

Kebo Drew

This multitalented artist is making queer women of color more visible. **By Katie Peoples**



Kebo Drew, a queer activist and award-winning poet, has spent her career covering the topic of the African diaspora to the Americas. Her work has given her a unique perspective on women of color in the queer community and her activism has led her to become the festival manager of San Francisco's Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project. Through QWOCCMAP, Drew has given many underrepresented women a place to have their voices heard. We can't get enough of her, and here's why.

1. She's a poet. And we know it. Drew has performed her poetry in Europe and the United States. She is a Cave Canem Poetry Fellow, has won the Audre Lorde/Pat Parker Award and the Astraea Emerging Lesbian Writers Award, and has performed at venues like

Justice/Just Us and Poets Against Rape in support of rape victims.

2. She can dance. As a member of the troupes Mambo Queens and Sisters of Substance, Drew has shaken her thang in cities like London, New York and San Francisco, including a performance at In Bed with Fairy Butch. And she's won the Irene Weed Dance Award and a Robert Kuykendall Dance Scholarship.

3. She's an activist. As a second-generation dissenter, Drew has a background in protesting, rallying and fighting for what's right. Her parents were civil rights activists and, like Drew, they used their creative talents to support protest lines and spread the message in schools.

4. She brings people together. Through QWOCCMAP's film festival, Drew gathers people from all sides of the LGBT community under one roof. And gets them talking. "All these different groups of people end up mixing," she says. "It's like, 'Oh that's your story, OK. And that's your community, OK.' And it's such a mixed crowd that it ends up feeling really amazing."

5. She's ready to feed the media masses. After years of hanging on to *Set It Off* with Queen Latifah, Drew says the community is hungry for new images of women of color, and QWOCCMAP is ready to deliver. "When we did the Corona Color Film Festival, because it was focused on queer black women, queer women of African descent, you would not believe the response," she says. "People were so hungry, so, so hungry for the images, because...the ones that are out there are not that positive. We're just, like, picking anything that we can take. But then, every so often...these films will come out and people are so hungry."

6. She's a history buff. Drew's work on the African diaspora not only spans African American history, but includes the his-

tory of South America and the treatment of European immigrants in the United States, which gives her a perspective on how all these things are interconnected. "Part of the work I do is like, 'Well we know that we're divided from each other, how do we find some more common cause and really tell the truth about what is our history?'" she says.

7. She thinks queer women of color are more than just "queer." "There's this tendency to want to think that people lead single-issue or single-identity lives, and we don't," she says. "Especially for queer folks of color—we're not just concerned about our sexuality, our sexual orientation and gender identity. We're also concerned about class issues [and] how the rest of our community is doing."

8. She's overcome barriers. To get to where she is today, Drew has dealt with institutionalized racism and shattered assumptions. In turn, Drew and QWOCCMAP have worked to help people overcome the barriers of race, class, ethnicity and immigration status. "We're trying to remove as many barriers as possible," she says. "And it might not be personal for every one of them, but it's certainly still an issue for a lot of our communities."

9. Queerness runs in her family, so to speak. "I'm actually a third-generation queer," she says. "I have several cousins and extended family, and then in my mom's generation and then also my grandmother's generation. So, I've actually heard stories from those generations about how it was to be queer and that history and everything else."

10. She's creating visibility for queer women of color in the LGBT community. As the festival manager of QWOCCMAP, Drew thinks it's important for queer women of color to be seen and heard. "I think that sometimes, within a larger LGBT context, people of color are a little [bit of an] afterthought... we're like the colored sprinkles on the white cupcake," she says. ■