

Alter EGO

Who is the man behind the drag queen, and where do their identities meet? A new photo series looks beyond the wigs and the fake lashes

Male and female. King and queen. Where does one begin and the other end? The question – and the wider one about the nature of gender and identity – is at the heart of Dutch photographer Léon Hendrickx's series that morphs drag queens from around the world and their male halves. "For most people, drag queens are an exotic phenomenon," he says, "restricted to the worlds of spectacle, fantasy, and entertainment. "But who are these drag queens? And who is the man behind the spectacular female display? Whose desire is satisfied with the transformation back and forth and what does one side get from the other?"

"These portraits tell stories about gender, love, identity, sexual transcendence, and even the nature of man him (or her) self."



♂ **King:** O'Neill Nichol Haynes
♀ **Queen:** Sapphira Cristal photographed in New York City.



♂ **King:** Joey Gugliemelli
♀ **Queen:** Miss Sherry Pie, photographed in New York City.

A heterosexual man, Leon says he is none the less "open to exploring the boundaries of my gender flexibility." And he has become increasingly fascinated by drag queens. "Visually at first. I mean, drag queens are stunning! But I've learned that there's much more to drags than merely the looks. "I like to depict my subjects unrestrained and honest," he adds, "as themselves, whether as a boy or girl, because I believe anyone can be both. Then, going further, I imagine what their juxtaposition would look like. Two persons derived from the same individual. The man – the creator, the

artist – and his muse – the extravagant display of fierce womanliness. Then their moment of interconnection; that moment which can't ever exist. I want to make that moment tangible." His intention? To get behind the big, bold persona and present a more intimate human being. "These portraits tell stories about gender, love, identity, sexual transcendence, and even the nature of man him (or her) self," he says. The first queen he photographed was in 2015, his friend Micha Schneiderberg and his drag alter ego Snorella. "For me drag, is a way to express myself wider than the male form that I got by birth," he says. "I am both. These two complete



♂ **Above king:** Sergio Conrad.
♀ **Queen:** Digna, photographed in New York City.

the one I am. People react differently to a feminized form of me than to me as a boy/man. "All over the world, guys have the urge to create another self and show it to people in cabarets, bars, clubs. But who are these people? What is the connection with their other self? How do they relate? These questions we try to answer with this project." That initial portrait led to another 20 – a collaboration between Leon and Micha called Kings & Queens. Then came an exhibition, then a world tour. They've photographed queens from all over the world, and were recently in Manhattan, where they photographed

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A to Z of LGBTQ

Make sense of the alphabet soup in our handy dandy, far from exhaustive glossary



Asexual - a person who feels little or no sexual desire or attraction (which is different from celibacy - which is abstention from sex). Sometimes abbreviated to "ace."



Bear - a large, hairy man.
Bisexual - someone who is attracted to people of both their own gender and another gender.



PRIDE *issue*

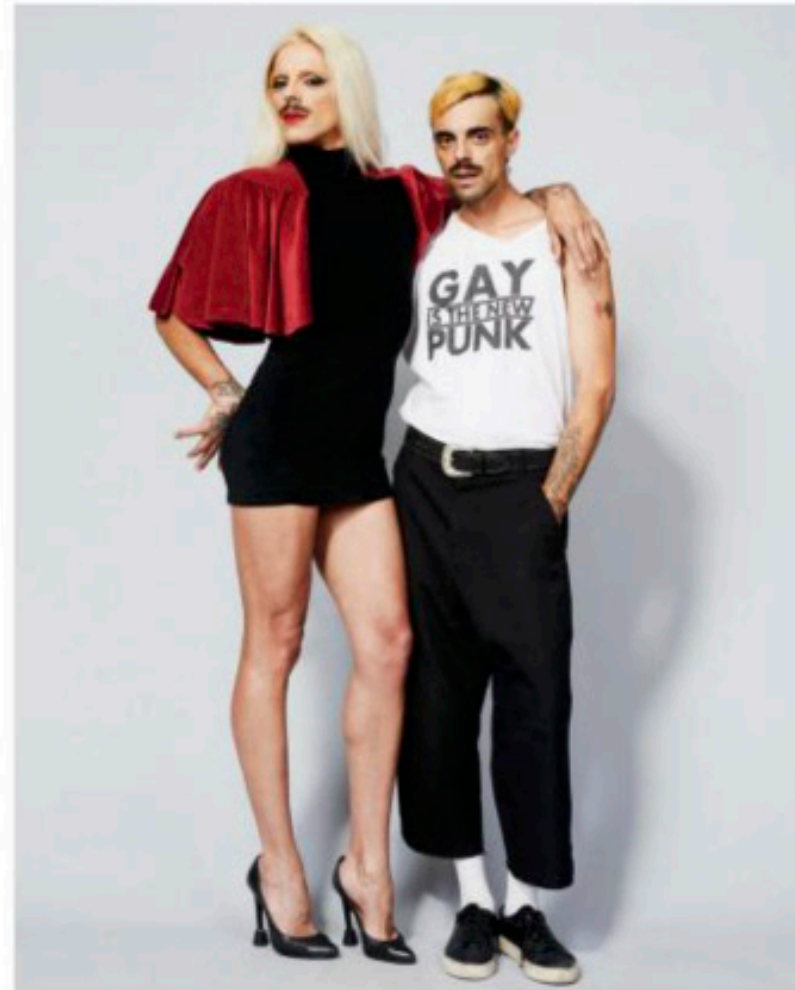
queens including Digna NYC, Sapphira Cristal, Miss Sherry Pie, Princess Magnifique, and Rify Royalty. And they'll be back in September for the Photoville festival. A book is planned for 2020.

"One of the most stunning reactions we got from one of our subject was the reaction of Extasis Liquid from Spain," says Micha. "He/She said, 'Oh my God! It is as if my two hearts beat at the same time now I see this – it's a beautiful feeling.'"

kingsqueenofficial.com

Instagram: @kingsqueenofficial

Clockwise from main: Henrique Dos Santos/Abby OMG, Amsterdam; Alex Mercurio, Tenerife; Dennis Gulikers/Deedee Janssens, Amsterdam; Sascha Grewe/Absinthia Absolut, Berlin.



C

Cisgender - a person who is not transgender is "cis" i.e. they identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Cross dresser - a person who dresses in the clothing usually associated with another gender (but is not necessarily gay).

D

Drag queen - a man who dresses as a woman for entertainment, usually an exaggerated expression of femininity. Not to be confused with cross dressing or a person who is transgender.