



Legendary drag performer Arturo Galster, who passed away Aug. 25, 2014. In this 1992 photo, Galster is dressed here as Patsy Cline. (Photo by Daniel Nicoletta with hair and make-up by Eddie Valentine.)

## San Francisco Mourns Death of Legendary Drag Performer

By Advocate Contributor

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Arturo Galster, a popular star of San Francisco's drag performance scene, died Monday 8/25/14 at California Pacific Medical Center Davies Campus in SF of as-yet-unknown causes. Widely acclaimed for his appearances as country superstar Patsy Cline - on film and in plays and club appearances throughout the United States and in London and Tokyo - Mr. Galster died two days after receiving a head injury during what his family described only as "an incident" in Dolores Park. He was 55.

"I feel a bit of San Francisco theater history has been ripped from my heart,"

impresario Marc Huestis posted, among the many tributes that erupted online.

Born Arthur Francis Galster on May 7, 1959, Mr. Galster was raised in Philadelphia, where he began performing in musicals while in high school. He moved to the Bay Area in 1978 and enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute, which he attended for four years.

By the early '80s, Mr. Galster was a rising star in the city's drag cabaret and theater world, a leader in what's been described as a new wave of ironic camp performance. Besides his iconic cabaret work as Patsy Cline - which he repeated in national and int'l. tours with a tribute band called the Memphis G-Spots throughout the '80s and in the 1999 cult classic drag film "Virtue" - he created tribute performances to Marlene Dietrich and to Chet Baker, in the guise of the jazz musician's fictitious widow, Chesty Baker.

In 1986, he moved to Japan for four years, where he studied Japanese and traditional kyogen and kabuki theater. In recent years he was an active participant in hula studies and supporter of the preservation of traditional Hawaiian culture, as well as an enthusiastic Airbnb host.

Besides his cabaret work, Mr. Galster appeared in many plays, musicals and revues, including the oft-revived "Christmas With the Crawfords," "Dirty Little Show Tunes," "Naked Boys Singing," "Simply Stunning: The Doris Fish Story" and "Hedwig and the Angry Inch." He was most recently seen in this year's long-running Thrillpeddlers revival of the Cockettes' "Pearls Over Shanghai."

The circumstances surrounding his death and its immediate cause remained unclear at press time, but friends and family said there was no indication that a hate crime was involved. Mr. Galster is survived by five brothers and three sisters - Rod, Gerry, Rick, Joseph, Greg and Miriam Galster and Helen Elliott and Cate Fetterman - as well as 17 nieces and nephews and 11 great-nieces and nephews.

A public celebration of his life is planned for Sept. 22 at the Castro Theatre, where Mr. Galster was a regular performer in Huestis' frequent drag tribute shows to camp and classic movies. The family will have a private memorial service in Philadelphia.

Media Statement from Cate Fetterman, sister of Arturo Galster, on behalf of the Galster family:

A familiar figure in San Francisco's Mission District where he lived for over 30 years, Arturo embodied what have become the iconic and defining qualities of his adopted city: passion, fearlessness and an unwavering zest for life. San Francisco was a central part of his identity, and it has now become even clearer to us as his siblings and nieces and nephews how much a part of San Francisco's identity Arturo truly was.

The outpouring of love and emotion from Arturo's chosen family, friends, colleagues and neighbors in San Francisco has overwhelmed us. The photos and memories so many have posted on social media will serve as testament to his life. As members of his family, we want to express our deepest thanks to everyone who has shared their thoughts and prayers with us in this time."

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