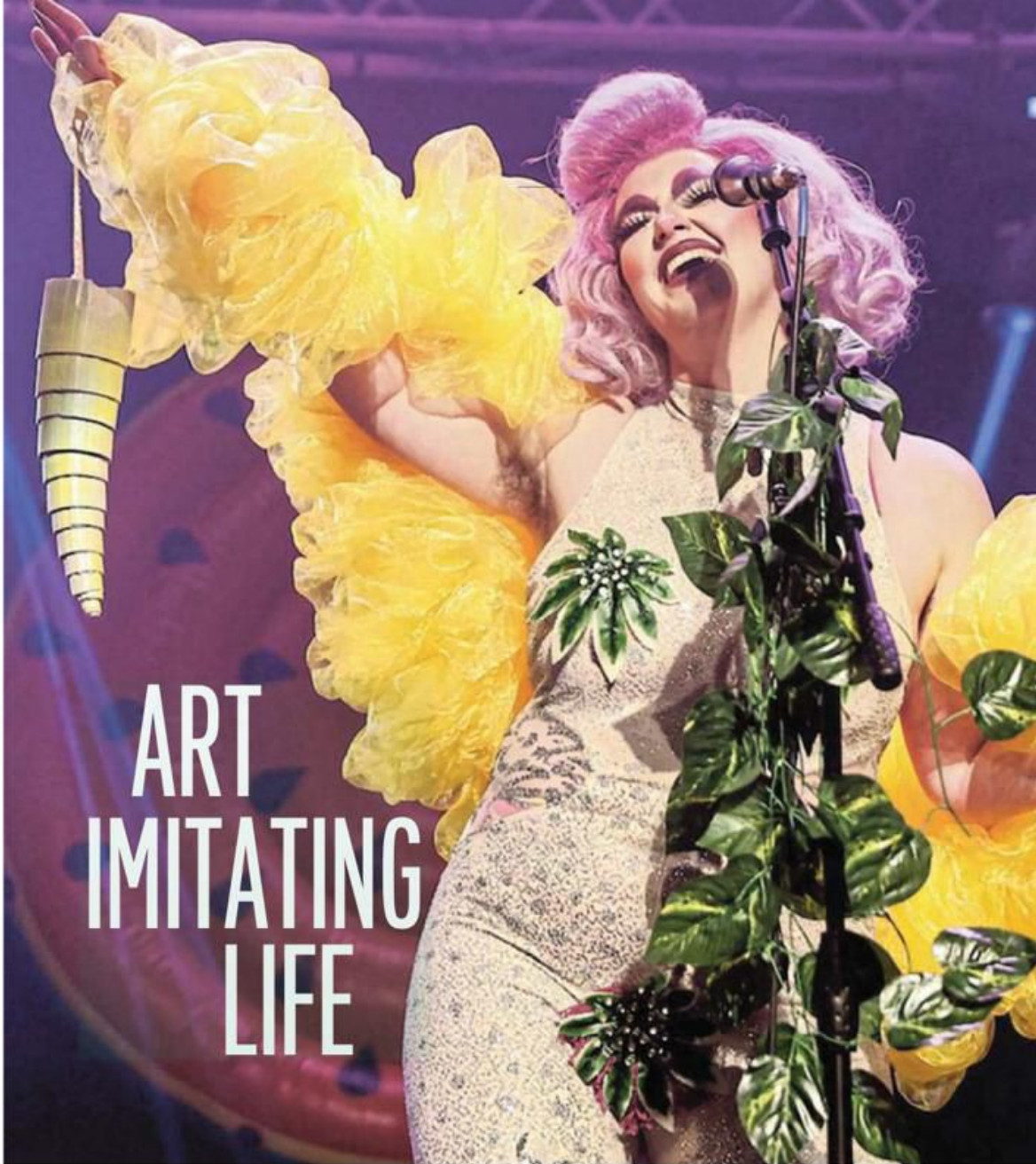


ART IMITATING LIFE



Nonbinary drag performer Pichi Keane will bring *Freshly Squeezed* to the HEAT Festival (still from *Ripe 'n Ready*). Picture: ALAN EASON

HEAT Festival showcases diversity of queer and nonbinary artists

With most arts events in Cape Town taking place in summer, HEAT Festival is setting a precedent staging a programme during winter. It will also be the first time 15 exhibitions open across the city, all curated to respond to a theme: Common Ground, set by curators Voni Baloyi, Mary Corrigan, Nkgopoleng Moloi and Andrew Lamprecht with proposals invited for theatre, opera and jazz programmes to complement the art.

The curators sought to uncover the conditions that bring people together, a fitting objective given the festival fosters a sense of community between city-based art spaces and different arts sectors.

Unsurprisingly, it's the LGBTQIA+ community that's become the focus of many artworks, plays and performances.

"Queer communities have been driving the creative arts for some time. Also, we've focused on encouraging younger artists, who often feel more free to express their identities, so it's not unexpected that the content of many works has slanted this way. The tensions of being part of and excluded from a community also



Baz Bailey, 'Ndoda and Child'. Picture: COURTESY UNDER THE AEGIS

resonates at a deeper level for many queer or nonbinary people," says Corrigan, director and founder of HEAT.

Many perspectives from different queer and nonbinary people, across various backgrounds and ages, has emerged to

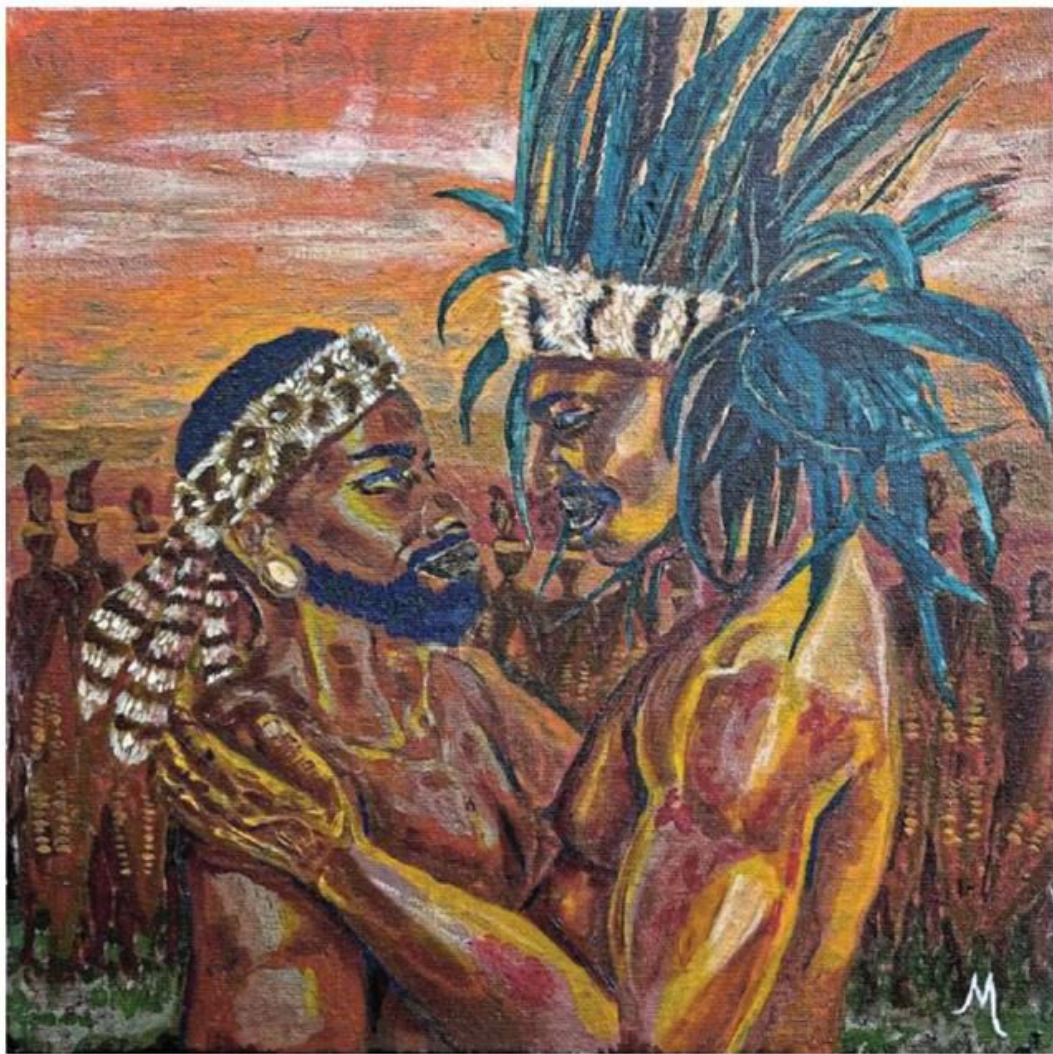
present a rich tapestry at HEAT, which runs from July 11 to 21, at venues in Cape Town's city centre.

The participating galleries presenting exhibitions are The AVA, Christopher Moller, Ebony/ Curated, Eclectica

Contemporary, Kalashnikov, 99 Loop Gallery, Iziko South African National Gallery, Michaelis Galleries, Nel Gallery, Reservoir Projects, Sisonke Gallery, Under the Aegis, Union House by Spier Arts Trust, Vela Projects and WORLDART.

Challenging traditional concepts of masculinity are tackled from interesting perspectives. A love affair between Zulu warriors during a historical colonial-era battle is at the heart of Desire Marea's *Baddies of Isandhwana*, which will show at Eclectica Contemporary. A transgender Xhosa man's struggle to undergo *uhwaluko* (initiation) is the focus of a suite of photographic works by Baz Bailey at the Under the Aegis titled *Isitimela: Planting of a New Man*.

In collaboration with GALA (Gay And Lesbian Archives), Michaelis Galleries hosts a special exhibition of the Kewpie Archives; a collection of almost 400 photographs from the personal archive of Kewpie, a District 6 hairdresser, drag artist and queer icon. These images present a hidden queer history of 1970s Cape Town, reflecting the use of drag pageantry as a means of creating and strengthening community bonds.



Desire Marea's 'Ungasabi'. Picture COURTESY OF ECLECTICA CONTEMPORARY

Queer female identity is the focus at the Nel Gallery in the video work *MRRT and Courage* by Wandie M (this is how the artist wishes to be known) and a collection of photographic works at *Pride and Prejudice* by Toscaeneena, a queer art duo consisting of Tosca Marthinus and Neena Borrill.

Freshly Squeezed, a cheeky drag-cabaret show, is performed by a nonbinary drag artist and musician Pichi Keane (Megan van Wyk), who playfully prompts audiences to examine their notions of gender, sex and taboo.

Also representative of nonbinary performers is Dara Beth, whose emotional one-hander *all my ex-lovers are dead* relays the vicissitudes of navigating love, desire, heartbreak and vulnerability through a gender non-conforming lens.

Exploring similar themes is Andi Colombo's *I want to write you a submarine*, which received rave reviews at the National Arts Festival and is a hyper-personal one-woman show which maps out the complexities of queer dating, queer love and loneliness.

Award-winning, multidisciplinary artist Aldo Brincat's semi-autobiographical one-man performance of *The Moon Looks Delicious From Here* invites his audience to witness coming to terms with his queer sexuality in apartheid South Africa.

Delivering another perspective is Double Impact's *Ganga Nyoko! Inzima Nyoko!*, a powerful emotional production that unpacks the challenges of being queer in South Africa against the backdrop of the rural Eastern Cape in the early 2000s.

As with all stories of human existence, those told by the queer and nonbinary artists at HEAT chart the highs- and lows and in-between.

Meet the artist

Desire Marea, transdisciplinary artist and musician

Desire Marea, a Durban-born transdisciplinary artist and musician, released an EP *Baddies of Isandlwana* with their debut painting exhibition of the same name at Eclectica Contemporary. Marea explores themes of queerness in Zulu culture and history through a series of paintings depicting queer love during this infamous colonial-era battle.

You are a renowned musician and performer, what prompted you to start painting?

The visual arts is where I started. It's the first thing I wanted to be, since I was a child. My father was an artist, he was big on the Durban art scene in the 1980s before he went missing during the height of the violence in 1991. I didn't get to meet him. [Art making] is a gift I was born with. Making art feels like home.

The body of work you're showing during HEAT Festival is an extension of your music and an EP you released dealing with the same narrative. What prompted you to portray the story of queer love on the battlefield through this historical lens?

I wanted to tell the story through music, but I felt that it was a limiting medium. I wanted to cultivate the interest I have in people who've existed and was looking at my experience, and the experience of queer people who have to play key roles in their families, something other people don't



Desire Marea. Picture TATENDA CHIDORA PHOTOGRAPHY

archetype of masculinity, which might be the most toxic kind, but I add a dimension to it.

What's the significance of this battle or the battlefield itself in the context of these paintings?

Putting your life on the line (in a battle) or being in defence of something is romantic. It's quite an intimate experience

between men who are your brothers, and your lovers,

and your friends. I was also saying about what they were fighting against — the British. They represent colonialism and a lot of cis-heteronormative values and customs that Zulu people have adopted, and are the result of colonialism. Symbolically, sometimes the battle is within ourselves because we've internalised the weaponised ideologies of our enemies.

These images might rile Zulu traditionalists — what's your intention with these works?

I never want the work to be read as just controversial. In my process and my saying, I wanted to capture love and the softness and the vulnerability of these people (warriors). Even if people are angered by these images, maybe they'll see how real and perhaps how beautiful these scenes and these people were.

Meet Marea during the festival in guided conversations with curator Nkgopoleng



Neena Borrill and Tosca Marthinus of Toscaeneena. Picture COURTESY OF THE NEL GALLERY

Meet the artist

Neena Borrill, of the art duo Toscaeneena

Neena Borrill of the art duo Toscaeneena, which includes their partner Tosca Marthinus, reflects on their photographic works that will show at the Nel Gallery, titled *Pride and Prejudice*.

How did you and Tosca come to work together?

We initially met at CPUT [Cape Peninsula University of Technology]. We studied commercial photography together in 2016. The course included visual communications and our professor was Ashraf Jamal. He introduced us to contemporary photography. In 2019, we became a couple and during the Covid-19 pandemic we became an artist duo and were introduced to the art scene by an artist.

There are very few collectives that produce art because of the emphasis on establishing individual artist identities. But your art's value is tied to being about a "coming together". How does this manifest in your photographic practice?

We first started with black and white street photography, but when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, we integrated into creating our work indoors. We used our bodies and our camera to express the mental state of isolation. Because we're a couple, the dynamic of "photographer" and "model" was a comfortable one. We shared both the same and different struggles with identity. I focused on using my body to express my personal experience of mental health decline and Tosca used their body to express their personal experience with identity, specifically being nonbinary.

Aside from Zanele Muholi's art, the queer female identity doesn't appear to have much prominence in our art world or popular culture. Would you agree? And what nuances regarding this community would you like to bring to light through your photography?

While the queer female identity may appear to not be prominent now, we have seen an awareness of the LGBTQIA+ community spike as subject matter in the art scene. The identity we push through our work is more focused on queer nonbinary and mental health, not female identity. Mental health and identity do tend to interlink in our work. We don't speak on behalf of the community as everyone's experience is different. There are multiple artists that do speak about queer female identity in their work or poetry. We worry that these artists don't always get the recognition that Zanele