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Glitterboys And Ganglands (World Premiere)

A brainwavez.org Film Review *Tiaras and tucking take centre stage in this documentary by husband-and-wife team Matthew Brown (producer) and Lauren Beukes (director) that follows three contestants who are preparing for the 2010 Miss Gay Western Cape pageant.*



I was unsure as to how I should approach this review. Do I look at it from the perspective of someone who lives in this city and has an emotional investment in how it and the people who live here and form its identity are portrayed or do I cast a more critical eye and approach it as someone from outside - another country, perhaps - who is being given a peek through a window into a whole new world? After all, isn't that

the purpose of a documentary to introduce viewers to new ideas and other cultures? I was conflicted for days with the result that the review probably contains elements of both but I have tried to analyse the documentary primarily from the perspective of an outsider (but with insider insight).

The Miss Gay Western Cape pageant is open to both gay and straight men who practise transvestism, are female impersonators, or who are transgendered. Most of the contestants come from the [Coloured](#) community in Cape Town and *Glitterboys And Ganglands* follows the stories of three of the participants from preparation for preliminary events right to the night of the pageant, and beyond, all the while giving us a glimpse of their personalities, motivations, and personal challenges.

Kayden van Eerden, who has won 59 beauty pageants and is aiming for her 60th title, is a pre-op transgender woman who is on hormones, which has affected her body shape, and this is creating a tense situation regarding who should and shouldn't be eligible to participate. (The pageant promoter has a wonderful philosophical response to the debacle.) Eva Torez is a young mechanic who is preparing to enter the pageant for the first time.



Kat Gilardi is assisted by her partner Errol Stroebel (together they are known as "the Posh and Becks of the Cape Flats"), who makes her costumes and is very vocal in his opinion of what she should wear and which contests she should enter.

The documentary introduces us to their motivations for entering, takes us through each

contestant's preparations for the pageant, and tells us their personal stories. We learn about their work and family life, as well as personal tragedies that have affected them, and are thereby introduced to "[moffie culture](#)", although this term, and other slang that periodically crops up during conversations and interviews, is never explained and may be rather mystifying to viewers of the documentary who aren't South Africans. (In some contexts "moffie" is a derogatory Afrikaans term for a gay man. It has been co-opted by the gay community as a positive term of self identification but in the context of this community "moffie" also means transgender people and transvestism.)

The documentary shines when little, unfiltered moments are captured on film, notably some behind-the-scenes occurrences during the pageant, some of which were fleeting but offered incredible insight. Unfortunately there isn't enough of this in the documentary but there is one incredible scene in which we are taken to Eva's workplace and introduced to some of her coworkers, who offer candid (and possibly surprising) commentary regarding having a gay mechanic as part of their team.



While the "glitterboys" part of the title is well covered I felt that the "ganglands" portion didn't do enough to provide deeper context, especially for people who aren't familiar with the Western Cape. At the question-and-answer session after the premiere Lauren spoke about wanting to make more documentaries that highlight social issues and that *Glitterboys And Ganglands* tackles homophobia in a way that doesn't scare people who

might find the topic uncomfortable, therefore it can work to bridge those divides. While this is true, the existence of the Miss Gay Western Cape pageant, and the fact that it has been held successfully for years, is a remarkable feat considering the community that the participants come from but this wasn't explored enough on screen.

The documentary primarily introduces us to the Cape Flats area of Cape Town, where the pageant takes place and where most of the participants live, via establishing shots and cutaway shots. We are provided with a bit more information through personal stories of some of the interviewees but the larger context is never properly defined. Drugs and gangsterism is rife in the area and this is touched on in the documentary but it wasn't enough to highlight how deeply the Coloured community, in particular, is negatively affected by it. Yet, in contrast to the violence and poverty, transgender men and men who practice transvestism (though not necessarily gay men, which remains an issue) have largely been accepted and embraced by the community.

[The reason for this](#) goes back to the history of [District Six](#) and apartheid. I would have liked to have seen the documentary explore this further, as the same levels of tolerance are not often found in the black communities, where gay people are often ostracised and [corrective rape](#), which is briefly mentioned in the documentary in a section that



takes place at [St George's Cathedral](#), is a huge problem and has led to the death of many lesbians in recent years.

St George's Cathedral is one of three other aspects of the story that I would have liked to have seen explored further, rather than in passing (if at all) in order to provide a richer context. This Anglican church in the heart of the city of Cape Town fought discrimination, embraced all races, and stood for human rights, including gay rights, during apartheid. The church (headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu from 1986 to 1996) was a place of emotional safety during apartheid and it forms a central part of the lives of many religious people deemed outcasts during that period, including gay people of colour. This is touched on in the documentary but the significance really isn't made clear to those who don't already know the history.

Secondly, I would have liked to have seen commentary from members of the community that attended the pageant, especially in light of the social issues mentioned above. You don't really see it on screen but you can hear the audience appreciation during the pageant footage and if I recall correctly the show was sold out on the night and very much enjoyed. I want to know who attends - and why. How long have they been going? How much of a social event is it to people outside of the gay community?

Finally, although the documentary purposely decided to focus on the stories of three of the participants to give us more of an in-depth exploration of their personalities and lives, we receive a peripheral introduction to many interesting people in the story, including the pageant organisers and some of the other participants. Even the pageant judges that were interviewed seemed quite characterful. I was dying to hear more about each person who, I'm sure, has a fascinating story to tell. Instead their participation was often relegated to background appearances and sound bites to add colour (so to speak) to the story.



Having said all of this, however, I really did enjoy *Glitterboys And Ganglands*. Watching it at the world premiere was especially entertaining as most of the people who appear in the documentary attended, many in elegant ballroom attire, and they really enjoyed the screening. They would collectively burst out laughing at unexpected moments or comments caught on camera, as well as in jokes related to moffie culture, and it really

made the screening all that more enjoyable. It was good to see that they were loving the experience and how they had been depicted on screen as documentaries can run the risk of misrepresenting people in an effort to find a predetermined truth. This was certainly not the case with *Glitterboys And Ganglands* and Lauren received lots of congratulations at the cocktail function held after the screening.

From a technical standpoint most of the camerawork was done with a single camera operated by Nick van der Westhuizen, although at the pageant it seemed that about five cameras were operated by the team to capture all the moments both on stage and behind the scenes. The editing is tight and people's names repeatedly appear on screen so you are not left confused as to who some of the individuals who received less screen time are. The sound work is also very good. The team was often filming in noisy environments but you can always clearly hear what is being said, even when it isn't specifically in an interview with the camera.



Matthew Brown is no stranger to filmmaking and won two awards for his short *Clowns*. Lauren Beukes has previously directed a few short (notably animated) pieces but *Glitterboys And Ganglands* is her long-form directorial debut. I think she has done an excellent job and the experience I imagine she has gained from this will result in even better productions in the future. Her inquisitive nature combined with her social conscience is an unstoppable force. Storytelling, whether in the form of award-winning novels or her new medium of expression, documentary filmmaking, is her forte. As always, I look forward to whatever she does next.

Glitterboys And Ganglands had its world debut in Cape Town on 10 June 2011 as part of the Encounters documentary festival. It will be screened again on 25 and 26 June.