

Life

Smart tips
to get that
home office
working
for you



Page
23

Factory floor to Spring Queen

The exhibition recalls
the glamour of the pageant,
writes **Esther Lewis**



MENTION the clothing industry's Spring Queen competition anywhere on the Cape Flats and most people will know what you're talking about. The annual event has been synonymous with the local clothing industry since the late 1970s and for many young women, whose days are spent working on the factory floor, it's the night Cinderella goes to the ball.

Many have described going to the Good Hope Centre to compete against contestants from other factories, as the "greatest nights" of their lives. And each year thousands of industry colleagues, family and friends join in their celebration.

It is in this spirit that the Centre for Curating the Archives is presenting the exhibition – Spring Queen: The Staging of the Glittering Proletariat.

The exhibition is a celebration of the contest which has come to showcase the beauty, style and personality of the contestants.

Curators Dale Washkansky and Siona O'Connell say that with the harsh reality of factory closures and job losses, the pageant is truly beauty with a purpose. "The event is pivotal to Cape Town history, a history that is becoming closed off to the general public," says Washkansky.

He says the pageant allows factory workers, once a year, to let their



Former Spring Queens
Mariam Bird and Farieda
Ebrahim at the exhibition
PICTURES: THOMAS HOLDER

imaginations run wild and display their creativity.

The purpose of the exhibition, which features past Spring Queens, is to make people aware of the stories behind each of the queens, says Washkansky.

Paégan Abrahams, 22, from Mitchells Plain was crowned the Barrie Cline factory queen in 2009 and represented her factory at the SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union (Sactwu) pageant at the Good Hope Centre that year.

She was crowned 2nd Princess, a great achievement for a tomboy who "only entered for fun".

For three months ahead of the Spring Queen pageant, Abrahams and the other contestants practised for three hours after work every day. Abrahams says she will never forget the energy that was felt on the big day. "When they announced the top three, the girl next to me nudged me, and said 'It's you'."

But after being crowned second princess, Abrahams still floating on the high of the experience, was sent crashing back down to earth.

"I got the klap (smack) of my life! Everyone expected a certain girl to

be in the top three, and she wasn't. I just left it because I knew she was jealous. I didn't let it spoil the experience," says Abrahams.

Being part of the competition changed the direction of her life, says Abrahams.

After Spring Queen, she entered other competitions and spent over a month modelling in Germany. "The experience was very nice, but I longed for home," she says.

Last year, she gave birth to a baby girl, who has kept her home for the last nine months. But plans are already afoot to pick up her modelling career. Her agency has called, and asked her to resume modelling in January next year.

Abrahams says the Spring Queen event is the perfect platform for factory workers to get recognition.

"They don't get the exposure. But on the competition night, people come there to watch and recruit talent. It can change people's lives," says Abrahams.

Mariam Bird, from Hanover Park, was crowned Emme Jeans Queen in 2002. At age 30, it was the first time she had entered, after her colleagues put her

name on the list and her husband Basheer encouraged her.

Bird describes herself as having been shy and withdrawn before the competition, and easily intimidated by other girls who she considered beautiful.

She says she could barely contain her nerves when she took to the ramp at the Good Hope Centre, but after going up the first time, the Number 11 contestant realised she actually enjoyed the stage.

"When they called the names of the winners, I thought: 'If it's not me, it's fine'."

"Then they called number 11. I thought so low of myself, I couldn't believe that they actually chose me," says Bird.

She was the factory's first Spring Queen and since the event, has gained a sense of confidence.

"When I became queen, everything changed. I now love going out, wearing make-up, and getting dressed up," she says.

Reflecting on the event, Bird says: "We are not just any kind of

women. We are ladies. We also have that self love, and self worth."

Farieda Ebrahim of Hanover Park entered the competition several times and was first named Duchess Overwear Spring Queen in 1994. Ebrahim eventually moved to another factory, Bonwit and says that at this point she had gained competition experience and knew what the judges were looking for. She decided to enter again and in 2002 claimed the Bonwit Spring Queen crown.

She remembers her dress for the Good Hope event – it was plain, but was made from black and gold fabric that cost R250 per metre.

Ebrahim was named first princess at the Sactwu Spring Queen competition that year.

She says she loves the confidence the pageant instilled in her. She now works for the Foschini Group in the design department, and still readily gets up on stage to speak to large audiences with ease.

Last week, Ebrahim walked through the exhibition ahead of the official opening, and on seeing her pictures, she said: "It makes me feel like a queen all over again."

● The exhibition opened on July 28 and will run until August 24 at Bertram House, Haddingham Campus, UCT in Orange Street.

**WITH THE HARSH
REALITY OF
FACTORY
CLOSURES THE
PAGEANT IS TRULY
BEAUTY WITH A
PURPOSE**



WINNER

Paégan Abrahams was
crowned Barrie Cline factory
queen in 2009