

GALA TIMES

The GALA Queer Archive's Newsletter

October - December
3/3 2023

**EVERYTHING NICE
WITH A LITTLE
MORE SPICE! WE
LIKE NICE
THINGS TOO!**

Hello GALA Fam!

As we bid farewell to another transformative year, it is with great pride and excitement that we reflect on the remarkable journey of the GALA Queer Archive. This year has been filled with significant milestones, dedicated efforts, and a deepened commitment to preserving and celebrating the rich tapestry of our queer African history.

2023 began on an immensely sad note with the untimely passing of GALA's Senior Office Administrator, Nobantu Nqolobe. Throughout the year the GALA team has sought to honour MaNobantu's legacy by emulating her dedication and service to our community and fondly remembering her bright and sunny presence in the office.

GALA also warmly welcomed Demi Phasha as our intern in April 2023, and later, Onkokame Seepamore as our GALA co-YOUTH Forum coordinator while Obvious Nomaele was on sabbatical. It's always wonderful when additions to the GALA fam are made, but Demi and Onko bring with them unmatched rizz! :)

LGBTQIA+ history is a complex and multifaceted narrative that encompasses the struggles, triumphs, and contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual individuals throughout time and at GALA we are proud to be the custodians of distinctly African and queer histories. The archive also

shows that LGBTQIA+ history is diverse, and the experiences of individuals within our community are multiple. As we draw to the end of an immensely challenging year, we wanted to take a moment to escape and seek relief and distraction from the challenges and hardships associated with being a part of a marginalised and often silenced community. History shows us that in the face of discrimination, persecution and social stigmatisation, members of the LGBTQIA+ community have sought refuge and solace in various forms of escapism to cope with the difficulties of daily life. We dedicate this Ke Dezemba edition to the artists, free thinkers and creators whose talents allow them to envision an alternative and better world with the promise of a queerer life for us all.

As we stand on the cusp of a new year, the GALA Queer Archive remains steadfast in our mission to preserve, celebrate, and educate. We express our gratitude to our dedicated team, supporters, and contributors who have made this year a resounding success.

Here's to a future filled with continued growth, inclusivity, and the unwavering commitment to the vibrant narratives that make up the fabric of queer African history.

Wishing you all a joyous holiday season and a fulfilling New Year!

Keval Harie
(Executive Director)



Happy Holidays!

xx the GALA Team

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ARCHIVE SPOTLIGHT:

AA PINK BALLOONS

With end of year fatigue setting in, I was struggling to find an archive story to fit with our 'Escapism' final newsletter theme. As I was trawling through photos on my computer, a photo of balloons caught my eye, and I thought, yes, balloons – the ultimate escape artists! So my December gift to you, from the GALA Archive, is an ode to the balloon, though four archive photographs and their stories.



Balloons have always made a prominent appearance at parades, and Pride parades are no exception. Floats in particular are often adorned with festive rainbow and pink balloons. Cost-effective and easy to procure, balloons remain a firm decorative favourite.

Pictured here, covered in an array of pink balloons, is the Gay Library float at Joburg Pride in 1995.



A popular event where balloons made a frequent appearance is the annual, themed, queer costume party hosted by the Mother City Queer Projects (MCQP). Pictured here are party-goers at the 2000 'Toy Box Party', holding large bunches of helium balloons.

The parties, initiated in 1994, were known for their elaborate costumes and décor. Though the parties became smaller, and stopped altogether between 2020 and 2022 (largely due to the pandemic), MCQP have announced a relaunch party this December.



Balloons can decorate people too! This photo shows revellers adorned with blue balloons at the Mother City Queer Projects (MCQP) Twinkly Sea Party in 1996, dressed up as sea creatures, or perhaps representing the sea itself!

MCQP has hosted an annual, themed, queer costume party in Cape Town ('The Mother City') over December since 1994. (Although they took a break over the pandemic years, they are set to be back this year). GALA has a large MCQP collection covering the first ten years of MCQP parties (1994-2004), and includes planning and promotional material, a large amount of photographs and some costumes and décor. The paper-based records and photos have been digitised.



Condoms work too! This photograph shows Theresa Raizenberg at the first Pride march in Cape Town in 1993. Raizenberg, one of march organisers, is also a long-time HIV and AIDS activist – fighting for access to protection and treatment. GALA has a collection for Raizenberg and her partner, Midi Achmat, as well as ABIGALE (the organisers of the 1993 pride)

I'm not entirely sure how (or why) we started this tradition, but a few years ago, when our interim Programmes Manager (now GALA Board member) Kendall Petersen left GALA, Karin Tan and I made him a farewell 'balloon effigy'. We were so tickled by our creation that we continued this farewell tradition with the next few staff members we bid farewell to. It's been a while since we made one of our effigies, perhaps it's time to pick up the tradition again!

Above: GALA's caretaker Director Getti Mercurio (and his balloon friend. Note the Birkenstock detail), at his farewell lunch in 2017.

Below: GALA's 2022 Intern, Bonke Sonjani and his balloon representation, dressed in his outfit from the YOUth Forum Ball) at his farewell lunch in 2023.



Linda Chernis
(Archive Coordinator)

CONTROL. SURRENDER

2023 has been a lot. Enough for me to lose myself. Enough for me to be unkind to myself. There has been a lot of changes, positive changes at that. I however find myself in a dark place still, mostly because I feel undeserving of beautiful things.

Recently, I had a beautiful encounter with a stranger, someone who strangely called me out to filth, despite us being strangers. They called me back to myself, demanded that I see myself, see the things I have achieved and who I have become. Which according to someone else in the same building, a stranger too if you were wondering, was a flower. Someone described me as a flower, a beautiful untamed flower. It felt so strange to me, that someone outside of me, someone who had never known of my existence decided to describe me as such a beautiful and delicate thing to be protected, a flower, when I felt like my world was breaking apart. I was, according to me, vulnerable, broken and abused.

Abused by me.

For days I pondered on what those two encounters meant, if they were being nice or if that's what they genuinely saw of me. A beautiful exotic flower. Of course, there was nothing nice about being dragged by a stranger telling you that "If you saw me treat anyone else the way you treat and see yourself you probably would fight me!". And she was right, all hell would break loose.

I recently moved back to Johannesburg after finding a job at GALA, and a part of me still, after many months of being with this amazing family feels unsettled and undeserving. This has nothing to do with them but everything to do with me being unkind to myself. I realised that my house still looks the same as it did when I moved in, there's nothing here that says, "This is Demi's house" and that's because I am scared of the future, I am scared that this won't be my home in the coming long run. In the fear, I am forgetting to be in the moment, to live. My refusal to make my house a home, GALA a home and everything else in the now a home is inherently deeply un-

kind to me. I am forgetting my own teachings, teachings of love, teachings of breath and learning how to live in the now.

I have been stressed and unhappy, but that is of my own doing. I realise that, so I must teach myself the art of releasing control, to exist and just be. Allow water and the wind to come through as it pleases, trust where I am led and love where I am now.

Everything happens because of something, and thus far, I have had nothing but good happen to me. I was only able to see myself through someone else's light and eyes, and I will forever be grateful to them for removing the scales from my eyes. I am alright, I am light, I am happy. For the first time ever in my entire existence on God's floating rock, I can say the kids are in fact alright. I don't have to defend my existence and being, instead, I get to live. So, thank you, I think this is a rather disorganised love letter to self.

Demi Phasha
('23 GALA Intern)



In November I was fortunate to attend the Outburst Queer Arts Festival in Belfast. I was privileged to encounter Seçil Epik, a Turkish writer and co-founder of Umami Kitap a publishing house prioritising the translation of queer literature into Turkish. We had the opportunity to engage with each other and our fellow delegates at the festival about art and arts-based practice in different contexts. We were able to share how queer identities and queer frameworks could operate in countries across the world, with different political, social and geographic circumstances. These conversations allowed for exchanges of creative strategies for making and sharing queer art.

What was equally wonderful was the chance to share personal experiences, and to find affinity in each other's stories despite coming from such disparate backgrounds. When I told Seçil that our

final newsletter of the year's theme was based on escapism, she told me about recently diving back into her old diaries, revisiting her old self with a more seasoned perspective. I was struck by the compassion she expressed while telling me about that young person finding ways to escape her reality. The diary, which was initially a source of embarrassment and evidence of past failure, turned into a herald of affirmation. As she described the process she went through of revisiting her diary, I pictured an much younger Seçil running away from her circumstances transform into someone running toward the person I met in Belfast.

Reading the text about revisiting her diary (featured in the Eksilerek Biriken/Resurgence in Fragments exhibition brochure), I felt some regret about my past attitudes toward my diaries. Since the age of nine, I would intermitently start

and stop diaries. Perhaps the word 'stop' is inaccurate. Since I was nine I would start and destroy diaries. I continued this until I was in my mid-twenties, after which I gave up on personal diaries entirely. At a slightly different time, and a very different place, Seçil's was writing in and hiding her diary.

She is able to read a representation of that person with some clarity, while I only have the residual, negative feelings from a time I remember with shame. Although I can't locate exactly what versions of myself needs to be supported, Seçil's text allows me to find some kind of vicarious closure. It provides a sketch of how archives can be a source of healing, and perhaps this could reframe the phrase "learn from the mistakes of the past" with more compassion and openness.

Karin Tan

(Senior Information Officer)

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DEAR DIARY.
YOU ARE NEITHER ALONE NOR WRONG

In my first year at high school, I began to keep a diary starting from 2002 to the end of high school. I have put this diary out of sight for 21 years and have never read it again after the date it ended in 2004. However, this diary was not in a size that could be hidden so easily, it was actually a large-sized day planner with a black leather look. My adventure of keeping this diary and trying to hide it from everyone, which I started as a 16-year-old child, continued when I went to university at the age of 19, the time it came with me and stayed in the

state student dormitory for a year. It was hidden in my closet. After graduating from university, I returned to the family home like some of us. One year later, I left home again for my master's degree, and the next year I gave up on my master's degree and returned to the family home again. The diary also came everywhere with me. It traveled from one house to another. But, when I moved to Istanbul in 2013, I did not bring the diary with me this time.

I learned from my diary, which I read for

the first time after 21 years to write this text, that I even took that big day planner with me to school during high school, in case someone would read it if I left it at home. But the 27-year-old version of me, who came to Istanbul alone with a single suitcase, didn't care if someone read my high school diary anymore. When I left the diary behind, I didn't even bother to hide it, I put it somewhere behind one of the cabinets in my library and left the house. The diary was like a reflection of my sense of failure in life. The 16-18-year-old version

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of me who experienced what was written in that diary was the one who was responsible for this feeling of failure and being so far from the life I dreamed of at the age of 27. I had done something wrong, I could have been a more talented, more hard-working, smarter, more ambitious, more self-aware person. Now, as I write, these thoughts are coming to my mind one by one. I was like, unconsciously, seeing this huge, unaesthetic black day planner even as the culprit of not being able to come out earlier.

As I got older, the embarrassment I might feel when others read the diary was replaced by the shame of the person I would come across if I read the diary. It was the reason why I never opened and read this diary, which I carried with me almost everywhere I went for 11 years. When I moved to Istanbul in 2013 at the age of 27, I no longer feared that someone would have access to a whole diary of my personal life, because I was no longer that person. I had evolved and changed. Anyone with a little sense would understand that the things written in the diary are simple adolescent memories, not-that-simple existence and self-creation problems, and the inner outpourings of a child, who constantly doubts themselves, who is sure that nobody around them, especially their parents, really loves them, who is constantly bored, and wants to break their shell as soon as possible. At that point, I had overcome the fear of others finding and reading my diary, but my fear of reading what was written in the diary and not being pleased with my 16-year-old self had gone nowhere. During the brief visits to the family home after 2013, I would take the diary from the library, and think about how many times my mother, whom I know visits my library frequently to lend my books to the neighbor children who are interested in reading, would have read this diary, then, I would have concluded that if she had a problem with 16-year-old Seçil, it was not my problem, so I would return the diary and go back to Istanbul.

Time passed, and on a family visit a few years ago, I decided that I could continue my mission of looking after the diary, this important and yet aesthetically unappealing part of my personal history, at

my own home. The diary came with me to Istanbul, I put it in a make-up case with a mirror, which looks like a small suitcase that I bought from the Dolapdere flea market long before the pandemic when everything was in its place. The case was exactly the size that the diary could fit into it.

A few weeks ago, when the Bound/less team called me, I opened this case which contained a day planner whose existence had only made me feel uncomfortable for 20 years and began reading the diary. Not only did I read it myself, I also shared some of my memories with my partner and friends. The wall of fear about my own past was broken. Even if it sounded cliché, the more I read my diary, the more I started to love that struggling child, who was trying to become someone useful. It was the first time I witnessed her resilience and vulnerability at the same time, a child who is trying to break through their shell and build their own life. I was grateful to that child for helping me to become the person I am today, despite all the financial and moral impossibilities, even obstacles, of their close environment trying to guide them to a more “correct” life; that child who gave the signals that they would draw their own path from that time, and who never stopped taking that path even though they always felt guilty inside.

I’ve been thinking about the archive more often over the past few years. This is neither an academic nor a professional interest. From time to time, I look at my notebooks, flyers, postcards, stickers, badges, catalogs, drive files, photos on the phone, audio recordings and even my social media accounts that I’ve been collecting for years and can’t help thinking about, “What will happen to all of this one day?” Should I store all this material by transferring to digital or will I pack all this junk again the next time I move? So where should I store digital archives? Let’s say, I managed to preserve all this and was able to splice together what I had accumulated as a meaningful whole and turn it into a personal archive one day, will all these things one day become part of a larger narrative? Will we be able to create a collective queer archive one day, or should we fix our expectation of connecting with

our own past and building the future to the level of survival as it is imposed by the instruments of power and adopted by the society we live in?

One day, will someone record what we have done, what has happened to us, in order to take care of our lives, our existence, to make the path of those who come after us a little less rough? I would love to have a positive reply to this question. And then it comes to my mind how many people like us are a part of our queer history. I know certain times and moments of this story; my knowledge is as much as what I have witnessed, read, watched and listened to. When we think about the archive, the first thing that comes to our mind is the past. However, it worries me to think that our current struggle will also be “past” one day, and while the works of those who came before us disappear as if they have mixed with the air and water, we and those who come after us will suffer the same fate. Just like looking at my own possessions and asking, “So, what will happen to them?”, I can’t help myself from asking the question “So, what will happen to us?”

Along with the class issue of the practices of creating and preserving a personal archive, the creation of institutional or official archives with heteronormative motives also prevents us from looking at our past and connecting with it. While our existence as millions of LGBTI+, whose all achievements have been usurped, who are prevented from expressing themselves freely, who are attacked not only on the right to live as they wish, but also on the right to life directly, is being questioned every day, I believe it has a healing aspect to feel more compassion for ourselves and our community when we doubt ourselves, and to look at the past with a broader grasp and understanding. Even though some moments still seem funny, cringe or meaningless, finding the connections, some traces of the person I am today, helped me gain a clearer vision not only of my present-self but also of my future-self. 20 years later, it was not easy to return to my diary, which I was sure would not like the person I would meet, to open its cover and start reading the memories of hundreds of days, but I no longer need to hide this black-covered notebook from myself or anyone else.

Seçil Epik

This essay was first published in Turkish and English in the exhibition brochure of [Eksilerek Biriken/Resurgence in Fragments](#), 2023, Istanbul.

TO KEEP FROM CRYING, BUT CHILE, THIS SWORD IS DOUBLE-EDGED!

It is no secret that the world can be a tough place to navigate, and this is especially true for queer people of colour. But in the midst of all the darkness, including loadshedding, there is light to be found. And for many of us these days, this light comes in the form of internet memes. Memes have a unique ability to lift spirits and make us laugh, even when the world around us feels bleak. In South Africa, a number of black queer content creators have made a name for themselves by creating hilarious and relatable memes that capture the joy and resistance of everyday queer life.

Memes have become an integral part of internet culture, acting as a form of shared communication that transcends cultures, languages, and even borders. They can take many forms, from images and videos to text-based jokes, and have evolved into an art form in their own right. Queer memes, in particular, have become a way for queer people to express ourselves, connect with our community, and celebrate our unique experiences.



With the vast amount of content available on these sites, I am still unsure of the reasons I am particularly drawn to self-deprecating memes. Perhaps it is the fact that in a world where queer people often face discrimination and prejudice, this brand of humour has the magical ability to distill shared experiences and challenges into laughter in a way that renders one a little less alone and a lot less peculiar. By playfully mocking the very stereotypes that have historically been used to marginalise us, they become a powerful instrument to reclaim our narrative, exposing the sheer ludicrousness of these age-old misconceptions.

The power of black queer joy found in South African social media streets is nothing short of a digital revolution. It is a collective cry of affirmation, resilience, and absolute love. At the forefront of this movement are content creators who use humour, wit, and their unique experiences to shed light on the beauty and challenges of being black and queer in this country.

@AngeloNthako has secured a special place among my personal favourites. She creates Tiktok content which I find deeply relatable. Within her videos, she fearlessly navigates the realm of masculine-presenting black lesbians, deftly weaving humour with moments of surreal insight.

In one of my favourite videos, she shares her experiences about how the mere presence of masculine-presenting lesbians can challenge and threaten the conventions of heteropatriarchal masculinity. AngeloNthako's delivery is confident and funny and without a doubt, serves as an unwavering source of affirmation. I am certain that it strikes a chord with the many masculine-presenting lesbians fortunate enough to stumble upon it.

Not all of this is innocent. While the power of humour is undeniable, this, however, does not take away from the dangers associated with this particular type of humour as some of us may have felt that subtle boundary where the amusement, rather than lightening the mood may actually reinforce harmful stereotypes. While funny, self-deprecating humour can perpetuate

self-hate and has the potential to do more harm than good, as sometimes what was meant as humorous self-reflection might be seen as an endorsement of harmful beliefs or used to justify discrimination.

We've seen them, right? The "I'm poor but I identify as trans-financial" memes. This kind of humour, outside of the queer community and without the full grasp of the issues, can be harmful as it trivialises the idea of gender identity, minimises it by equating it to a frivolous and superficial concept such as one's financial status, makes light of gender dysphoria, and perpetuates the misconception that transgender people's identity is a choice or a trendy statement.

As we navigate the complexities of being black and queer, the emergence of memes has been a great source of humour and a wonderful way to connect and share experiences. However, when it targets sensitive and deeply personal aspects of an individual's identity, it can be hurtful and harmful. It's essential to be mindful of the impact of jokes and comments on others, especially those who may already face significant challenges in society.

Kgomotso Kgasi
(Programmes Coordinator)





A NIGHT FULL OF STARS

The year-end function is the most anticipated event for the GALA YOUth Forum. This year's took the form of an intimate dinner under the stars. We had a wonderful experience of a 3-course meal by the renowned cook, Siyamthanda Nkinti. From the door was a beautiful set up of flowers and fairy lights. This was a beautiful night filled with young lesbians, gays, trans and many more others of the LGBTQIA+ community. From the curation of soft South African jazz were the trailblazing and soft conversations around the table, energies just gyrating, moments of honour, release and receive. The end of the night was a full circle moment of the young beings coming together and saying grace, being thankful for the beautiful, hard, soft, painful, healing year with many reflecting on their journey and appreciating how far they have come. "I would love to release into everyone's heart growth, love, and healing. I am thankful for the moments I have shared with you all and most importantly to my teacher, ancestors, and God for the grace they held me with, and I am receiving everything beyond reach that I ever wished for." Those were some of the words shared by the YOUth Forum members during the circle of trust. In the end was a toast, a toast to the good life and a happy ending.

Onkokame Seepamore
(Interim YOUth Forum Coordinator)



FEATURED FA

This year, GALA had the privilege of working extensively with Umlilo Ngcobo, a.k.a. Kwaai Diva, the South African musician and multidisciplinary artist. Umlilo was the assigned mentor for our collaborative project with Fak’ugesi African Digital Innovation Festival, Queer Catalyst. She also travelled with us to Belfast to perform at the Outburst Queer Arts Festival. Umlilo was interviewed by Karin Tan at the Tshimolog Precinct, JHB, 08 December 2023. The following text is an edited and abridged version of that interview.

Pronouns: She/Her

Karin Tan (KT): Could you describe your musical trajectory?

Umlilo (U): As a performer and musician? I started off studying media and drama and theatre. The idea was to combine all those things somehow. I don’t know how, but I ended up working in newspapers, radio, and TV. I’ve been a documentary filmmaker, which I wouldn’t do again. But I’ve kind of worn all these hats because I’ve always considered myself very multidisciplinary. But music was always just so personal to me that it trumps all of my other passions.

What is great about music is that it combines a lot of things that I really love, like performance, writing, film, fashion and marketing and media as well. I feel like it kind of grounded me in all those different aspects. So once I felt like, okay, I’ve made enough of a mark as a musician and settled into it enough, it gave me legs to start exploring all these other things. I feel like all of it kind of has the roots of music, but music kind of gave me the opportunity to be all these other things as well.

KT: And can you tell me about the trajectory of the music itself? Like, your influences and how it has changed over time?

U: I think when I started, I made music by myself. Everything is very much self-taught. So, I look at a lot of my older stuff as a very young, experimental me. And I’ve grown so much. I’ve even outgrown the stuff that I’ve released this year. I’m constantly in a state of remixing myself as I’m constantly evolving. In terms of genres, when I started out, I was very influenced by things like kwaito and trap and gqom. I’m still very much influenced by those genres, but it’s developed into something bigger. I feel like my scope of music is so much wider now. There’s more of a classical

approach to music, but also, it’s super urban and super now, but also futuristic and electronic and like, very queer.

I think as queer people, we’re able to be anything and everything. And that’s how I approach my music. And as I evolve as an artist, I love incorporating all the new stuff with the old stuff.

I’m in the process of remixing my old songs. Live shows sound so different from the recorded songs. And people ask me, “oh where can I find this music?” So, I was like, oh what an interesting process, to revisit my old stuff. Remixing it and putting it out there and then also making space for new productions. I guess revisiting and then like, reproducing almost. Reframing completely.

KT: It’s reframing... Perhaps it’s quite an interesting way to love yourself? Love your old self? Love your iterations of self?

U: Yeah and nurture yourself. The weird thing that I realised, as a writer especially- one of the compliments that a lot of people say to me is that “Wow, you’re such a good songwriter.” I never thought of myself as a great songwriter. I only see it now because I can do so much when remixing of my old songs. I feel like they’re universally good songs, so if you have a good basis then you can do anything with it. I feel like I do make timeless music. I feel like a lot of stuff that I make; you can listen to in 10 years’ time and it still wouldn’t sound so weird, or dated.

KT: That just made me think, there is this narrative that we hear a lot, especially for queer people of colour, of being ashamed of your younger self, right? Obviously, that’s a bit of an injustice to ourselves, but is there some kind of parallel between how you remix your old music and how you think of your younger self?

U: I think so. I’ve lost a lot, like, my parents are no longer here. I’ve lost a lot of things that represent a time that I will never get back. So, part of the healing that I’ve done in the last three to four years is that I’ve had to nurture my inner child.

What I learnt is that our inner child, or who we were before, travels with us a lot of the time. Sometimes that is where our triggers come from. Often, we think that we evolve and then leave that person behind, but the versions of you are still there in one way or another. Subconsciously or not, it is my quest to go back and love that person as they are and make them proud. And not giving myself a hard

UMLILO

time, because we all were children, and we didn't know what we were doing. So, there's always a space for evolution.

I know the younger versions of me would look at me now and be like, "Whoa". I want to supersede all their expectations because I know that heals them and it heals me.

It is difficult for me to look at pictures of myself, even from like, five years ago. But part of it is letting it go and be like, yes, I was a different person then. Who doesn't change? It would be more of a problem if I was the same person every year. It's such a great thing that we evolve and change, and we age and become wise, and we mature. So, for me, part of that maturity is just to always do stuff that would make that inner child super proud or super happy because they are the reason why I got into what I'm doing now. It was their curiosity, the love of all things pretty and arty and creative. So, it's also trying to find all the good parts as well. The younger version of me was so daring and rebellious. I didn't give a fuck about anyone. And I love that. And sometimes as an adult you get too laser focused on who you're becoming and what people think.

I love tapping into the younger version of me that didn't care so much and just did the things that they loved. So, there's so much of our younger selves that we take for granted, but there are things we can learn. I want to combine some of that with who I am now then that's an amazing combination.

KT: That sounds like you're like collaborating with yourself.

How has that rebellion manifested now?

U: That rebellion is a bit more focused now. It's a bit more of an institutional rebellion, I would say. I find myself in rooms and cities and countries that my younger self didn't have the opportunity of being in. But I find the struggle is still the same. I've always had a quest for justice and equality. I'll always have a quest for human rights. That's intrinsically who I am. When you translate my old middle name, it means freedom. This is what my parents named me. I feel like they already determined what my quest was going to be. I feel like my rebellion when I was younger was against authority. I hated anything that puts you in a box and limits you. So school was a struggle, even university, working in an insti-

tution was a struggle.

But I work for myself now, through so many collaborations, through other people. I feel like that's a productive way of rebelling because it's rebelling through making art and collaborating with people in a way that I feel like there is actual, real, tangible change. For me, it's a more productive way of rebelling against the system.

KT: You know, you've kind of answered something for me. Something that I took away from the Outburst Queer Arts Festival are the conversations we had about Arts' role in activism.

I often feel quite disillusioned with the purpose and efficacy of art. But while we were there, the work, because it's queer, because they care, because they approach life and art with a queer lens and with care, it seems like it is doing something.

And I feel like you've also kind of reminded me that art can be a powerful tool of rebellion. Sometimes it's useful, sometimes not. But this is why art in queer activism is important. Because it's a space that we can visually, vocally, and maybe not entirely freely, but more freely, challenge the institutions that maintain the status quo.

Is there anything you might want to add?

U: Yeah, I was watching Beyoncé's Renaissance film. One of the things that they were saying was that they had to visualise their own world and create that world from a vision. And I think the beauty of artists is how you can go from an idea of something that was in your brain to a fully formed world.

I think as human beings, sometimes we underestimate our power of manifestation. There's such an amazing power of creation in all of us. The reason why we've even come this far as a queer community at large- I know everything is still at different stages but if I speak for South Africa- is that we can say we've come a very long way from where we started. Part of that was because of people who dreamed of this reality for us, who were the visionaries of the past. I feel like it is our duty to continue that for the next generation.

KT: I wanted to ask you about, kwaai diva and umlilo. What was your thinking behind these words? How did they become names?

U: So, umlilo means fire in Zulu. We were in Cape Town at the time and everyone would be like, "Fire! That was fire!" I had

this manager, and we were looking to change my name because I was going as Siya Is Your Anarchist at the time. It was a very different kind of genre of music. I called it post-apocalyptic pop and I was moving on from that.

So Umlilo came about from this fiery performance. Fire has a way of bringing us life and warmth, but it can be super destructive and chaotic. So it kind of became my alter ego.

I'm a trans woman- I'm transitioning- or have transitioned- and I've taken on Umlilo as my personal name and my stage name at the same time. It's merged all of what I am. Kwaai Diva is now becoming more of the stage persona.

I think Kwaai Diva is more of a fan given name. It kind of took a life of its own. And I still haven't fully developed it, but I'm also excited. In the next couple of years we're gonna see Kwaai Diva really blossom.

Kwaai is an interesting word. It's funny because if you look it up, it's like, strict or very aggressive. That's one meaning, but the street meaning is actually fierce. So that is the name that I got when I was living in Cape Town. It's Cape Town slang. Right? In Joburg you won't hear a lot of people say that. So, it can be very confusing for people. But in essence in the street slang is like, Cool. Fierce. Yes! You know?

But in an old sense if you say that's a kwaai woman, my grandmother will see it as like, it's strict- like a strict teacher. But I embrace all the meanings.

KT: And then also, Kwaito. Which- it was so nice to hear that influence in your music. It's a very specific sort of South African sound. Which was very cool to hear in Belfast.

U: Yeah. And that church was so perfect. It really encouraged me to keep doing what I'm doing because it's amazing when people that you've just met hear the sounds of where you come from, and they kind of have an idea of where you come from. I never used to see myself as like an ambassador of where I come from. But I wear it with pride now because I'm performing overseas a lot of the times. I become very aware of my South Africanness. As much as I can be critical about my country, I can also be like, look, I actually do love where I come from. And the people here are super dope. And we've done some dope things. It makes me appreciate South Africa a lot more when I'm outside. Sometimes when I'm within, it's hard to see. But sometimes it takes just leaving home for a little bit to see that we are a bunch of cool people.



We are hiring:

Administration Officer

Applications close
Sunday 07 January 2024

gala.co.za



We are seeking a candidate who is dynamic, politically aware, organised, meticulous and professional in carrying out administration duties to a high standard, in order to help the organisation achieve its goals. The incumbent should be committed to the development and promotion of human rights, especially within LGBTQIA+ communities in South Africa.

The Position:

The Office Administrator is responsible for maintaining the GALA office by organising office operations and procedures (which includes office maintenance), preparing payroll and project budgets, controlling all official correspondence, couriers, and document storage, designing filing systems, reviewing and approving supply req-

uisitions, and conducting clerical functions (such as taking minutes). The Office Administrator reports to the GALA director.

Follow [this link](#) to find out more about the position and to access the application form.

Applications close on Sunday 07 January 2024.

CLOWEY'S END OF YEAR PRAYER

Father God, I thank you for yet another year of your saving grace and for being with us throughout this year. I pray for peace all over the world. Please guide and protect our loved ones during this Festive Season. May the blessings of the almighty God be with you always.

Amen

I take this this opportunity to wish you and your family a pleasant Festive Season and a prosperous New year.
Happy holidays!

Clowey Stevenson
(Outgoing Administration Officer)

Donate to GALA

The GALA Archive is a living archive. This means that we never stop collecting.

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Your contribution matters.

Please contact our Archives Coordinator, Linda Chernis: linda.chernis@wits.ac.za

Donations of books with queer content are welcome additions to the Cooper-Sparks Library that is housed at the GALA offices.

GALA is a non-profit organisation that relies solely on donor funding. Any and all donations are welcome.

You can donate to:

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