

“District Six Is Really My Gay Vicinity”

The Kewpie Photographic Collection

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all photos from the Kewpie Collection, courtesy the GALA Queer Archives, Johannesburg, SA

In recent years, the representation of queer identities in South Africa has become associated among international audiences with the work of the visual activist Zanele Muholi, whose photographs celebrate the diversity and resilience of LGBTQI+ individuals in the face of homophobia and violence (Salley 2012). South Africa’s constitution, adopted in 1996, guarantees its citizens freedom from harassment and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. In the years following 1996, legal battles were successfully fought to revoke homophobic legislation and entrench sexual equality in law. Nonetheless, as Muholi’s work reveals, there exists a disjuncture between legal rights and the lived experience of LGBTQI+ people, many of whom experience prejudice and violence. While the attention Muholi’s work has received is therefore necessary, there remains a need to trace the wider histories and various modes of queer self-representations in South Africa.¹ Sexual norms exist in a state of flux, and same-sex sexual practices have been subject to different degrees of repression, resistance, and tolerance over time as well as between localities (Laskar 2017: 219–29). In this article, we examine a personal photographic collection that reflects a local and temporally specific tolerance of same-sex sexual practices and gender nonconformity. The photographs,

which date between the 1950s and 1980s, belonged to Kewpie (1941–2012; Fig. 1), a hairdresser and drag queen who was born and lived in District Six, Cape Town.²

By the mid twentieth century District Six had developed as a multiracial working-class urban area with a distinctive cultural identity. In 1950, two years after it was elected to power, the Nationalist Government passed the Population Registration Act, one of the foundational acts of apartheid. The act enabled the state to compile a population register in which every subject was assigned a racial classification that defined them as either “white,” “coloured,” or “native” (Horrell 1978: 16). This process of racial classification facilitated the implementation of another cornerstone of apartheid, the Group Areas Act of 1950, which allowed the government to split urban populations into separate racially defined residential areas. On February 11, 1966, District Six was declared a “white group area” and was scheduled for demolition—a protracted and contested process that was only completed by the early 1980s. Residents of District Six, the majority of whom were classified as “coloured,” were forcibly resettled to segregated residential developments across the Cape Flats. The trauma resulting from forced removals and the destruction of communities like District Six continues to reverberate in South Africa to this day.

Through an exploration of the Kewpie Photographic Collection, we present a reading of queer life in District Six which shows a thriving queer community that was integrated within the broader District Six community, supporting historical narratives of District Six as a place where diversity and tolerance was valued. In making this argument, we focus on a particular type of collection—namely, a personal photographic collection. The existing literature on photography in District Six has highlighted a diverse range of coexisting practices. The demolition of District Six drew the attention of a number of documentary photographers who found in the District a utopian vision of nonracialism as well as a microcosm of apartheid’s violence. Many of these photographers were outsiders, while others lived in or had family connections to the district. Their corpus of work has received both scholarly and curatorial attention (Smith and Rasool 2001; Hallett and McKenzie 2007;

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particular attention to the materiality, storage, and reproduction of photographs in the collection. Our research on the Kewpie Collection complements this existing literature but is also unique in that it is the first explicitly queer personal photographic collection in South Africa to receive scholarly attention.

The Kewpie Collection allows us to reappraise images that might otherwise be dismissed as “snapshots” or homogenized under the noncategory of the vernacular and to show that they are rich in personal meaning, intention, and cultural significance and have long histories of circulation and display. The context, use, and function of the photographs in social processes has been critical in determining their meaning and efficacy as carriers of personal and collective memories. Instead of reading the visual content of photographs in isolation, we analyze their use and circulation; in other words, we consider what photographs do. Their use and circulation is also linked to, and to some extent determined by, the materiality of a photograph as a physical object and its corresponding capacity for provoking emotional and embodied responses (Pollen 2016: 11–14; Edwards and Hart 2004). In taking such an approach we are inspired by the District Six Museum itself, which, in its use of photography in its displays, exhibitions, collections, and publications, has highlighted the “social lives” of photographs from personal and family collections as well as their shifting meanings, material forms, and emotional resonances (Smith and Rasool 2001: 142).

Newbury 2013; Thomas 2014).

Curators and scholars have also researched the archives of photographic studios in Cape Town that were popular with residents of District Six (Nwafor 2010; Bennett 2008; O’Connell 2015a, 2017; Frieslaar 2011). While the Kewpie Collection contains a number of studio photographs, the bulk of the collection consists of photographs whose authorship is unknown. Such collections are sometimes undervalued due to hierarchies of taste and “professionalism” that are applied to the photographic field. Despite this, personal photographic collections of former District Six residents have received attention. The District Six Museum has made exemplary use of personal photographic collections in both its exhibitions and permanent displays (Smith and Rasool 2001). Moreover, recent research by Siona O’Connell has explored personal photographs and family albums belonging to former residents of District Six (2014, 2015b). Elsewhere in South Africa, Tamsyn Adams (2018) has studied a personal photographic collection belonging to a farming family from the Kwa-Zulu Natal Midlands, paying



1 “This was June in winter time in the city. Taken by one of the movie snaps.” Photo by an unknown Movie Snaps photographer, June/July 1967.

2 “A very, very good gay friend of mine. Her name is Kay Kendall, hairdresser.” Photographer unknown.



3 Woodstock. Olivia Bromwell (tea girl, in glasses, who stayed with Kewpie) together with some of the guys she worked with. Photographer unknown.

4 Kewpie with Mark and Sally, the Biggs's children. Photographer unknown.

THE KEWPIE PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

There are around 700 photographic prints in the collection, as well as accompanying negatives, and the material spans the period 1950 to the early 1980s.³ The collection is held at GALA Queer Archives, a center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) culture and education in South Africa and the African continent. GALA Queer Archives purchased the photographs from Kewpie in 1998, having been made aware of the photographs by Jack Lewis, a filmmaker who made two documentaries about Kewpie (Lewis 1997, 2000). The vast majority of photographs in the collection have captions that Kewpie provided during the accessioning process in 1999, and most of the photographs have been digitized. On the surfaces of some of the photographs there are written annotations which predate Kewpie's recorded captions for GALA Queer Archives. These annotations, written by Kewpie or friends, provide complementary and occasionally contradictory information.

The collection is a personal collection held within an institutional archive, and this has implications for how we understand the photographs. The meaning and "evidential" status of photography is determined by its archival framing and the power relations which constitute the archive, but also by the subsequent and often unpredictable ways in which they are used, reproduced, and circulated by users of the archive (Sekula 1986: 56-67; Sekula 1999: 163-6; Tagg 1988: 63; Mittman and Wilder 2016). From recorded conversations with Kewpie conducted by Jack Lewis and Graeme Reid, it is clear that some of the photographs sold to GALA Queer Archives were originally arranged in albums.⁴ It is not clear whether they were removed from these albums before or





DISTRICT SIX AND A NOTE ON IDENTITIES AND TERMINOLOGIES

The area referred to as District Six was originally known as Kanalarorp and was renamed when Cape Town was divided into six districts in 1867. From the late 1860s onwards it developed as a multiracial working-class community located next to the city center. The district provided the city with a casual labor pool whose residents lived in close proximity to the docks, the railroads, and the fishing and manufacturing industries (Bickford-Smith 1990: 35–38). It was home to many languages, and in time its residents developed a distinctive dialect characterized by linguistic switching between English and localized Afrikaans (McCormick 1990). By the 1950s the District itself provided much of what people needed in their day-to-day lives—there were shops, markets, cinemas, schools, and hairdressers. There were significant problems in the district, including overcrowding, poor housing conditions, poverty, and gangsterism. Having said this, former residents have recalled with pride the bonds of care and reciprocity that existed between residents of different religious, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and have testified to the existence of a

after their acquisition by GALA Queer Archives, but this change means that some potential meanings, which were contingent on prior forms of arrangement and display, will have been lost. That said, we argue that the photographs in the Kewpie collection, understood as material objects, still bear physical traces of their uses and circulation which allow us to understand something of their social lives as physical items rich in personal meaning and affective power (Smith and Rasool 2001: 142).⁵ Kewpie’s captions constitute an authorial intervention that remains present in the collection in its current form and which anchors the range of possible meanings connoted by the photographs (Barthes 1977: 39–40). Catherine Hobbs (2001: 127–29) has argued that personal archives present an opportunity to explore issues such as self-projection and personal memorializing. Following Hobbs (2001: 129), our readings of the collection aim to show some of the multiple ways Kewpie and her friends were able to “construct their vision of their world.”

strong sense of community that existed alongside a freedom for individual and subcultural expression (McCormick 2002: 36–50).

Although the District was home to a heterogeneous population, the majority of its residents were classified as “coloured.” Zimitri



⁵ “The Rutger Street family that loved the gays staying around there”: Aysa, Carmen, Leslie Caron, Mona in Rutger Street. Photographer unknown.

⁶ Koggel’s Bay: Chekki and Kewpie, Carmen, Koelie (Kulsum, Sammy’s sister). Photographer unknown.



7 Brian and Kewpie (in their 20s) in Rutger Street. Photographer unknown.

8 Kewpie in her late teens wearing a fashionable hairstyle of the time. Van Kalker Studio, December, 1964.

Erasmus (2001: 17–23) has criticized the ways in which “coloured” identities have been discussed with reference to “racial miscegenation” or “race mixture,” arguing that such terms are drawn from discourses of eugenics that wrongly assume the prior existence of “pure races.” Erasmus (2001: 17–23) instead defined “coloured” identity as a creolized cultural formation created within conditions of slavery and colonial encounter. This is not to say that “coloured” identity is singular—there have in fact been multiple articulations of “coloured” identity over time and place which have been shaped by state actors as well as the dispossessed themselves (Erasmus 2001: 23). Following the Population Registration Act of 1950, “coloured” identity was institutionalized within the legal structure of apartheid and was negatively defined as comprising all of those who were generally considered to be neither “white” nor “native.”⁶ Further government proclamations and amendments passed in 1951, 1959, and 1961 introduced a number of subdivisions within the “coloured” category (Horrell 1978: 16).

Kewpie was born in District Six in 1941. At the age of six, Kewpie’s school principal introduced Kewpie 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 (Lewis 1997). Kewpie was a talented dancer and was invited to study overseas at age 14, but her father rejected the invitation. In the mid-1950s Kewpie started going to gay parties and performing at shows, becoming part of a queer community of individuals in District Six who were often referred to as “mof-fies” by contemporaneous observers. Members of this community sometimes identified as gay men, sometimes as women, and in other cases rejected binary gender categories entirely. Moreover,



it is likely that the way people identified shifted over time and within different contexts. It is difficult to say with any certainty how Kewpie would have chosen to be identified in terms of gender. However, both Kewpie and her friends tended to use feminine pronouns and names for each other, as shown by the caption provided by Kewpie for Figure 2: “A very, very good gay friend of mine. Her name is Kay Kendall, hairdresser.” Following Kewpie and her friends, we use feminine pronouns for Kewpie in this article, without seeking to infer that this reflected any fixed gender identity on the part of Kewpie or her friends.

There are a range of historical meanings for the word “moffie” in South Africa, including “male homosexual,” “effeminate male” and “transvestite.”⁹ In Cape Town, the term is synonymous with a gay community and performance culture that developed in multiracial urban areas of the city, most notably in District Six (Pacey 2014: 113). “Moffies” were highly visible in District Six through their

performances at “moffie” shows and their attendance at “moffie” concerts and balls in elaborate drag. They also played a prominent part in the Cape Minstrel Carnival, or Kaapse Klopse, an annual series of events in which inner city public space was appropriated by working-class performance troupes (Jeppie 1990: 69–70). Criticized by some for inscribing stereotypes of racial difference, the carnival was also a space where normal hierarchical relations were temporarily inverted and where repressive societal norms could be breached (Lease 2017: 134; Jeppie 1990: 69–70). Carnival troupes commonly included a “moffie” performer at the front of their parade, and the captains of carnival troupes valued “moffies” for the audiences they attracted and their symbolic role as embodiments of transgression (Martin 1999: 16–17; Jeppie 1990: 82).

The term “moffie” can be highly offensive, especially in its contemporary usage. However, there is evidence to suggest that in mid-twentieth century Cape Town it was not necessarily used in a pejorative way. As previously mentioned, the term was associated with a performance culture that was popular with wide-ranging audiences and was a celebrated part of the cultural repertoire of inner city Cape Town. As Kewpie remembered: “at that time we weren’t called as gays, we were called as moffies then. But it was beautifully said, not abruptly” (Lewis 1997). Furthermore, many

9 Piper Laurie. “She had the photograph taken at Van Kalker in Woodstock.” Van Kalker Studio, date unknown.

10 Darling Street. “I was on my way to work in the morning at Salon Kewpie in Kensington.” Photograph by an unknown Movie Snaps photographer, June/July 1967.





11 Christmas lunch in Rutger Street (l-r seated Kewpie, Carmen, Hayley Mills, Mitzy, Brigitte; unknown person at the back, possibly Miss Caron). Photographer unknown.

12 "My Brian." Brian at 19/20 years old. Photographer unknown.

individuals from the queer community of District Six embraced the term as a mark of distinction and were proud to identify themselves as "moffies." Speaking retrospectively in Jack Lewis' documentary on Kewpie, Charles Arendse said "it was only talented people that they called moffies" (Lewis 2000).

However, this pattern of identification was by no means uniform and varied over time. At the annual election of the "Queen of the Moffies" in Cape Town in 1964, contestants were asked "what would you do as Queen to improve the moffie kingdom?" Nancy Acacia answered: "Ban the word moffie. We much prefer to be called queer" (*Drum* 1964: 42). The term is further complicated by the fact that heterosexual musicians and dancers sometimes assumed the persona of the "moffie" in variety performances, often as a means of deriding transgressive sexual and gender identities and "recouping convention" (Mainguard 2003: 31–32). While acknowledging the multiple meanings and widespread use of the word "moffie," where possible we use the term "queer" to refer to Kewpie and her friends and use quotation marks to indicate where "moffie" is used in its historical sense.

During the 1960s, Cape Town was viewed as more tolerant of same-sex relationships than the rest of South Africa—for example, anti-masquerading laws, enforced elsewhere in the country, were applied less frequently in Cape Town—and there was a trend of migration of gay men to the city from other regions (Chetty 2012: 119–25). This tolerance was at odds with political developments nationally, as during the 1960s the apartheid government, increasingly taking the role of a "puritan police state," attempted to pass an amendment to the Immorality Act of 1957 that would have made





13 In Mrs. Biggs's yard in Kensington.
Photographer unknown.

male and female homosexuality—that is, the sexual identity of an individual rather than the sexual acts themselves—an offence punishable by a prison sentence (Hoad 2005: 16). This proposed legislation followed a much-publicized moral panic. A vocal political campaign succeeded in reducing the scope of the 1969 amendment, but it still criminalized gay sex. Against this backdrop of the policing of both sexual and racial bodies, Kewpie and friends lived openly in ways that defied expectations, often supported (or at the very least tolerated) by the broader District Six community.

PRESS REPRESENTATION OF “MOFFIES”

The visual and textual representation of District Six's queer communities is often associated with the sensationalized press coverage that appeared in the pages of *Drum* magazine and the *Golden City Post* (Chetty 2012). The frequency of photographically illustrated

articles in these publications reflect a popular fascination with the figure of the “moffie” (Chetty 2012). Such was the extent of the press' interest that the *Golden City Post* actually sponsored the “Moffie Queen” competitions held at the Kismet Theatre, a cinema in Athlone, and on occasion provided food and alcohol for drag parties in exchange for access (Chetty 2012: 119–20). Although such stories and photographs reflected some of the glamor and excitement of these events, showing Kewpie and friends in their most elaborate drag, embodying the fabulous personas of film stars, they are predominantly characterized by a depiction of queer life as freakish and marginal. Moralizing discourses were even more pronounced in news items and profile features that focused specifically on the supposedly tragic lives of queer individuals. Such profiles, presented in a pseudo-sociological guise, invariably portrayed “moffies” as social outcasts and figures of pathos, leading bleak and desperate lives. In fact, some of the most sensational news stories were entirely invented by magazine staff (Chetty 2012: 118–19).

In contrast to this skewed vision of their lives, the Kewpie Collection shows that Kewpie and other queer individuals were accepted members of the wider community, valued for much more than just their talents as performers. They can be seen socializing with a wide range of people, including work colleagues (Fig. 3) and families (Fig. 4), both in and out of drag. They were not pariah figures but were accepted by people outside of a narrowly bounded queer community, as is evident in a number of photographs. Figure 5 shows two openly queer friends of Kewpie's,



Carmen and Leslie Caron, happily posing with a family that lived on Rutger Street, where Kewpie lived for many years. This scene of intimacy is reinforced by Kewpie's caption describing the family, who she remembered as "The Rutger Street family that loved the gays staying around there." Many queer people, including Kewpie, found accommodation and economic security by living with nuclear families headed by a heterosexual couple, where they were

treated as daughters and sisters. They provided childcare and domestic labor while the parents were out at work and their gender and sexual identities were accepted (Lewis 1997, 2000). The photographs also negate the idea that queer people led miserable lives. The photographs, and supporting evidence in oral testimony, show Kewpie and friends going on social excursions across the city and building intimate friendships as part of supportive communities, just like other District Six residents (Fig. 6).

It does need to be acknowledged that this tolerance was not universal and some queer people experienced discrimination and harassment, as well as disapproval from family members. Queer people were sometimes the targets of public humiliation, with Lena Horne, a contestant in the "Queen of the Moffies" competition, requesting "that all queers are respected and not made a mockery of in the streets" (*Drum* 1964: 42). Although some residents may have disapproved of "moffies," perhaps even have scorned and derided them, it appears that ultimately they were accepted as an intrinsic part of the fabric of life in District Six (Pacey 2014: 114). As famous drag queen and hairdresser Piper Laurie recalled: "I think the people already got so used to me. [J]a, everybody knew Piper, can't be somebody else. And funnily enough, nobody bothered me."⁸

However, Pacey argues that this tolerance extended only to queer individuals who assumed the feminized persona of the "moffie"; it was not an acceptance of homosexuality per se, but rather an acceptance of (male) homosexuality within a narrowly defined social role (Pacey 2014: 114).⁹ From what we know about Kewpie's life we can also add that same-sex relationships were tolerated but only when they assumed specific forms; in this case that of a romantic partnership between a "moffie" and a male-presenting



14 Kewpie on a neighbour's stoep in Invery Place. Photographer unknown.

15 Samantha "with a floor mat over her as a cape"; in Rutger Street; a neighbor's child, Yusuf (Aysa's son), is watching. Photographer unknown.

gay man. For many years, Kewpie lived with her partner Brian Armino, whose family accepted Kewpie as a woman and therefore an eligible partner (Fig. 7).¹⁰ The qualified nature of such tolerance reinforces one of the guiding principles of queer African studies; namely, that there are formulations of sexuality and gender which are specific to African localities and temporalities. As such, they require consideration on their own terms, rather than using frameworks from the West (Ncube 2018).

OVERLAPPING PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES IN THE KEWPIE COLLECTION

The photographs in the Kewpie Collection were taken by a variety of people. With the vast majority of the photographs, it is difficult to discern authorship. However, several of the photographs bear the stamp of a local photographer or photographic studio. Often these photographs were commissioned to capture a particularly stylish look. For example, Kewpie had her photograph taken at the Van Kalker Studio in December 1964, sporting a fashionable hairstyle (Fig. 8 and cover). Several of the portraits in the Kewpie collection were taken at this studio, which was located on Victoria

Street in Woodstock, a multiracial inner-city area neighboring District Six.¹¹ The studio, which was established by a Dutch immigrant in 1937, produced quality photographic portraits and was highly esteemed by its many clients. Oral histories conducted by the District Six Museum reveal that, for former residents of District Six and surrounding areas, having your photograph taken at the Van Kalker was an exciting and memorable occasion. Photos commemorated rites of passage, such as weddings, and remain cherished in family collections, where they act as both sites of memory and tools for storytelling (Bennett 2008: 120–29).

Nwafor has argued that, by commissioning portraits from the Van Kalker studio, clients constructed dignified self-images that counteracted the reductive identities imposed on them by state racial classification (Nwafor 2010). This reading is supported by individual photographs in Kewpie's collection, for example the Van Kalker portrait of Kewpie's friend Piper Laurie, who was also a hairdresser and drag queen (Fig. 9).¹² Piper's makeup and hair in this photograph are immaculate. She chose to be photographed reading a crime novel, not only to signify erudition, but also to provide an opportunity to show off her manicured nails and ring. The photograph can be read as an attempt by Piper to highlight her intellect, the pride she took in her appearance, and her skills as a beautician and serves as a testament to her ability to lead a glamorous life despite the deprivations endured by those classified as "coloured."

An equally fashionable but less formal mode of commercial photography were the outdoor street portraits produced by the Movie Snaps studio.¹³ Figure 10 shows Kewpie walking along Darling Street, on her way to work at Salon Kewpie in Kensington.

16 Sodja and Kewpie getting off the coach at the Ambassador Club. "It was like a stage coach with horses on." Photographer unknown.





17 Olivia, Kewpie, Patti (back, l-r), Sue Thompson, Brigitte, Gaya, Mitzy (front, l-r) in Sir Lowry Road. Photographer unknown.

18 Kewpie in Trafalgar Park in District Six. Photographer unknown.



Although seemingly a candid photograph, the image corresponds to an established Movie Snaps formula. Located on Darling Street, Movie Snaps' photographers would draw a chalk line on the pavement, assume a fixed distance from the point, focus the lens, and set the depth of field accordingly. As pedestrians crossed the chalk line, the photographer would press the camera shutter. They were then offered a ticket, which could be redeemed in exchange for their portrait at the Movie Snaps kiosk a few days later, after paying a fee (O'Connell 2015a: 31–32). From the early 1960s the studio began employing photographers who were classified as "coloured," many of whom lived in District Six and Kensington (O'Connell 2017: 225–56). This included the photographer Billy Biggs (b. 1928), who was the husband of Kewpie's close friend Sylvia. Kewpie lived with the Biggs family at one stage and was regularly photographed by Biggs at a variety of social occasions.¹⁴ Indeed, as Kewpie recalled, "the majority of the Movie Snaps photographers knew the gays as well. You know, going shopping and walking around in town."¹⁵ Although in the image Kewpie appears coolly unaware of the photographer's presence, this was probably illusion crafted for the camera, and her aloofness, along with her stylish attire, suggest careful orchestration.

Kewpie had numerous studio portraits of friends in her collection (Fig. 9) that were gifted to or exchanged with her. The presence of these portraits is a reminder that these photographs, and indeed many others in the collection, were material objects that passed through a number of hands. Sophie Feyder (2014) has studied portraits commissioned by young women in photographic studios in



a township in the Benoni municipal area during the 1950s and 1960s. She charted the circulation of the photographs in courtship rituals and among friends as well as their assemblage within photographic albums—practices that she argues were a means of cementing social networks. In a similar way, many of the photographs in Kewpie’s collection were intentionally gifted and circulated within social networks (including queer social networks) in order to establish and consolidate friendships and romantic relationships.

With the vast majority of photographs in the collection, especially those of everyday life and social outings in and around District Six, it is difficult to confer authorship. When providing captions for the images, Kewpie explained that the photographs were taken by friends.¹⁶ In only two instances do the available captions indicate the specific friends who took particular photos. Such photographs might be glibly described as snapshots by some observers. Snapshots are often conceived of as the result of a mechanical process, without any conscious purpose or design on the part of the photographer, and as



19 Kewpie doing splits at Standfontein Beach in the late 1970s. Photographer unknown.

20 Kewpie (center back), Brigitte (far right), Margaret (sitting center front) and the “Seapoint girls” on the site of a demolished building off Invery Place. Photographer unknown.



21 Kewpie in Invery Place. Photographer unknown.

22 Kewpie in front of Salon Kewpie, c. late 1960s. Photographer unknown.

a result are seen to lack symbolic power or emotional resonance (Pollen 2016: 157–61). Furthermore, the simplicity of the technology with which most so-called snapshots are produced has been assumed to reflect a corresponding simplicity of intention. Parallel but equally patronizing interpretations celebrate snapshots as an authentic, unmediated view of everyday life, an objective historical document or a portal to the unconscious, uncorrupted by previzualization, contrivance, or postproduction (Pollen 2016: 159–61). Such assumptions have often been at work in the art world’s appropriation of so-called snapshots as exemplars of an “anti-aesthetic,” but these simplistic approaches overlook a range of meanings and primitivize the photographers and subjects. As Annabella Pollen has argued, all photographs involve selection, intention, and choice. As long as the purpose and intention behind “snapshots” are ignored, the richness of individual meaning and emotion in personal photographs will remain overlooked (Pollen 2016: 160–61).

The unattributed photographs in Kewpie’s collection do not correspond to such interpretations of the “snapshot,” nor are the dismissive connotations often latent in this term applicable. They are in fact often carefully composed, expressive, stylish, and rich in meaning. A photograph of Kewpie and friends enjoying Christmas lunch is sophisticated in its use of available light to silhouette the arms and profiles of Kewpie and Brigitte Bardot as they engage in a toast, providing a compositional point of focus which extends outwards to the illuminated spread and the distribution of guests surrounding the table (Fig. 11). By performing this ritual gesture at the moment the camera shutter was pressed, Kewpie, Brigitte, and the photographer collectively decide to communicate and commemorate the celebratory nature of the event. Kewpie’s captions





23 “This is a photograph of me and Brian, the late Brian.” Taken at Piper’s House, on their way to the Luxurama Cinema. Photographer unknown.

for images of Brian Armino also reveal that the photographs in her collection hold personal meanings and emotional resonances that are easily overlooked if they are dismissed as unremarkable snapshots. The highly personal significances of these images are intrinsically linked to their use, or in other words, their intended purpose: namely, to commemorate and celebrate milestones in Kewpie and Brian’s relationship and, later, to serve as a poignant reminder of a lost love (Fig. 12). The material signs of wear and tear also suggest this dog-eared photograph has been extensively handled, viewed, and displayed and, along with Kewpie’s poignant caption, “My Brian,” hints at its social life as a material and affective object to which Kewpie had an embodied and enduring relationship.

Some of the photographs in the collection were taken by Billy Biggs. In an interview he explained that he “lived by the camera,” and his wife’s friendship with Kewpie meant he often photographed Kewpie.¹⁷ Biggs has subsequently lost his vision, so it has not been possible to establish which of the photographs in the collection are his work, although he was almost certainly the photographer for pictures of the Biggs family holidays and Christmas celebrations. As well as working for the Movie Snaps studio, he took photographs of revellers in the nightclubs of District Six and was commissioned to take portraits of people and families in his customer’s homes and gardens.¹⁸ Not only does this knowledge cast doubt on the assumption that the unattributed photographs in Kewpie’s personal collection were “amateur snapshots,” it also serves to undermine the sharp divide often assumed to exist between amateur and professional practice (themselves very elastic, mobile, and interdependent terms) by showing that many photographs that

might be dismissed as snapshots due to their assemblage within personal collections may in fact have been produced by professional photographers operating outside the confines of an indoor studio or using their professional skills in a personal capacity (Pollen 2016: 153–55).

Kewpie and the subjects of her photos were skilled and practiced in posing for the camera, presenting idealized images of themselves by drawing on established modes of self-presentation and cosmopolitan trends in fashion photography (Figs. 13–14). Kewpie and friends often staged their own fashion-inspired photo-shoots, posing in their favorite places, in both District Six and surrounding areas. The resulting photographs show they were comfortable striking exuberant and playfully suggestive poses in public with friends and neighbors looking on, reinforcing the perception that an environment of tolerance existed in District Six (Fig. 15). In so doing, they participated in the authorship of their photos by drawing on a repertoire of bodily gestures. Such poses show a level of previsualization on the part of the photographic subjects and negate the idea that these were mindless snapshots. As Billy Biggs recalled, Kewpie often wanted to be photographed in ways that highlighted her physical flexibility and her identity as a performer: “Kewpie always wanted me to take her when she’s happy. Like in Maitland [doing] the splits, sitting on the ground with her legs like this. Sy was goed da in [She was good at that].”¹⁹

Just as the photographs show that Kewpie and her friends were comfortable expressing themselves openly in parts of Cape Town, Kewpie’s performances were also highly public affairs that took place within clubs and on the streets. For example, Figure 16



24 “Miss Capucine & Miss Andrews in their new Movie; “Girls will be Boys, Boys will be Girls ‘73.” Photographer unknown.

shows Kewpie dressed as Marie Antoinette with her friend Sodia Arthurman for a ball held at the Ambassador’s Club in 1967. They paraded through the streets of District Six in a horse-drawn carriage (visible in the background) before arriving at the ball, where they waved at onlookers in the street from a balcony above.²⁰ Other locations where queer individuals appeared able and unafraid to express themselves include the busy Sir Lowry Road (Fig. 17), Trafalgar Park (Fig. 18), various beaches in the Cape Town area, and also parts of the city center. Significantly, Kewpie and her friends regularly wore bikinis in a range of public spaces, expressing themselves openly (Fig. 19). The conjunction of pose and location takes on a particularly poignant, even defiant resonance in a series of photographs taken in the ruins of a demolished building off Invery Place, cleared as part of the forced removals of District Six (Figs. 20–21).

AN INTEGRATED PART OF LOCAL LIFE: HAIRDRESSING, CINEMA, AND COSMOPOLITANISM

Kewpie had a long and successful career in hairdressing that began in her teenage years, when she started doing her neighbors’ hair at her parent’s home in Osborne Street (Lewis 1997). She later underwent training at Salon Andre at 39, Upper Darling Street in District Six (Lewis 2000). By 1966 Kewpie was running her first salon, Salon Kewpie, at 51 Fifth Avenue in Kensington,²¹ which later moved to the nearby Sunderland Street (*Cape Times* 1966:

690; Lewis 1997).²² Around 1975 Kewpie again moved premises within Kensington, opening Yugene’s Hairtique, on the corner of Sixth Street and Fifth Avenue, which remained open into the late 1990s (*Cape Times* 1975: 875).

Several of the photographs in the collection show Kewpie at work in her salons, providing an insight into the world of hairdressing in the city. Many gay men were employed in the hairdressing industry in Cape Town, and some of the most famous drag queens, including Kay Kendall, Piper Laurie, and Kewpie, were also famous hairdressers who would often win hairdressing competitions.²³ Belying their depiction in *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, queer individuals were not drunken failures but professionals and businesspeople, as the portrait of Kewpie assuming a proprietorial stance outside of Salon Kewpie attests (Fig. 22). Working in the hairdressing industry, concerned as it was with image and fashion, positioned Kewpie and others in a sphere that embraced innovation, perhaps bestowing a particular status that allowed nonconformity when it came to their appearance. For example, Piper Laurie’s parents disliked her having dyed hair, but in the end, “they thought it was just part of the hairdressing movement.”²⁴

The photographs also reflect a localized culture of cinema-going. Jacqueline Mainguard (2017: 17–34) argues that this activity was a deeply entwined part of everyday working-class life in District Six, which boasted a large concentration of cinemas. In oral history interviews with former residents of District Six, these cinemas are commonly mentioned as both local landmarks and



25 Taken in 5th Ave at Y Eugene's Hairtique, ca. 2000. Photographer unknown.

sites of formative personal experiences. Cinema-going was not just the passive consumption of an overseas cultural form but in fact became part of the “warp and weft” of lived experience, local identity, and culture (Mainguard 2017: 20). For example, cinemas and cinema staff played a role in preparations for the New Year

Carnival, and Hollywood films such as *The Jazz Singer*, consumed in the District’s cinemas, influenced the fashions of the carnival’s performers (Mainguard 2017: 25–27).

Kewpie’s photographs show that queer life was just as intertwined with cinema-going as other localized cultural forms. Drag queens regularly sang and performed at talent competitions at the Bioscope cinema.²⁵ The drag personas of queer individuals were named after and loosely based around iconic film stars. For example, some of the friends depicted and named in Kewpie’s photographic collection include Mitzi Gaynor, Kay Kendall, and Julie Andrews. People were attracted to those who could absorb and display the latest trends and fashions, and the drag queens, named after screen icons, sporting the latest fashions and hairstyles, were feted for their association with the glamorous film stars of the day. Additionally, there were links between the hairdressing industry and cinema, as Piper Laurie explained: “Particular film stars will have a particular hair style. And they will just ask—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, what they want.”²⁶

Individual photographs in the collection encapsulate how queer life was enmeshed with cinema culture. Cinema-going, acted as a courtship ritual in the development of romantic relationships. Figure 23, taken at Piper Laurie’s house, depicts Kewpie and her partner Brian about to embark on a date to the Luxurama cinema. It is also significant that this event was recorded photographically and the resulting print was retained by Kewpie; clearly, photography was part of broad repertoire of practices that surrounded cinema-going and amplified its romantic associations.

Other photographs reveal the playful referencing of Hollywood culture. A series of photographs taken at Cape Town station in 1973 includes an image with the original annotation “Miss Capucine & Miss Andrews in their new movie; ‘Girls will be Boys, Boys will be Girls’ 73” (Fig. 24). The photographs in this series and their annotations also display a cosmopolitan imagination at play. By using fantasy and humor, the captions relate the photographs to a global geography of fashion and glamorized vice. For example, original written annotations on other photographs include “modelling Dior gown, Paris” and the ribald “3 whores from 42nd Street New York. 24.3.73.”

Kewpie’s photographs have a rich history of display that precedes their acquisition by GALA Queer Archives. This wider

trajectory is occasionally hinted at within the photographs themselves. Figure 25 shows Kewpie in Yugene's Hairtique during the filming of Jack Lewis's (2000) documentary. In the background, adorning the wall of her salon, are many photographs from the collection. In this photograph Kewpie is revealed as a curator herself, carefully selecting and displaying images from her personal collection with a definite purpose and narrative in mind. This calls to mind bell hooks's reflections on the practices of photographic display in another context: twentieth century African American homes. hooks (1995: 59–61) interprets the display of photographs on domestic interior walls as an autonomous act that reflected a "will to participate in a noninstitutionalized curatorial process."²⁷ Kewpie's photographic display may also have been a commercial strategy, advertising her longstanding experience, versatility, and success as a hairdresser, but it also functioned to establish both her and her friends' lineage within District Six. By establishing a sense of place and belonging, by remembering queer life in District Six in spite of the dislocations of forced removal, Kewpie's display can be understood as an act that resisted the erasures of both apartheid and heteronormative narratives of history and memory.²⁸

CONCLUSION

The Kewpie Collection reflects the individual and collective agency of a queer community who used photography, along with other tools, to construct, perform, and celebrate public queer identities. This took place within a wider context of multilayered oppression but also a spatially and temporally specific environment of qualified tolerance in District Six. In contrast to their sensationalized representation in *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, the Kewpie Collection presents a rounded picture of queer life in District Six. When considered alongside Kewpie's captions and triangulated with other oral testimony and historical information, glimpses of everyday queer life in District Six emerge. Furthermore, the very nature of the collection and the material inscriptions of circulation, movement, and display borne by the photographs attest to their social lives as material objects—a pattern of circulation and affect which in itself tells us much about the nature of queer social networks and visual production in the District. Not only that, by using a cosmopolitan visual language of fashion, cinema, wealth, and glamor, Kewpie and her friends expressed aspirations that were shared by many District Six residents and which, through a

play of fantasy and imagination, defied and transcended the limits placed upon oppressed people during apartheid. The Kewpie Collection, as a personal collection produced by a range of photographic actors using a variety of approaches, represents a type of collection often misunderstood as "snapshots" or generalized under the overly broad category of "the vernacular." However, when these photographs are considered in terms of their use and affect, and as material objects circulating in their local context, they are rich in meaning, affect, and historical value. GALA Queer Archives and the District Six Museum have shown great foresight in recognizing the immense value of this and other personal photographic collections, a recognition still lacking in much photographic scholarship. Kewpie died in 2012 at the age of 71, but her photographs outlive her and continue to be reproduced, circulate, and engender meanings. The exhibition *Kewpie: Daughter of District Six* opened in Cape Town in September 2018 and travelled to Johannesburg in May 2019. In the lead up to the exhibition in Cape Town, workshop participants, including former residents of District Six, used Kewpie's photographs as memory objects to explore issues of belonging, memorialization, and return. Activations of the photographs in such workshops led to intergenerational dialogue about LGBTQI+ activism and rights in contemporary South Africa. Once the exhibition opened, audience visitors took selfies in front of exhibition prints of photographs from the Kewpie Collection and circulated them on social media. A Heritage Day parade through District Six, organized to coincide with the exhibition, saw the images return to the locales in which they were taken. These photographs occupied significant spaces, both as large-scale photocopied wheat pastes that were installed at sites of historical significance by the Burning Museum with participation from the District Six Museum's Young Curator's project, and on flags and costumes created by workshop participants and carried or temporarily displayed at key locations along the route of the parade. For former District Six residents, Kewpie's image in District Six was a celebration and reclamation of their heritage. For younger people in Cape Town, the images functioned as a visceral connection to the queer history of the city and a means of reimagining space, providing inspiration for activism and creative work. Alongside the exhibition itself, such activations demonstrated the ongoing capacity of these photographs to spark new memories, reveal new histories, and act as social agents connecting people and stories across time and place.

Note

This article was written while Malcolm Corrigan was a postdoctoral research fellow with the South African Research Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture, University of Johannesburg and Jenny Marsden was a project coordinator at the GALA Queer Archives in Johannesburg.

1 Zanele Muholi is by no means the only contemporary South African photographer representing queer identities, but her work has received a heightened focus in scholarship, to the extent that critical engagement with the work of other photographers has been somewhat neglected. This article in part seeks to highlight the need for further research into the photographic representation of queer identities in South Africa, both past and present.

2 Kewpie's given name was Eugene Fritz, but she was known as Kewpie throughout her life. The name "Kewpie" was a nickname coined by her aunt when Kewpie was a child, because Kewpie reminded her of a Kewpie Doll, a popular toy (conversation with Ursula Hansby, Kewpie's sister). At the start of her performing

career Kewpie used the drag name "Doris Day," after the American actress, and later took on the name "Capucine," after the French actress Capucine, who was famous in the 1950s and 1960s.

3 This does not comprise the entirety of Kewpie's collection, as some photographs remain with her family and other people Kewpie knew.

4 Kewpie, interviewed by Jack Lewis and Graeme Reid, December 4, 1999. Uncatalogued cassette tape recording, GALA Queer Archives, Johannesburg.

5 Nor have these uses and circulations been arrested following their acquisition; on the contrary, their polyvalence continues to be animated through exhibition, publication, and their handling by visitors to the archive.

6 "Coloured" had been used as an administrative category by the State and its agencies prior to 1950 but the Population Registration Act of 1950 consolidated and intensified its statutory use.

7 For a discussion of the possible etymology of "moffie," see de Waal 2012: xiii.

8 Piper Laurie (Ismail Hanief), interviewed by Pat Fahrenfort, October 25, 1999. Oral history interview

transcript, District Six Museum Collection, Cape Town.

9 This is of course not to say that there weren't other expressions of queer identity in District Six. Kewpie herself had lesbian friends, some of whom appear in the collection.

10 Kewpie, interviewer unknown, 1998. Oral history interview transcript, AM2709 A1.23. GALA Queer Archives, Johannesburg.

11 Some of the photographs also bear the name or stamp of other studios. These include H.G. Thomas, M. Paker, Ray Ryan, and the Parade studio.

12 Although Kewpie and Piper were friends, they also had an enduring professional rivalry and repeatedly vied for the title of "Queen of the Moffies" at competitions.

13 The Movie Snaps studio was established in the late 1930s by a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant named Abraham Hurwitz (O'Connell 2017: 222).

14 Billy Biggs, interviewed by Jenny Marsden and Tina Smith. Cape Town, May 31, 2018. Digital audio recording. GALA Queer Archives, Johannesburg and District Six Museum Collection, Cape Town.

15 Kewpie, interviewed by Jack Lewis, January 12,

1996. Cassette tape recording, AM2886/d13. GALA Queer Archives, Johannesburg.
- 16 Kewpie, interviewed by Jack Lewis and Graeme Reid, December 4, 1999.
- 17 Billy Biggs, interviewed by Jenny Marsden and Tina Smith. Cape Town, May 31, 2018.
- 18 Billy Biggs, interviewed by Jenny Marsden and Tina Smith. Cape Town, May 31, 2018.
- 19 Billy Biggs, interviewed by Jenny Marsden and Tina Smith. Cape Town, May 31, 2018.
- 20 Kewpie, interviewed by Jack Lewis, January 12, 1996. Cassette tape recording, AM2886/d13. GALA Queer Archives, Johannesburg.
- 21 Kensington was a previously multiracial area of Cape Town which, by the late 1950s, had been subject to forced removals and had been officially designated for "coloureds only" (Field 2013: 173).
- 22 Kewpie, interviewed by Jack Lewis, January 12, 1996.
- 23 Ismail Bolla Buffkins, interviewer unknown, August 12, 1999. Oral history interview transcript, FAH. 646.005 District Six Museum Collections, Cape Town.
- 24 Piper Laurie (Ismail Hanief), oral history interview transcript, October 25, 1999.
- 25 Tony Naidoo in conversation with Kewpie and Jack Lewis, unpublished video recording. Uncatalogued VHS tape. GALA Queer Archives, Johannesburg.
- 26 Piper Laurie (Ismail Hanief), oral history interview transcript, October 25, 1999.
- 27 With thanks to John Edwin Mason for alerting us to this congruence.
- 28 For further reflection on the practices of photographic display in different South African domestic contexts, see Peffer 2015.
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