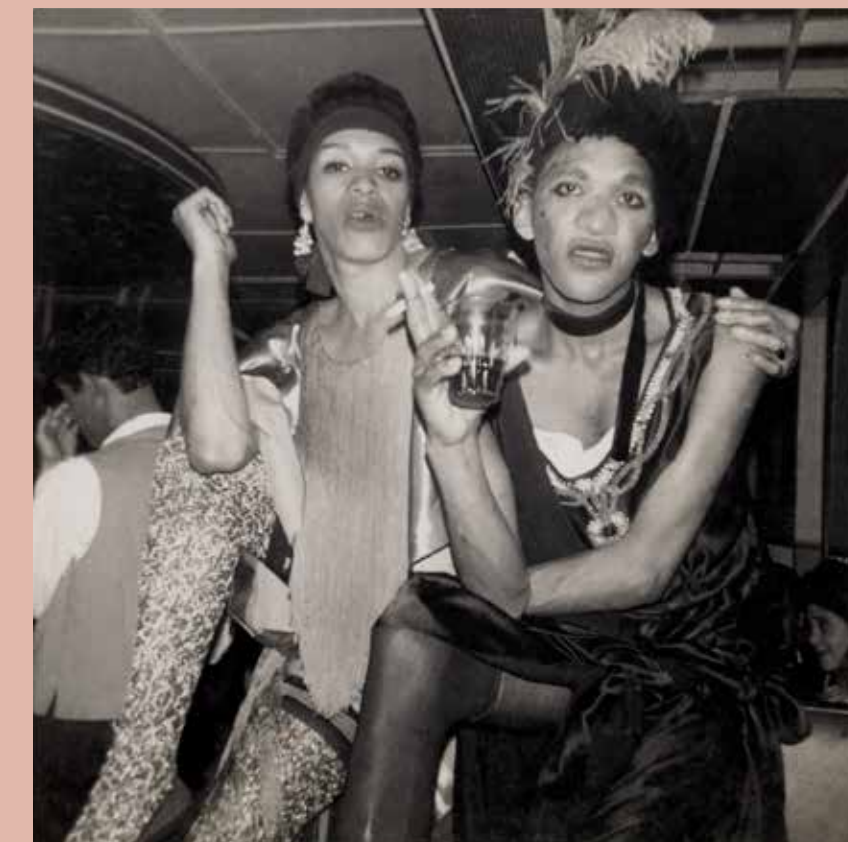
Perhaps the most iconic of these was a seventeenth century-styled Parisian ball held in 1967, which Kewpie attended dressed as Marie Antoinette with her friend Sowda Osman. They paraded through the streets of District Six in a stagecoach drawn by four white horses, and on arrival waved to onlookers in the street below from a balcony. Kewpie won first prize for best costumed dancer, with Sowda coming second.



Kewpie at the 'Roaring '20s night' at the Ambassador Club c. mid 1960s



Kay, Anna, Kewpie, Douglas, Bassey at the 'Roaring '20s party' c. mid 1960s



Mitzi and Bassey at the 'Roaring '20s party' c. mid 1960s

“Driving through with these four horses and the carriage with my driver going along, and we had a traffic cop in the front and a traffic cop at the back. And at that time coming through the roads, the main roads, the bioscopes were coming out and people were going home. They forgot to go home It was like a royal fanfare”



Kewpie at the Marie Antoinette Ball at the Ambassador Club, 1967

Sowda and Kewpie at the Marie Antoinette Ball at the Ambassador Club, 1967



Left to right: Clifffidia and her husband, Gigi with her husband. New Market Street, District Six drag party c. 1963

Parties

Parties were held at people's houses in and around District Six. Some parties took a particular form known as a 'drag', an intimate alternative to public performance. A regular venue for these gatherings was at the home of Madame Costello (Joey Felice), an older, well-established queen. In these spaces, male-presenting men would always be partnered with one of the 'girls', and generally this was the form in which same-sex relationships were tolerated – two sisters would never be seen dancing together, for example.



Brigitte, Gavin Petersen, Kewpie. New Market Street, District Six drag party c. 1963



Cissie Gool's house in Mount Street. Lameez, Olivia, unknown person, Cora, Kewpie, Bassey. Kewpie was Cissie Gool's hairdresser, and Cissie let Kewpie host a party at her house when she was away one weekend.



Brian, Sammy, Brigitte and Mrs Mills at a De Smidt Street party "famous Mrs Mills, always with us... [famous] for singing and dancing with us" (Kewpie) c. late 1970s



Piper Laurie at Kewpie's party in Rutger Street, 1974. I never used to go to a party early. 11 o'clock is my time to go to a function (Piper Laurie)

“We walk up and down and spend the whole day in District Six”

The Streets Are Our Stage

The streets of District Six were busy and full of people who knew each other. It was a place where identities were shaped by street culture. District Six streets evolved into spaces of performance, peopled by both performers and a ready-made audience of pedestrians. Kewpie and friends, embodying the personas of film stars, embraced the possibilities of performance on the streets of their neighbourhood, publicly inscribing their identities. Skilled and practiced in front of the camera, they would strike artistic, expressive and playfully provocative poses, in photoshoots that took place all over the District, and sometimes further afield.

These street scene photographs demonstrate the extent of integration of queer people into the broader District Six community, as well as the confidence that Kewpie and her friends had to be themselves. Despite this level of integration, some queer people were still the targets of discrimination and violent harassment, both in District Six and Cape Town more broadly.



Darling Street ‘Movie Snaps’ photograph. “I was on my way to work in the morning at Salon Kewpie in Kensington.” (Kewpie) c. 1967/68

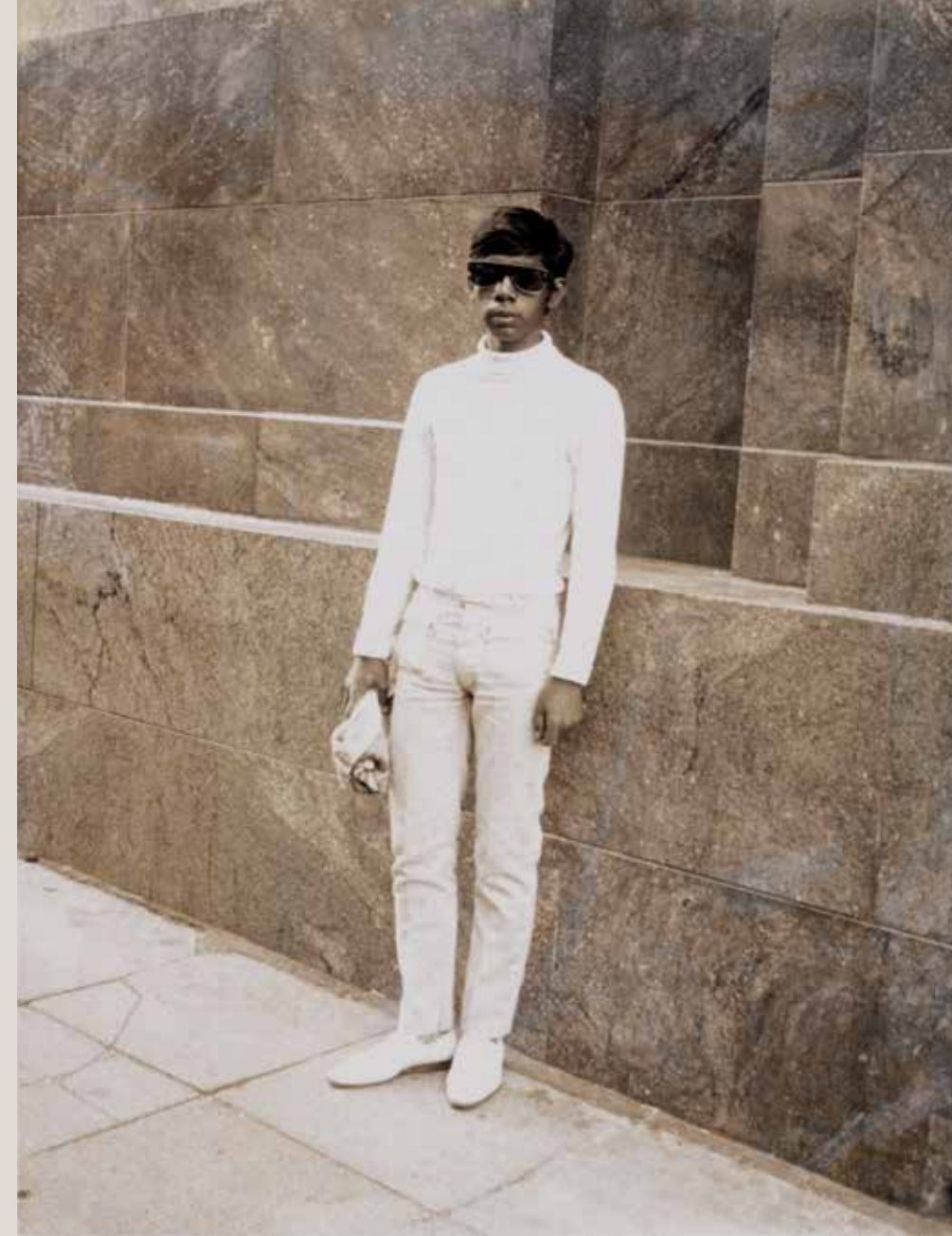
“Our District Six had respect for each other”

Movie Snaps

Almost everybody in District Six had a Movie Snaps photograph of themselves in Darling Street. The photographer would draw a chalk line on the pavement to capture their subject with the correct focus, and the photograph would be available at the Movie Snaps kiosk a few days later. Kewpie's friend Billy Biggs worked for Movie Snaps, as well as taking photographs at the clubs and cabaret shows.



Patti and Olivia in Darling Street. Movie Snaps



Brian (18 years) Darling Street Post Office

“I am Mr Movie Snaps, I took all those pictures” (Billy Biggs)



A Movie Snaps picture of Brigitte Bardot, Kewpie and Joanne Woodward (Jonah).
“Friends of mine and a co-worker” (Kewpie)

“District Six was really my gay vicinity”

During her time in District Six, Kewpie lived in Osborne Street, Francis Street, Rutger Street, and finally Invery Place, in a building which Kewpie named ‘The Queen’s Hotel’.

Key landmarks in Kewpie’s District Six included Trafalgar Park on Searle Street, Salon Andre on Hanover Street, the Crescent Restaurant, the Ambassador Club on Sir Lowry Road, and the Star Bioscope: *“I did a show as a cabaret star one night. And it was fantastic. I was about 15, 16. And I can still remember Charles Scarat playing that night and it was a beautiful function. And I had applause, standing applause, standing ovation”* (Kewpie).



- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 District Six Homecoming Centre | 13 British Cinema |
| 2 Cissie Gool’s house | 14 Jackie Oaker Barber |
| 3 Salon Andre | 15 Rosemary Salon |
| 4 Star Bioscope | 16 Parkers Barber |
| 5 Kewpie and friends house | 17 National Bioscope |
| 6 Queens Hotel | 18 Zambezi Jazz Club |
| 7 Ambassador Club | 19 Taj Restaurant |
| 8 Kewpie family home | 20 Salon Bernie |
| 9 Syms family home | 21 Eoan Group |
| 10 Trafalgar Park | 22 Crescent Restaurant |
| 11 Trafalgar Swimming Baths | 23 Avalon Bioscope |
| 12 Berlin Missionary Primary School | |





“I’m naturally just me... people can’t say I’m a man, they can’t say I’m a woman.”



Kewpie in Osborne Street, about 19 years old c. 1960



Top, left to right:

- Kewpie and Gaya (standing) in Sir Lowry Road
- Olivia Bromwell (wearing glasses), a tea girl who stayed with Kewpie, together with some of the guys she worked with
- Christmas Day in Rutger Street, Sammy (Dolores Gray)

Bottom, left to right:

- Mitzi Gaynor. "She was a very, very good worker. Good hairdresser" (Kewpie)
- Samantha with a floor mat over her as a cape in Rutger Street. Yusuf, the son of Kewpie's neighbour Asa, is watching
- Waydie's sister in Rutger Street



“And the world around me was love”



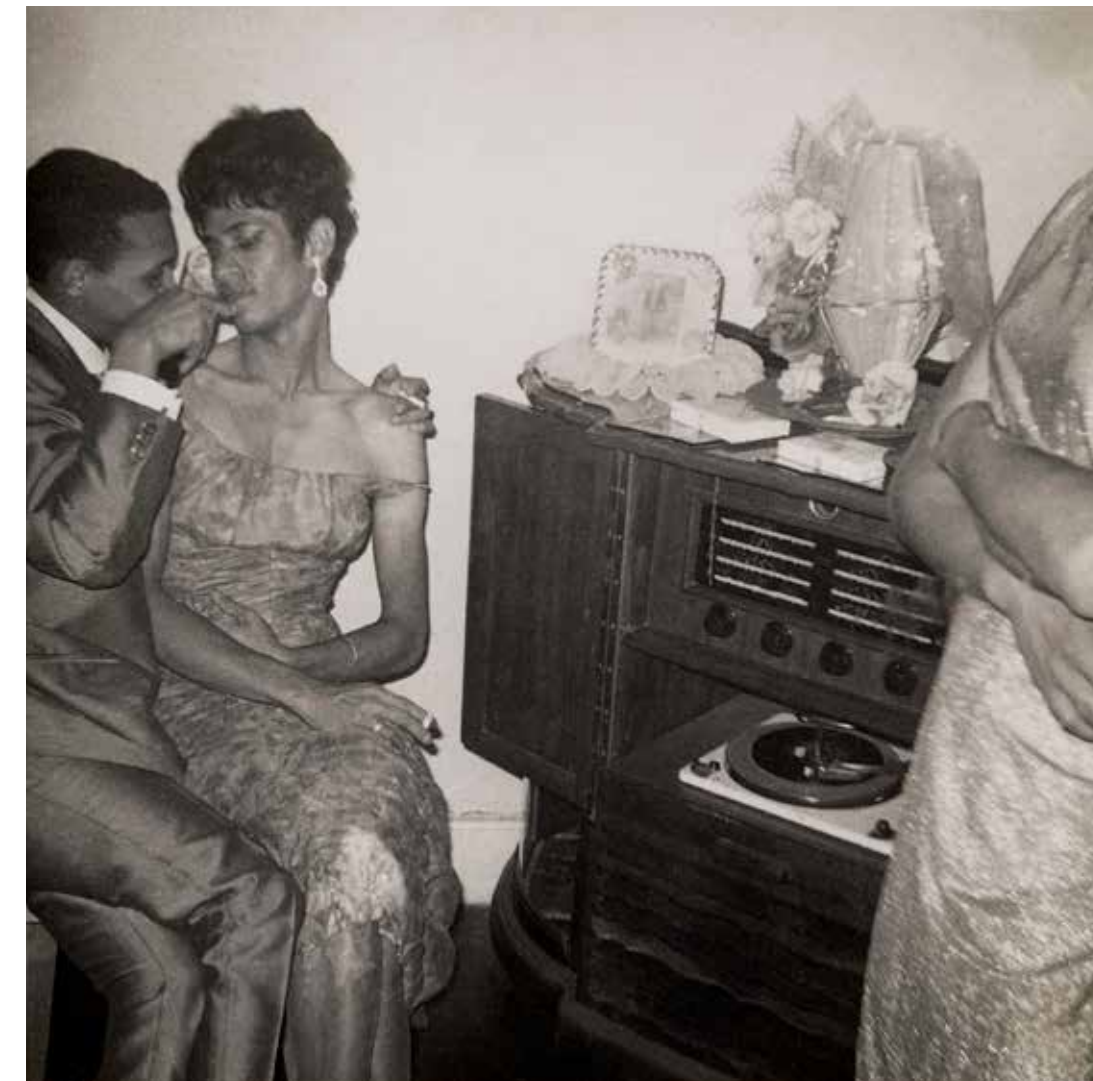
Kewpie sitting on the radio with navy-blue hair in Rutger Street after a six-week holiday in Durban with Salama and Geraldine.

Kewpie's Music

Music was an important part of Kewpie's life and she had an enviable record collection. Friends would come to relax at Kewpie's place on a Sunday and listen to music. Kewpie's favourite artists included Shirley Bassey, Roberta Flack, Connie Francis, Eartha Kitt, The Supremes, The Three Degrees, Donna Summer, and Gladys Knight and the Pips.

On a Sunday morning it was wonderful to go to the Queen's Hotel, because then all the LPs are spread, they're playing their LPs, and Kewpie lay on her couch like a queen.
(Mogamat Benjamin)

When young, Kewpie loved listening to rock 'n' roll and jazz. Sunday night was jazz night at the Ambassador Club, and Kewpie became friendly with Abdullah Ibrahim (known at the time as Dollar Brand) who used to play there regularly: "he's a perfect jazz musician" (Kewpie).



De Smidt Street. "The late Garbo" (left) and Brigitte Bardot (right)



Cliffidia and Miss Haley Mills



Anne's 21st birthday party in Kensington. Left to right: The late Shirley Bassey, the late Patti, the late Mitzi, Anne, Kewpie and Pearl



The Lives of Photographs

The photographs in this exhibition have a history of usage, circulation and display that predates their acquisition by GALA. Kewpie's photographs were incredibly precious to her and she would sometimes display them for people to see, or go through her albums with visitors, especially in later life. Considering the photographs as material objects helps us understand their particular significance to Kewpie, and the way in which photographs can establish a sense of place and belonging – in Kewpie's case, to District Six.

Kewpie's collection is in part an exercise in self-representation. We see Kewpie at work, performing, partying, holidaying, dancing, posing for the press, posing with friends, and relaxing. The photographs also function as self-representation by reflecting back to Kewpie her friendships and important relationships. Special people in Kewpie's life appear over and over again in the collection, and the photographs function as a map of Kewpie's most significant social relationships.

Many of the photographs are annotated, often by Kewpie. These interventions reveal glimpses of Kewpie's personality and the relationships between her and her friends. Several of the photographs have original captions on the reverse, which give an indication of how Kewpie played with notions of glamour, fame, femininity, and adventure. These whimsical connections to the wider world, beyond the increasingly oppressive confines of the Apartheid state, reflect Kewpie's cosmopolitan outlook – as well as displaying the tongue-in-cheek humour District Six residents often employed.



Gayle

Around the world, gay languages have developed to enable queer people to communicate secretly, thereby avoiding legal punishment and discrimination. The gay language in the Western Cape emerged as a form of slang. It is made up of a set of coded words with assigned meanings, and is often referred to as Gayle, from one of its coded words 'Gail' meaning 'chat'.

Some examples of Gayle are listed below.

- Affair - n. gay relationship, usually of less than one month's duration; n. gay lover
- Bag - n. butch
- Beulah - adj. beautiful
- Belenia - n. attractive man
- Cilla - n. cigarette
- Clora - n. coloured person
- Dora - n. an alcoholic drink; v. to drink alcohol; adj. drunk
- Elsie Geselsie - n. chatterbox
- Fatima - n. fat
- Gayle/Gail - v. chat
- Greta - adj. greedy
- Harriets - n. hair
- Lana - n. penis
- Lettie - n. lesbian
- Mavis - n. queen; n. gay person
- Mildred (Milly) - adj. dizzy; adj. mad
- Moffie - n. gay man; n. effeminate gay man
- Moffietaal - n. Cape gay slang in the 1950s
- Natalia - n. black person
- Nora - adj. stupid
- Priscilla - n. police
- Sheila - adj. rubbish; n. shit
- Sister - n. gender non-conforming person; n. gay male friend
- Wendy - n. gay white man; n. cry baby

har hara - 'bang' / Scared

Boentjie - Top / Active sexual partner

Betwe - BEER

Belinda - adj. blind

Clarence - Sq maat vrek!!! It's ouch!!!
Cindy - young Cat Balloons
↳ eyes

dina bash - dommer / fight Hazel: Hollas

doris

daphney - Deaf / Doef

Hilda - adj. hideous; unattractive Hester - listen
INDERA - INDIAN

Sonja - Sun

P.P.A. KAFUYATA

Gerty - n. girl

Caroline: cry. / Mable

Moreen - v. murder

nancy sheila gayle - don't talk shit

naomi - name

Nors Pink Palace - jail

Pram - car

Oliver - beautiful / 'oulik'
pussie - n. vagina
Oh. 's pronounced z'

Prunolda: Very Pretty

Pauline Baai - Palt



Kogel Bay. Left to right: Sammy, Kewpie and Liz. 1971

Queer in and Beyond the City

Kewpie and friends were by no means confined to District Six. As well as working in Kensington and performing in shows all over the peninsula, Kewpie would regularly visit beaches, parks and swimming pools for days out with friends.

Many of Kewpie's photographs were taken during days spent at Trafalgar Park, established for District Six residents in 1905, and Trafalgar Baths, both on Searle Street. Kewpie and friends also left the city on occasion, staying at Strandfontein beach, where Kewpie went on camping holidays with Sylvia Biggs and her children, and Kogel Bay.

The 1950s to the 1960s was a period of increasing oppression for queer people as the Apartheid government began to police sexual behaviour across South Africa. During the 1960s the government attempted to pass legislation that would have made male and female homosexuality an offence punishable by a compulsory prison sentence. A political campaign meant the resultant 1969 amendment to the Immorality Act was less draconian than feared, but it still criminalised gay sex.

Significantly, Kewpie and her friends regularly wore bikinis in a range of public spaces: at the beach, at the swimming baths, and in the park. Cape Town was seen as more tolerant of homosexuality than the rest of the country, but presenting their gender non-conforming bodies so openly in public was still highly subversive, and contravened anti-masquerading laws, constituting actions that were punishable by a prison sentence.



'Pretty Polly'. "The late Patti at Trafalgar Baths." (Kewpie)



Patti and Sammy with unknown men at Trafalgar Baths



Kogel Bay. Chekki and Kewpie, Carmen, Koelie (Kulsum, Sammy's sister) c. 1960s



Models' Patti (left) with Wilhelmina (right). "I used to call her Willy." (Kewpie)

Racial Segregation in the City

The election of the National Party in 1948 accelerated the already well-established process of racial segregation in Cape Town. Following the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, all public amenities were segregated along racial lines, including parks, buses, and hospitals. Beaches were strictly segregated, with those considered the best reserved for 'whites only'.

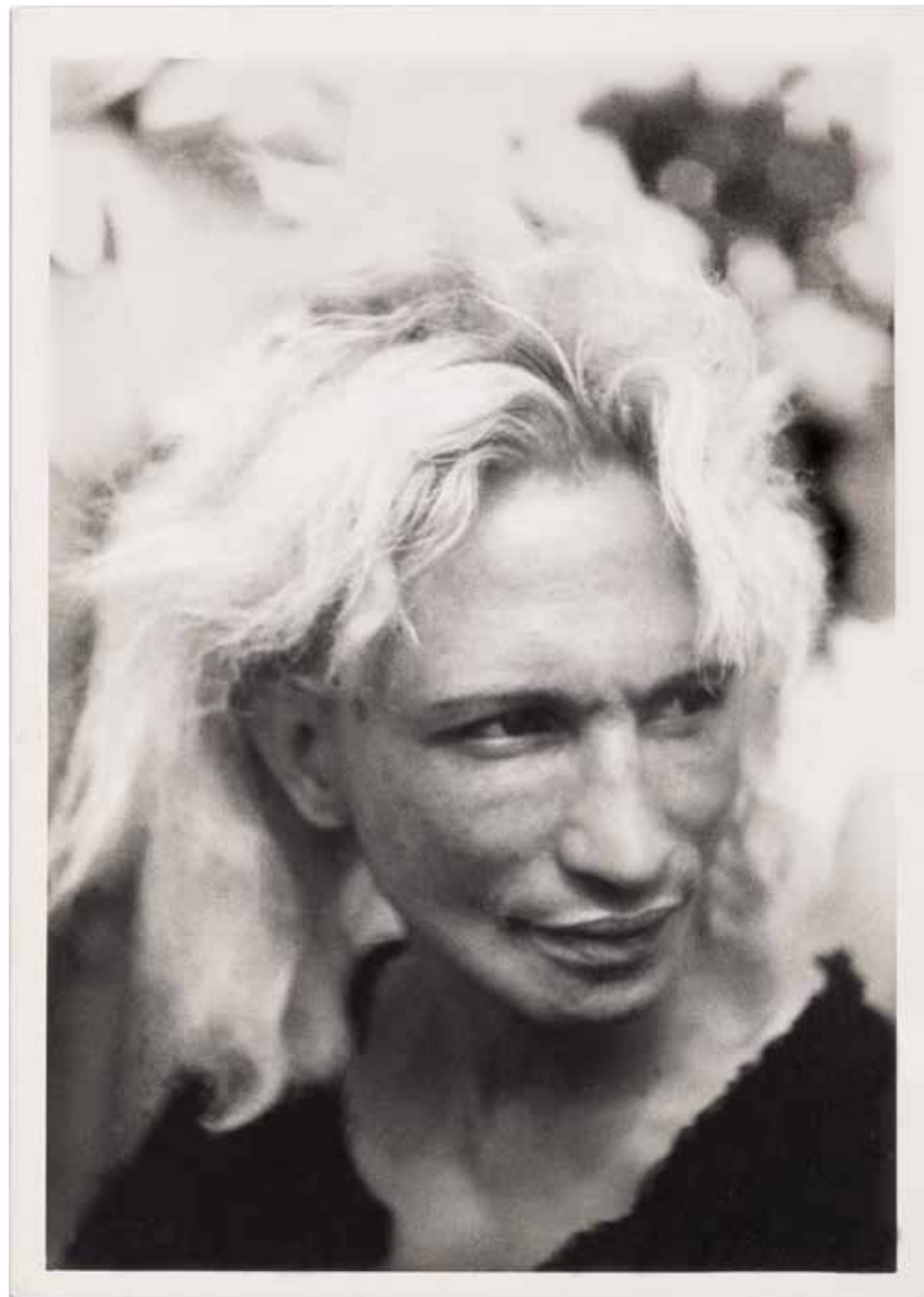
Despite numerous pieces of legislation designed to segregate the city, grey areas remained and Capetonians, including Kewpie, continued to move around the city as they went about their business. Photographs in the collection show Kewpie and friends at Fourth Beach, which was designated a 'coloured' beach, but gay men would often meet here across the colour bar. The District Six hairdressers retained and even gained white clients during this period, but they would do their hair upstairs, out of sight.

“We could go camping... dancing on the beaches, dancing in the water, dancing in the sand”



Top, left to right:
 - Sandra Dee at Strandfontein, late 1970s
 - Kewpie at Strandfontein Beach, late 1970s
 - Norman Daniels on Fourth Beach. “This is Kim Novac, Norman Daniels.” (Kewpie)

Bottom, left to right:
 - Brian at Fourth Beach
 - Kewpie with Sandra Dee at Strandfontein, late 1970s
 - “The late Ralph Abrahams (Miss Carol Baker) with Australian boyfriend.” (Kewpie)



Kewpie



'Willy' (Wilhelmina) at the Trafalgar Baths. "She was a strooi meisie... you know, working on the road" (Kewpie)



'Dolly Dimple', Sammy at the Trafalgar Baths. "We used to call her Dolly" (Kewpie)



'Always wanting to be beautiful'. "The late Patti with a short haircut" (Kewpie)

Forced Removals from District Six

In 1950 the National Party government passed the Group Areas Act, which facilitated the forcible division of population groups, as classified by the Population Registration Act, into separate racially-defined residential areas. On 11 February 1966, District Six was declared a 'white group area', and the state began to implement a policy of forced removals, systematically demolishing people's homes. Residents were gradually moved to racially-defined residential developments across the Cape Flats. Many people resisted and remained defiant in the face of the removals.

I was one of the last people to move out of District Six. I didn't want to leave Cape Town. You know why, because everything was in Cape Town, clubs, your social life was completely ruined you know, when they moved you out. (Piper Laurie)

The unrestricted self-expression and energy of Kewpie and other members of the queer community apparent in these photographs reflects their perseverance and resilience, even in the midst of a disintegrating District Six. They created their own vivid and subversive world amid the hardships of everyday life, and the looming tragedy of forced removals.

The process of forced removals changed people's lives forever. The depth of loss experienced by all those who were displaced, including Kewpie, cannot be overstated. Their world was stolen from them.



Kewpie in Invery Place



Brigitte in Invery Place



Kewpie, Brigitte (on the right), Margaret and the Sea Point girls on the site of a demolished building off Invery Place. "The Sea Point girls used to frequent the Queen's Hotel where we stayed at Invery Place." (Kewpie)

After District Six

After District Six, Kewpie lived briefly in Salt River and then moved to Kensington. Kewpie spent the last 10 years of her life at the Kensington Home for the Aged. Amelia Brinkhuis, a former staff member at the Home, described Kewpie as "a beautiful-spirited person." She recalled that Kewpie used to do the other residents' hair and knit scarves and caps for them. Whilst at the Home Kewpie dressed entirely in pink and would often show her photographic collection to staff, retaining her dancing skills to the end:

... en Kewpie was 'n ballet dancer gewees. Ja, sy kan geskôpit, baie hoog daai bene. Toe ons by die party gewees het, die reunion van Kewpie, toe staan Kewpie stil om met my te praat toe sien ek net daar gat 'n been op innie lig in. Toe se ons, nei sy kan nog altyd skop!

... and Kewpie was a ballet dancer. Yes she could kick very high with those legs. When we were at the party, a reunion for Kewpie, she stood next to me to talk and then all of a sudden I saw a leg fly into the air. Then we said "no she can still kick!" (Sowda Osman)

A reunion event called 'The Last Party' was organised for Kewpie at the Kensington Home by Sandra Lentoer, a younger sister. In 2011, Kewpie's family organised a 70th birthday party at Athlone School for the Blind, inviting all of Kewpie's friends and neighbours from Osborne Street. Kewpie died in 2012 at the age of 71. In 2014 a drag competition was held in honour of Kewpie's memory, with all of Kewpie's peers who were still alive taking part. They performed under a photograph of Kewpie at the Roaring '20s party at the Ambassador Club in the 1960s.



Kewpie in Invery Place

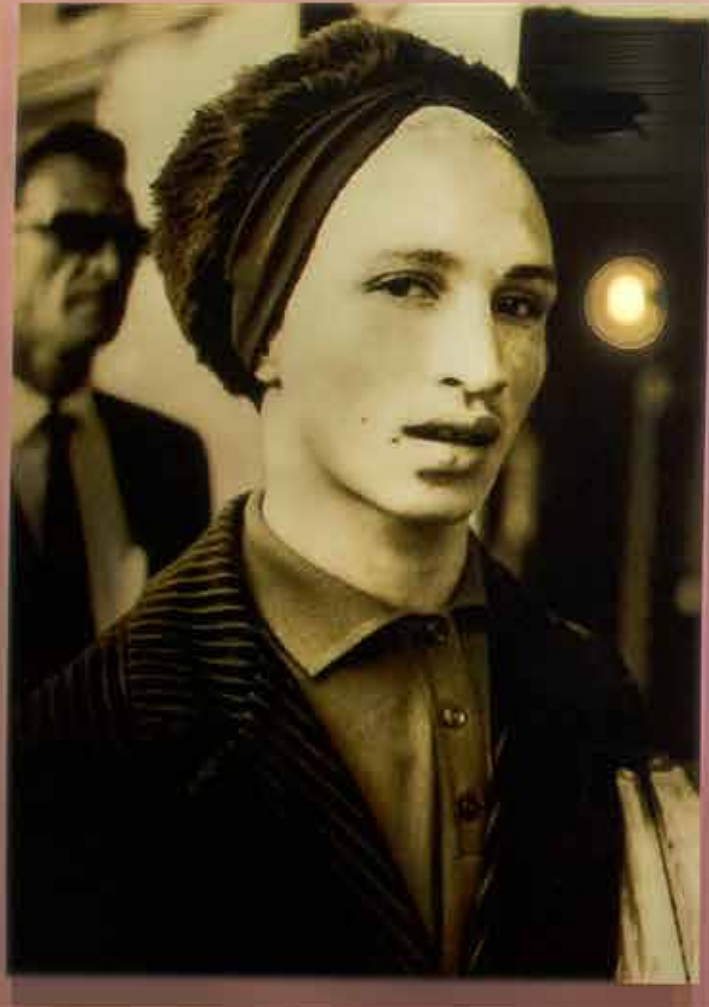
“Life can be beautiful like a rose in a garden”



Kewpie in Trafalgar Park in District Six

3. Photographs From The Exhibition

District Six Museum Homecoming Centre
21 September 2018 - 23 March 2019



Kewpie

DAUGHTER OF DISTRICT SIX

This exhibition explores the life of Kewpie (1941–2012), a celebrated queer figure and hairdresser in Cape Town's District Six. Kewpie was part of a queer community that was highly visible and integrated into the broader community, playing an important role in the fabric and culture of District Six.

Members of this queer community sometimes identified as gay men and sometimes identified as women. From what we know, Kewpie's gender identity was fluid, and she did not strictly identify as either male or female. Kewpie and her friends generally used feminine pronouns, and would refer to each other as 'sisters' and 'girls'. They were sometimes known as 'moffies', which can be an offensive term, but in District Six its use was not necessarily derogatory. However, many people objected to being called 'moffie', preferring 'queer'. Kewpie herself recalled that "we weren't called as gays, we were called as moffies then. But it was beautifully said, not abruptly."



Oh it was gorgeous glorious times



Installation Detail: Salon Kewpie



Installation Detail: Salon Kewpie



Installation Detail: Salon Kewpie



Installation Kewpie exhibition banner and vinyl silhouette



Installation Detail: Film clip from *A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six*, 2000



Installation Detail: Memory Board, visitors were invited to add memories and personal anecdotes they have of Kewpie and her community



4. Heritage Day Parade and Burning Museum

An integral part of the District Six Museum's memory work is to facilitate processes of symbolic 'return' through acts of remembrance. A commemorative procession in celebration of Kewpie's life took place on Heritage Day (24 September 2018) titled, 'Reclaiming with Pride'. A memory map was developed for the route; it referenced and plotted a selection of images from the collection, which identified existing and non-existing sites in District Six that held significant personal and spatial memories of Kewpie's life.

In the lead-up to Heritage Day, a five-day creative workshop series facilitated by artists Ayesha Price, Micah Chisholm and Heath Nash, brought together ex-residents, members of Sistaazhood, Death of Glitter, Diskotekah youth and community groups to participate in the preparation work. The objective was to explore the collection as a heritage resource from which new meanings could be creatively re-imagined and produced. This platform allowed for self-reflection, expression and explorative interpretation as a means to purposefully navigate different forms of personal and collective recovery, bringing the life of Kewpie into a contemporary and intergenerational space.

Stimulated by the photographs and stories, participants created colourful designs for flags, costumes, hats, styled wigs and together transformed their personas into the many characters based on their impressions drawn from Kewpie's extraordinary, eventful portrayal of herself and her friends in the District.



Ursula Hansby, Kewpie's sister, in front of 13 Osborne Street, District Six (Kewpie's childhood home)

Parallel to the creative workshops, a site-specific art intervention curated by Burning Museum artist Jarrett Erasmus, along with the District Six Museum Art in Public Places Programme, prepared a selection of images from the collection and sign-posted five locations on the memory route. These enlarged photocopied artworks were wheatpasted on both the last remaining remnants of the old District Six urban street grid, while others were pasted on the re-development site where the returned community of District Six has been re-housed. This was further enhanced by artist Andrew Tsafendas Whispa and our Young Curators. The sites included Osborne Street, Rutger Street, Invery Place, and Nelson Street.



Public artwork on the corner of Dorset Street and Osborne Street, District Six



Public artwork on the corner of Nelson Street and Sir Lowry Road, District Six



On Heritage Day, as the vibrant procession made its way along the route, an explosion of colourfully painted motif banners, flags and decorative costumes filled the streets momentarily shining through a shadowed and painful past of a returning community. Songs from Kewpie's favourite play list got the jovial crowd dancing to the tunes of Shirley Bassey and the Supremes sending off an effervescent energy invoking Kewpie's spirit. At each of the site locations, poignant anecdotal stories and memories were shared amongst family and friends honouring her rich legacy.

The Heritage Day programme was an overwhelming celebration and reconnection to the life of Kewpie, her family, friends and the District Six community highlighting the importance of this collection as a 'living archive' with a critical presence in contemporary LGBTQIA+ activism and its connections to the broader human rights movement. It re-enforced a space for reclaiming dignity and for visitors to participate in the act of remembrance as a form of solidarity that unites against any form of gender inequality, discriminatory politics and bigotry.





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Oral history interviews

Kewpie
Ursula and Allister Hansby
Piper Laurie
Billy Biggs
Sandra Lentoor
Ismail 'Bolla' Buffkins
Stanford Anderson
Gamierodien Samuels
Gordon Adams
Charles Arendse
Mogamat Benjamin
Ebrahim Faro
Sowda Osman

Additional sources include:

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Charles Arendse collection, District Six Museum
Elwyn Hansby-Consul and Fritz collection, District Six Museum
South African History Online <http://www.sahistory.org.za/>
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