System beauty

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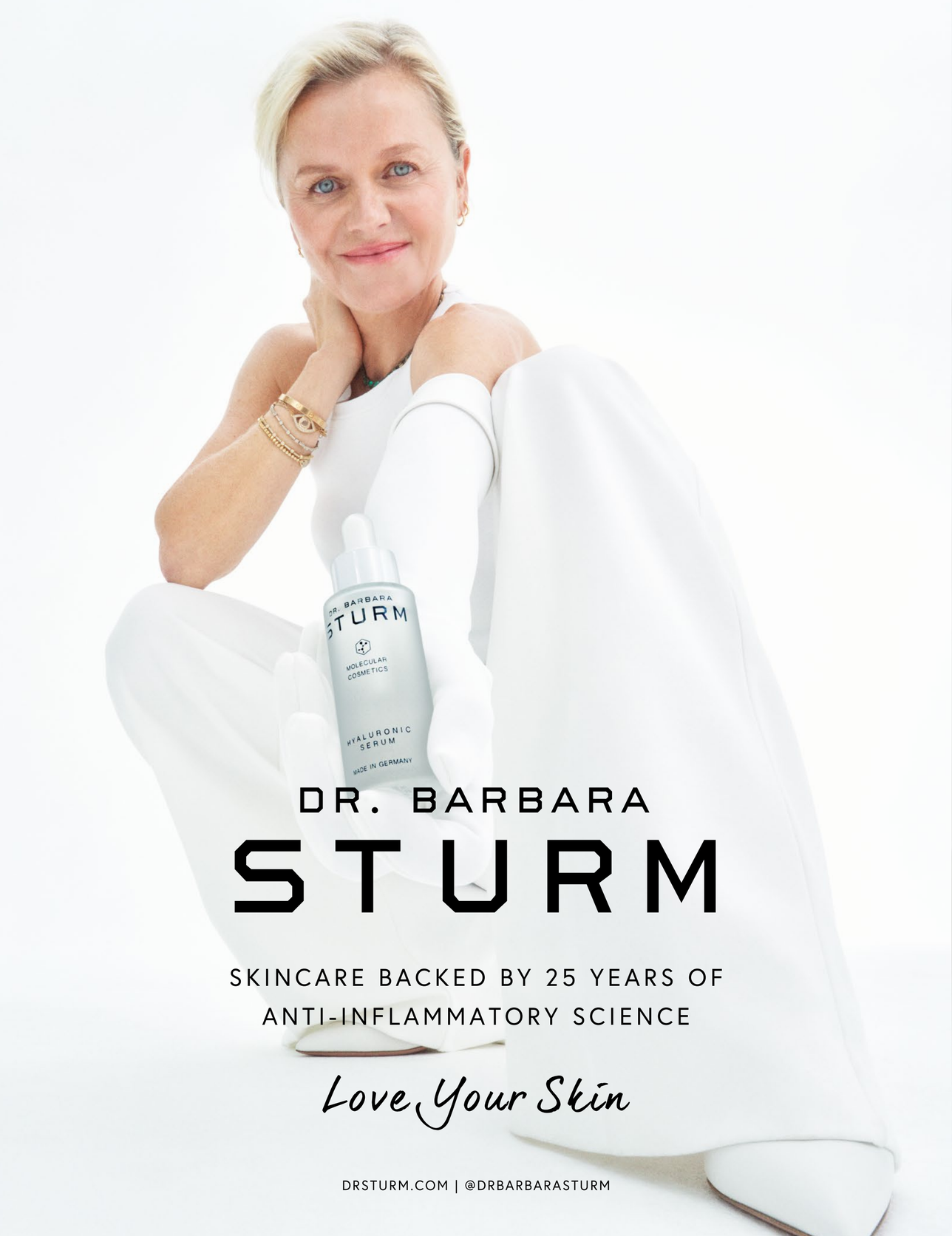

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For more information, please contact
beauty@system-magazine.com
or visit www.system-magazine.com.

'Working with Isamaya is always inspirational,' notes Kate Moss. 'She has fearless creativity and a brilliant mind,' states Ib Kamara. 'She pushes the possibilities of what worlds we can live in,' attests Jawara. 'There is an unspoken understanding between us,' says Junya Watanabe. 'She's daring, confident, innovative and experimental,' adds Riccardo Tisci. 'Working with her is a mystical adventure of beauty and darkness,' notes Mert Alas. 'She's a magician,' suggests Andreas Kronthaler.

It's hard to distill Isamaya Ffrench into being just a 'make-up artist'. One minute she's transforming herself into a grotesque tentacled beast, the next she's recreated the delicate glass tears of a Man Ray photograph. The result is unsettling and exquisite, glamorous and eldritch, otherworldly and at times, just plain bonkers. As such, she doesn't just represent the beauty of today, but rather the expressive possibilities of beauty tomorrow. One that's defined by monstrous prosthetics, lipsticks in the shape of phalluses, and CGI renderings of celebrities with mythological animal parts. Indeed, no other make-up artist, and globally not that many people in the industry, divert so much from their initial set of skills, with such energy and success. 'I'm sort of beauty adjacent,' as she puts it. She has redefined the role of a make-up artist, or rather has made that role work for her, which is why there was no one better to front this second issue of *System beauty.*

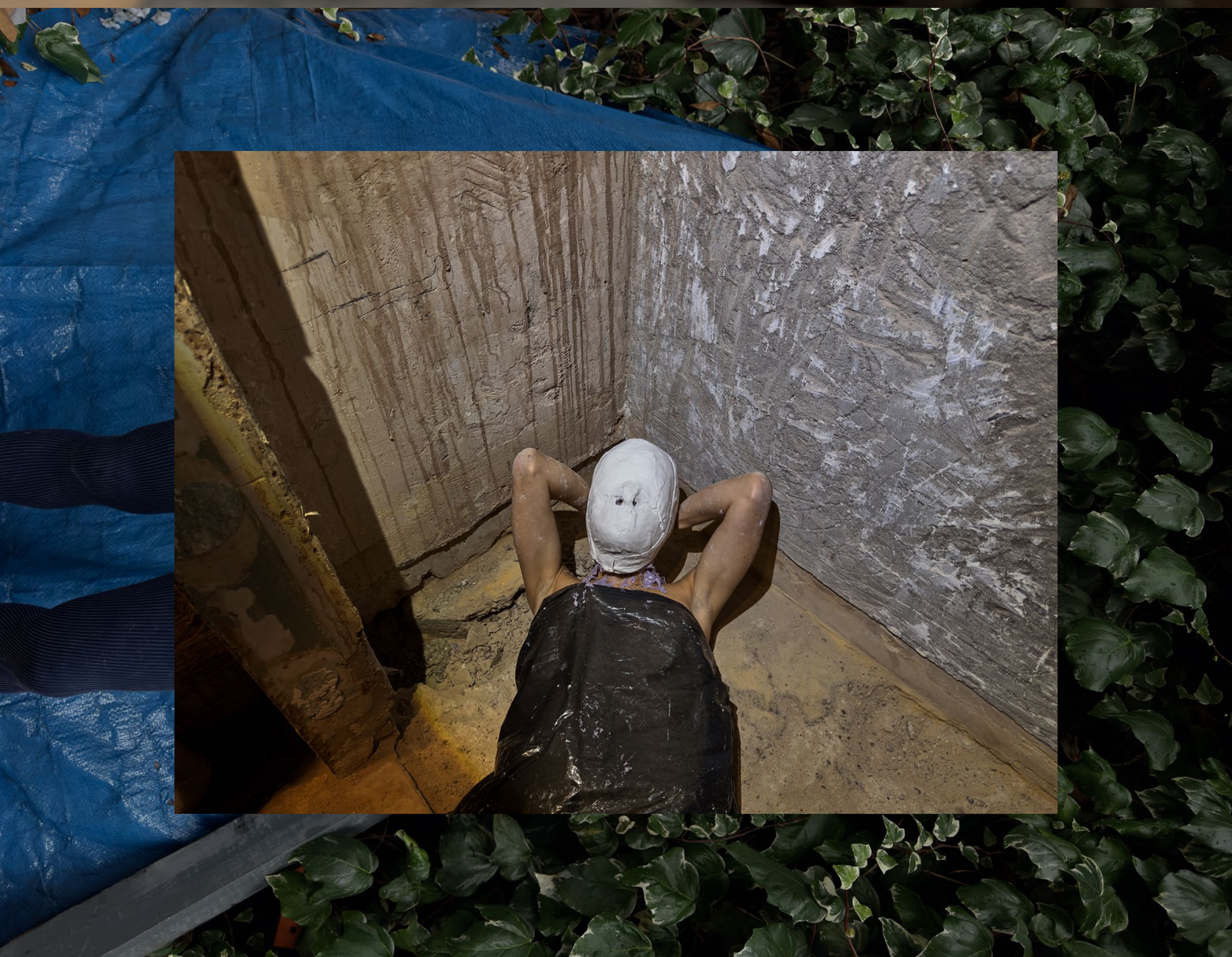
Here, captured by Juergen Teller, we meet Isamaya in her studio, surrounded by objects, tools, and obscure ephemera she's collected along the way. She also speaks to the artist Jordan Wolfson about finding depth in ugliness, interrogates the notion of femininity with the actress Gwendoline Christie, and shares why she'll never get bored of the beauty industry.

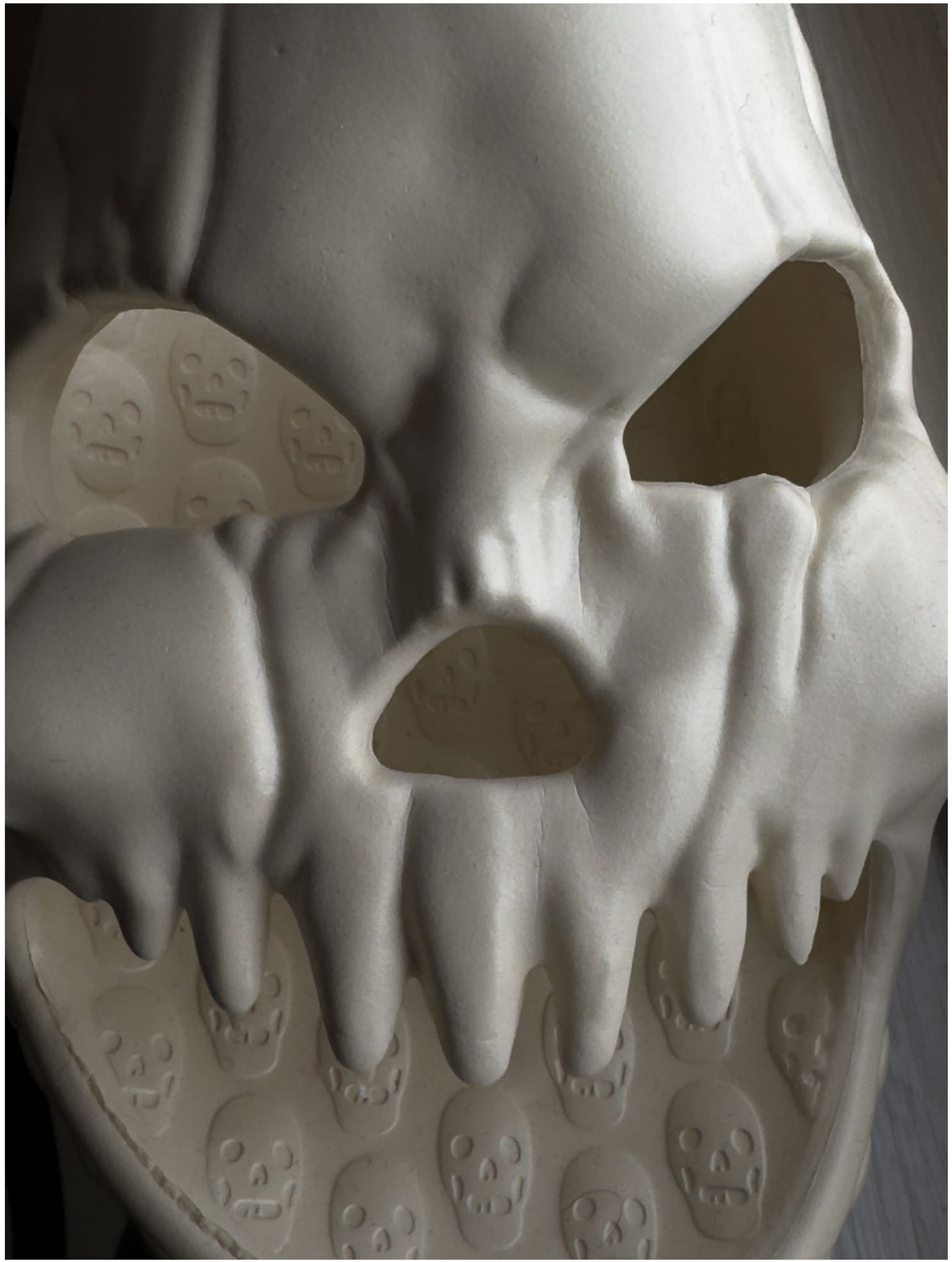
Elsewhere in the issue, Fara Homidi and Paloma Elsesser dissect what makes a brand, Pierre Dinand reflects on designing the industry's most iconic perfume bottles, and Pharrell Williams reframes skincare as self-care. Meanwhile, Cho Giseok pays homage to the cultural history of Korean beauty; Takahashi Homma and Tomihiro Kono explore Japanese street style through the language of hair; and Liv Liberg and Ana Takahashi reflect on the growing pains of youth.

‘I’m sort of beauty adjacent.’

From her phallic ephemera to her collection of masks and wigs, we take a tour of Isamaya Ffrench’s studio and enter her wild world of glamour and the grotesque.

Photographs and layout by Juergen Teller
Creative partner Dovile Drizyte



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ISAMAYA

Isamaya Ffrench first met photographer Juergen Teller backstage at a Vivienne Westwood show, now too long ago to remember which one. Over the years, they've worked on plenty of jobs together whether that's for Westwood or for Riccardo Tisci when he was still at Burberry, but it wasn't until she stepped in front of his camera, as part of this portfolio for *System beauty*, that she finally understood his power as an artist. 'The whole day felt like a wild blur that I couldn't really get a handle on, but it sort of didn't matter,' she says. 'It was real, it was honest and it was me.'

Isamaya Ffrench: I have a funny relationship with make-up – maybe I stigmatise it. A lot of people think about make-up in a very commercial and superficial sense and it's hard for me to feel connected to that. My relationship with make-up has always been one that's been pursuing something entirely different; not just making people look good, which is primarily what make-up is there to do. I've always felt embarrassed about being a make-up artist. But the older I get, the more I rely on make-up for myself to look good, so I do understand the power it wields. It's magic for a lot of people, it can allow them to become something other than who they are.

'Being photographed by you is probably the most exposing. As I'm generally very in control of my image and the images I create, I really just had to let go.'

Juergen Teller: I had the same feeling about being a fashion photographer. Years ago, it was slightly embarrassing to do that. It's not anymore. People always ask me: 'What is beauty for you?' Beauty can be anything. Beauty in a commercial sense just means money. I really enjoyed the day we spent together, I thought that was a beautiful moment.

Isamaya: It was! I've known your work for years and know it very well. But it's only when you're being photographed by Juergen Teller that you really feel the power of the process. It's probably the most exposing, even though we were doing lots of silly dressing up with wigs. We were in my house so while there was an element of control, I also felt totally out of control. And as somebody who's generally very in control of my image and the images I create, I really just had to let go.

Juergen: It's a very beautiful, strange portfolio. You look so different and the same. I thought you were extremely photogenic. When we worked together for Vivienne Westwood, I got a sense of who you were. Doing things in a very light way. That doesn't mean that it's light, but it's very fluid. And nothing is really so important. The whole thing is important, of course, but there's an ease which I really enjoy, and a sense of having fun. Instead of being so hung up about it – it has to look like *this*, or just the hair has to look like *that*.

Isamaya: I think you could literally have been talking about yourself just then, because that's exactly the way you work. I suppose that part of the way we work is to allow things to happen. To not be so controlling and to go with the flow. I knew that it wasn't going to be super staged, that it would just be an unfolding of events and we'd just go where it takes us. There wasn't this big set with lots of people buzzing around. There's no one holding lights, no one doing the catering, there's no production. It's just you, a subject, and a phone. Can you reflect on that?

Juergen: If you use the phone in the right way, it's an incredible, beautiful instrument. I just want to be very direct. When did you start working with Andreas [Kronthaler]?

Isamaya: Almost 10 years ago. It's only now that I realise there's no fucking point even opening a make-up mood board from them before the show. Because you go there and not only have they changed their mind, they can't remember what was on the mood board. They don't even like the mood board anymore. They basically go, 'Look, just do whatever you want on the show.' So that's what I do. I used to get so stressed but now I feel confident enough in myself that they really like what I do, so I go with it.

Juergen: Organically it comes together. Whenever we take pictures, all of us together with Andreas and Vivienne before, I also used to be nervous. But then I thought: 'This is going to work out, mix things up,' and that's how we get along. It's actually very beautiful.

Isamaya: Definitely. So much of what they do is about individuals. It's more character-based, and I think: what's the point in doing a red lip on this girl in a test, when it's going to look completely different on some other girl in the show?

Juergen: How many shows do you do?

Isamaya: It changes sort of seasonally, but I do all of the cities.

Juergen: I wasn't quite aware that you're on this sort of treadmill of things. Are you getting tired of it?

Isamaya: Not now that I have my brand. There was a moment before that, where I started to question things, but it has opened doors for collaborations. I do a lot of creative direction for people and for brands.

Juergen: Do you find it tiring to work with people?

Isamaya: Oh, God, yes. You're constantly having to play to other people's frequencies. If I could be on my own frequency, I would be listening to heavy metal music and painting quietly. But when you're on a shoot, and you have anxious clients, you've got to match their frequency.

Juergen: Is there a formula in how you work with colour for your brand? Is it very structured, or do you go like, 'Oh, I feel pink now.'

Isamaya: It's all intuitive, really. That intuitiveness could tell me that we need three wild colours to launch, or it could say, 'Why don't we give them six very wearable colours now?' Colour development takes a very long time, like shade matching, I'm literally in the lab sampling things going 'point four more yellow', and like, 'bring the reds down and push the white.' You've also got to think about different skin tones. Something might look incredible on you, but dreadful on me, because I have yellow-based skin tone, and yours is pink-based. Then you've got all the different lights, which you definitely know about: we wear something in here and it looks incredible, then we go outside and it looks dreadful again. You're constantly juggling the different factors that contribute to the colour.

Juergen: There's so many shades, and for us as outsiders it's like… just a fucking red.

Isamaya: Yeah, it's not just a fucking red! No, totally. Trends do come into it, because if you think nude lipsticks, they were very popular in the 90s, and again a couple of years ago. So most of the time with make-up, you've got to design a year or two in advance.

Juergen: It takes so long.

Isamaya: I don't know why it takes so long, but it does. And it's hard because sometimes you think the rest of the world is going to quickly catch up and do it before yours even gets to come out, even though you thought about it two years ago. But that's life, isn't it?

First photography assistant: Emma Williams. Post production: Lucas Rios Palazesi at Quickfix.

‘I don’t work for make-up, make-up works for me.’

Isamaya Ffrench talks about childish impulses, Carl Jung, and why she’s so much more than a make-up artist. Interview by Bunny Kinney

Isamaya Ffrench is one of the most extraordinarily unusual people I have ever known. Her interests are as varied as they are idiosyncratic. One minute she’s recording an experimental nu-metal-meets-British-folk album, the next she’s hysterically crying on cue in some high camp tragedy staged by the Theo Adams Company, shortly followed by a near-death experience as she attempts to climb Mount Everest.

I first met the Cambridge-born make-up artist a decade ago, at a party she was hosting in her flat in Stamford Hill. At the time, she was still drawing tigers on kid’s faces at posh birthday parties, which she’d fallen into by chance. Those parties led to editorial gigs at *i-D* and *Dazed & Confused*, where she established herself as a playful innovator, soon emerging as the go-to backstage visionary behind runway looks for Virgil Abloh’s Louis Vuitton, Junya Watanabe, Vivienne Westwood, Thom Browne, and more. Additionally, she’s helmed many of the industry’s top luxury beauty brands, including YSL, Burberry, Tom Ford, Louboutin and Byredo, before reinventing herself via her own mononymic brand ISAMAYA, which she launched in 2022.

We have collaborated in many ways across the years, from launching the ahead-of-its-time *Dazed Beauty*, the first print cover of which featured Kate Moss and Travis Scott as dystopian CGI centaurs, to filming Isamaya, bald in a bodystocking and writhing on the floor, mouth teeming with black goo in a music video for British goth rockers The Horrors. With each new project, she seems to effortlessly shapeshift between roles both on and off set – make-up artist, art director, model.

Despite the fact that Ffrench operates at the highest echelons of the industry, her defiance of categorisation allows her to maintain a position staunchly to the left of it. She is in a rank of her own, consistently leading the charge of what’s next in beauty. To watch Isamaya concoct her ideas – whether it’s on a face or one of the many other mediums upon which her work comes to life – is to witness a fearlessness powered by some sort of psychic genius.

Over the years, I’ve learned that whatever Isamaya is drawn to, obsessed with, or otherwise stubborn in her support of (even if no one else, including myself, is on board) will inevitably emerge as a dominant trend, not least of all because she’s usually the very person to set it free into the world in her customarily rule-breaking fashion. Whether it’s face painting or prosthetics or 3D scanning and AI, she’s always ahead of the curve and remains steadfast in her vision, never motivated by commercial appeal despite the fact that the beauty industry has become bigger and more powerful than ever. Case in point: her recent line of lipsticks encased in phallic packaging. It’s not to say no one had previously considered the psychosexual implications of the lipstick-as-phallus, but Ffrench was certainly the first to turn that Freudian dick-slip into a sell-out product that was, literally and figuratively, on absolutely everybody’s lips this year. Who would have thought it? Certainly not a room full of your average beauty biz execs. But industry pearl-clutchers be damned. It’s Isamaya’s wild world now. We’re just along for the ride.

Bunny Kinney: I’ve always been obsessed with the mythology of your family. One of the first things I asked you when we met was about your name and you told me all of the people in my family have unusual names. So tell me a little bit about that.

Isamaya Ffrench: There is no myth, my family really does exist! I was originally called Esmerelda… But my parents swapped it at the last minute. My name is 13th century English. It means ‘iron strength’ and comes from the Old English Christian Book Of Names. My sister’s called Kerstyn (pronounced ‘Shosh-tin’) which is Swedish and my brother is Æthan. When I was in the early stages of therapy, I used to reflect on how I felt disassociated from it and how it felt very burdensome. Can you imagine a seven year old girl constantly being asked about her name every time she met someone new and having to sort of ‘explain herself’? But I love my name now.

And what about Ffrench with the double f?

Originally it was written in a Gothic script and so the capital F looked like two lowercase Fs joined up. My name on my birth certificate and passport is ffrench with a double f but they are both lowercase.

From stories you’ve told me, it always sounded like your family is eccentric. Did they foster creativity at home?

My mum and dad are very creative people in different ways. My mum is an incredible knitter and has a brilliant eye for design. My dad is a pure problem solver and I think that’s where I get a lot of my grey matter from. I think of my job as being a creative problem solver. Dad was much more practical about it. He was always building something and he still is now – it’s quite inspiring. He could probably build the Hubble telescope if you left him to it. Our house was very unusual. My dad was an extreme collector of things; you couldn’t walk around the house because there were objects everywhere. My bed was behind a bookshelf and I had to climb over car engines and stacks of magazines to get into bed. I feel like this attachment to objects was because he saw so much potential in things. We used to have wire hangers taped to the ceiling so that we could tune into pirate radio stations and there were hundreds of old computers and monitors around the house, all with different operating systems. One of the downsides was that we didn’t have hot water or central heating because it broke down one winter and was never repaired. There was always this sense of, ‘It doesn’t matter if the house is falling apart, because we will rebuild it!’

How did you start to emerge as an individual amidst all of this?

When I was very young, I loved roaming around that house in all its chaos. I could test a fuse and read morse code when I was seven years old. I remember finding a fully formed wasp nest in the living room because nobody had been in there for so many years. We had scaffolding up in the garden for as long as I can remember and an upturned boat. I used to climb up to the roof where there were decaying planks of wood, and create little platforms and comfy places to sit and read my book and look into other people’s gardens. I had so much freedom growing up. That environment gave me

a huge sense of independence. I had to make my own fun and really had to use my imagination. I remember when I was about 10 years old, I would go and sit in my parents' bedroom where they had this tiny TV and I would watch *Cabaret* in the dark. The glamour of Hollywood was just so otherworldly to me. It felt like the ultimate escape from my pretty crazy reality. Up until I was about 13 it was magical. It didn't disturb me. But then there came a point in my teens where my relationship with everything changed. I wasn't interested in getting under the bonnets of cars and repinning exhaust pipes. I wanted to dance and do art and other things. I spent a lot of time away from home and quickly realised that I was very different from all the girls at school. I suppose in a way I was quite an isolated character, but brilliant at putting on a performance and joining in with everything.

What did you imagine your future was going to be like at that age?
My childhood and teen years were super physical. I joined a dance school when I was four years old and then when I was seven, I joined a highboard diving club. My parents were so supportive. They decided to become trampoline instructors in order to support me and would drive the squad around England in our campervan to competitions. I did martial arts and long distance running for years too. I was totally unable to sit still. My A-levels were very academic: Physics, Maths, English and History – I hated every second of it. I didn't know what I wanted to do so I did a foundation at Chelsea and then I was like, 'OK, I've got to go to art school.' I went to Central Saint Martins and did product design, which is sort of problem solving through design but it wasn't conceptual enough. I remember the day that I decided to leave. We were doing a project where we had to design something that was based on a classic design piece but would also solve a human problem. I decided to take the classic metal tubular Bauhaus chair and design it so that it would seat you in the perfect anatomical position for taking a shit. I spent ages on the research. The tutor didn't like it. So I dropped out. My parents stopped helping pay my rent because they thought that I was an idiot for dropping out and so I became a kids' face painter as a side job. I enrolled on a face painting course in Paddington to learn some basic skills. I really loved it and got really good at it. I ended up working for a very posh kids' party agency up in Hampstead, doing parties for the Princess of Azerbaijan and B-list celebs.

So then what happened?
Through friends I was introduced to the Theo Adams Company, which is a dance theatre troupe. We performed all over the world. We would do installations at The ICA and Tate Modern, bespoke shows for events like the opening of a Louis Vuitton flagship store in Japan and one year we took a residency at The Watermill Centre in New York. Theo would bring together all of these performers – Gwendoline Christie and Sonoya Mizuno were part of the company when I was there – and we would create very unusual, shocking and provoking work. Often the work explored the 'The Diva' archetype, as well as concepts around femininity and masculinity.

One day the artist Matthew Stone came to take portraits of the company. While I was having my portrait taken, he asked me what I did, and I said, 'I do face and body painting.' I was like 19 or 20 at this point. And he said, 'Oh, you know, I'm doing a shoot next week, could you come and turn the models into clay-encased gods?' And I was like, 'Sure, yeah.' And it turned out to be a shoot for *i-D*. I didn't know what it was at the time, I wasn't interested. I was just there for the art and the weirdness of it all.

I was wearing soggy overalls and washing my dirty brushes at the sink, and I remember looking over at the make-up artist on set and was shocked to see how clean and put together she and her kit were. I was convinced that was something I could do. I was just like, 'That looks so easy compared to this slop bucket that I'm having to carry around.' I went out the next day and bought myself a load of foundations from Boots, and then called myself a make-up artist.

Who was the first person to book you as a make-up artist?
Christopher Shannon, the London-based designer, had seen the *i-D* shoot and got in touch. People were like, 'Who is this girl that's doing all these alternative beauty looks?' I loved working with Christopher, we often did these avant-garde make-up looks – one season I heated plastic bags and glued them to the model's faces and for another show I built masks out of Lego. It was such young, naive work and it really resonated with this NEW-GEN culture. I look back on my work now and see how childish it was, because I was literally a child! I had no investment in the fashion game so I could do stupid shit.

When did you start playing with your own image?
I was shooting with David Sims and he started asking me all these questions about what I was doing. I was still very young at this point and I just said, 'I feel really frustrated, because I've got all of these great ideas, but nobody wants to shoot them.' And he said simply, 'Do it yourself.' That was around the time Instagram was surfacing. So I got a camera and asked my friend Josh [Wilks] to start shooting things. For four or five years we did these little projects together. We'd go to Iceland and just document our trip. And then *Dazed* would want to post it because it was really creative. I became a creative director very early on because I was creative directing all of these personal projects that ended up in fashion magazines.

What did it feel like to then start working with traditional clients as a make-up artist?
I've done make-up for almost 15 years now. I jumped in at the deep end quite early on but I knew if I just turned up for a job and they wanted a smokey eye, I could do that. It was like making a gradient on a canvas. I'd literally wing it at the beginning. I was a good artist and a really good painter. Growing up, I used to read Kevin Aucoin's Making Faces from cover to cover just because I liked the pictures. It's about make-up techniques but to me it was more of an art book. I loved the transformations that he did on all of these fabulous women – Cher, Madonna, and Kate Moss – and I could recreate those looks very easily. Coming from that as a seven year old kid who's watching *Cabaret*, I could see a way to become those women or to connect to those women that I was seeing on screen and it was through make-up. It was incredibly powerful. I hung around with a lot of boys when

'People are often judged by the last thing they do, and that can feel like strangulation for an artist. I've never been afraid to fail. What is failure really?'

I was younger and one of my earliest memories was making my neighbour's son up into a Kevyn Aucoin Naomi Campbell look and forcing him to catwalk down the dining table during dinner because I thought he looked so fabulous.

Were there ever moments on set where you were like, 'I can't do this'?
Well, sort of… There were constantly things that I'd never done before but I just felt like if I go for it, I'll be able to do it. With any emerging artist, you work your way up. I was sort of winging it in that I hadn't had any formal training or assisting but I knew exactly what I was doing. There was no point where I ever felt out of control. I might have never done a smokey eye before, but I'd make up how to do it. Everything was very easy and intuitive, even if I hadn't done it before.

I think that's a trademark of your personality. The impression is that you have a kind of fearlessness with your creative work. When you've tried other things outside of beauty, you approach it in the same way. You trust yourself, even if you've never done it before. That's always why I feel you are so creatively successful.
I think with any artist, actually doing the thing is part of it. So many people have incredible ideas, but they feel so inhibited because they're afraid of failing. It really holds them back. But I think just the sheer fact that you put something out there is what elevates things.

Doing the thing is a necessary part of the process. We live in a culture where everything has been very curated. People have this impression that everyone is doing it right the first time and I feel like we skip over the fact that all artists have to make a bunch of crap in order to make something good. You've got to start somewhere.
People are often judged by the last thing they do, and that can feel like strangulation for an artist. I've never been afraid to fail. What is failure really? If you're on a journey of self discovery there will always be ups and downs. Life is about constantly learning from experiences. Don't sit and fester in that shitness that you created, that you hate and everyone else thinks is shit, just move on and do something else.

Describe your creative practice… How do you work?
If I'm doing an editorial or creative piece, I feel it's really important to daydream. That's when the best stuff happens. I don't pressure myself into coming up with something, if I just don't think about it, then the idea slides into place. Then I set about developing the concept, working on the team, the narrative, the way it'll be presented. With the brand, it's a similar thing, I think there's a conversation always happening in the back of my head that I consciously dip in and out of – this happens for the conception of all the collections – they sort of 'arrive' and then I get to work building a world around them. Carl Jung once said, 'People don't have ideas, ideas have people.'

What are some of your favourite things you've worked on?
I did a project with WeTransfer where I worked really closely with prosthetics and special effects artists, and we created all these different characters that I embodied. They were based on creatures like spiders, squids, a fly and a bat. As a process that was really exciting because I collaborated with every department very closely so it felt extremely close to my vision. At one point, I had to sit in a cold bath basically wearing a loincloth with six kilos of silicone tentacles on my head. That's my kinda shit!

You mention prosthetics and I know you're really interested in new technologies like CGI. I read an interview somewhere where Dean Kissick said that Dazed Beauty *was really ahead of its time but no one appreciated it at the time. I was like, 'Yeah, damn straight.'*
Totally agree. And now people are doing avatars on the covers and using AI to create beauty images. Very late to the party bro.

Now that you've launched your brand, and you're in it on every level, and now that you've worked with everyone big in the world, every magazine, every brand, every celebrity, what do you think of the beauty industry and beauty itself today? What's your take on everything? Is it all bullshit? Is it good for the world?
That's a really big question. In a way I'm sort of beauty adjacent. I always have been. Maybe that's why people find my work interesting, because I'm not always on the nose of commercial beauty. Beauty is a platform and an environment for my work to exist in. I get bored by things that I've seen, I'm not interested in trends. I love exploring new territories. That's what I do with my brand, whether that's in the form of the campaigns, the product or the packaging. Even though you can't reinvent the wheel, really. The first red lipstick was seen in Mesopotamia 4000 years ago, and not much has really changed, they're still Sephora's top selling item.

Obviously, we had a big explosion of creative make-up posts, during Covid, when people had too much time on their hands and wanted to liberate themselves and do crazy art stuff, which is awesome. But that's really not affected the vast majority of the global population. What people want is just to look good, generally to the person that they find attractive. And that means always going back to the basics of good skin, foundation, and looking healthy. Basically, that's what the beauty industry is driven by, this pursuit of youth, because youth is sexy, youth is potential, youth is fertile. That drives humanity, that continues the cycle, which, as humans, is sort of why we're here. To explore that very basic human trait and make it exciting is my job now.

You called yourself beauty adjacent, which I think is very interesting, because there's this tendency to categorise you as a make-up artist. That's how you built your career. But you're obviously so much more than that. Do you feel like that's a mis-categorisation or that it limits what you do? I've always seen you as an artist and the make-up thing just happens to be one medium that you were able to uniquely make work for you.
Thank you. Well, I mean, I am a make-up artist, I've got 300 kilos of the stuff in my garage. But I definitely do other things. I have a lot of creative energy for life! And things other than make-up, whether that's music or film directing or horse riding in Mongolia – that's seriously creative stuff. In my career, the make-up artist thing has really worked for me, so I've gone along with it. I suppose I don't work for make-up, make-up works for me, as Carl Jung might say.

'As a seven-year-old kid who watched *Cabaret*, I could see a way to become those women or to connect to those women on screen, and it was through make-up.'

‘You’ve always been an anomaly.’

Isamaya Ffrench and Gwendoline Christie on femininity, glamour, and the transformative power of a haircut.

Ask Isamaya Ffrench about women who inspire her and she’ll immediately bring up British actress Gwendoline Christie. The pair met 13 years ago while they were active members of the Theo Adams Company, a band of multidisciplinary artists, designers, dancers, and musicians celebrated for their genre-defying performances staged all over the world. The next thing she’ll tell you is about the time she was helping Christie prepare for her role of Brienne of Tarth in the smash hit series *Game of Thrones*. ‘She asked me to be her personal trainer so I would take her to London Fields and get her to do military style training to get her in shape. One evening she was doing sit-ups and suddenly she goes, ‘I think I can smell dog shit.’ What happened was I had made her do sit-ups in dog shit. But she persevered and I’ve admired her commitment to the role ever since, no matter how shitty it is!’

Work ethic aside, for Ffrench, who has always been a bit of a tomboy, Christie is the paragon of femininity; someone who oozes glamour and radiates confidence as a result, a quality Ffrench has always admired. As Christie takes a break from filming in New York, Ffrench sits down with the actress to discuss their evolving relationship with beauty.

Isamaya Ffrench: Recently I was considering cutting all my hair off. I’ve done it once before; I cut it to my ears, and it was very liberating. But then I hated it, and I couldn’t wait for it to grow back. Often when people decide to do very drastic things, there’s a deeper narrative at play. But when you’re an actor, you’re often having to make quite bold, physical changes, whether you like it or not. You had to chop all your hair off for Brienne of Tarth in *Game of Thrones*, whereas before you had very long, very blonde, classically feminine, glamorous hair which is what it is now. What are your thoughts on making these radical changes for roles?

Gwendoline Christie: I’ve always had incredibly long hair. When I was 17, it was down to my hip bones. So it was absolutely excruciating for me to cut it. There’s so many aspects to me that I was always terrified to really contact, which was my own strength, my size, my masculinity, my androgyny, my feelings of being an outsider, the asymmetries in my face, the traumas I had experienced and the general alienation I felt from a lot of conventional society. Cutting the hair off, exposing myself, leaving myself with nothing to hide behind or decorate was an enforced acceptance of self. But I knew that that’s what the character needed. I really wanted to transform. All I’ve ever been interested in is transformation. I was repelled by it personally, because it hurt. But I was magnetically and undeniably attracted to it as an artist. I had to change. We used to have a lot less control over how we looked or how we presented ourselves. Now there are so many different ways where you can modify yourself and become who you want to be. 15 years ago, what you had was sort of what you got. I just knew that being uncomfortable creatively was where I would grow the most. It would bring me an awful lot. And it did. And as a result the performance was something that none of my friends around me would ever have expected. Would you have expected that kind of work for me?

Isamaya: Well, it’s difficult to say because when we met, we were both still active members of the Theo Adams Company. You always have your own personal view of how you present yourself to the world, whereas onlookers sometimes see something quite different. I don’t think there was ever a moment where I wouldn’t have put anything past you. From my experience you were somebody who felt very expressive in themselves. My first observations of you were of somebody who is outwardly ultra feminine in their choices. I always admired you, and Theo [Adams] and all those other members of the group who really embody that feminine, glamorous energy. I never embodied that, I was much more of a tomboy. I always felt like a complete fraud. So I looked at you all with fascination and another kind of idealism. With your ability to project so much, I don’t think that I would ever have questioned any of the roles that you’ve played. You are such a creative person. It all makes perfect sense to me, from what I know of you, you’re quite fearless. People often ask me, ‘Who do you admire? Who are your idols?’ And I swear to God, you are always the first name that my brain conjures. You and probably Madonna. You have this fearlessness and your commitment to your craft and who you are. You work fucking hard, and you take it seriously, and I really admire that.

Gwendoline: I’m really surprised, though, really, because most of the people around me were quite shocked.

Isamaya: But maybe a lot of the people around you hadn’t had an experience working with you.

Gwendoline: They hadn’t, that’s the thing.

Isamaya: I mean, you’re a glamorous character. You were very big on the social scene. Lots of friends. That’s a very different framing for somebody who’s quietly committed and dedicated to working on whatever it is, whether that’s vomiting pieces of red tissue in a Theo Adams show or doing sit ups with me in the park while lying in dogshit.

Gwendoline: That’s exactly what it was. And I never realised it before. You’ve always worked incredibly hard, ever since the first time I saw you. And it seemed like there was nothing you couldn’t do. You’ve always been such an anomaly; a genuine total weirdo and a freak. You turned up and you’re sort of this exquisite being. One of the ultimate humans. You can do absolutely anything outstandingly with what appears to be minimal effort. It takes an awful lot of drive.

Isamaya: That’s very kind of you. I just want to come full circle about this sort of character and personal development thing. Acting is a therapeutic practice as much as anything. Having to make all the physical changes and deal with that and get to know yourself again, how has it affected your sense of self and where you feel you are in the world?

Gwendoline: That very definitive role and act was incredible, because it propelled me like a cannonball into myself. I always remember at drama school, they said, ‘You have such a strong sense of who you are.’ And I can’t say whether that’s true. But now, I just love to transform into different people, into different characters. And I feel a very strong line between me and my work. I love my work more than I ever have done in my life, because I relish the opportunity to transform and to tell the story, and to listen, and to really work with directors. I love when you feel the charge of an energetic exchange, which is exactly the way I feel with you. I’m really into using up my ideas. I really like exploring new things. I like pushing myself out of my comfort zone.

‘Most beauty doesn’t have a lot of depth, whereas grotesque and ugly things really do.’

Isamaya Ffrench and Jordan Wolfson on truth, ugliness and controversial themes. Interview by Dean Kissick

In *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Keats wrote in 1819 that ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty.’ The artist Jordan Wolfson thinks much the same. Ffrench credits Wolfson as one of the few people around whom she can be totally and unapologetically herself – and because he, like her, pushes the boundaries of notions of beauty, ugliness, honesty and artifice. Wolfson creates animatronic figurative sculptures that perform, interacting with their audience in intimate, sometimes discomforting ways, trying to provoke a feeling. Before flying down to Canberra, to the National Museum of Australia for the world premiere of his latest work, Body Sculpture, he spoke with Isamaya about beautiful ideas and beautiful people.

Jordan Wolfson: I realised that what I think is beautiful, other people might not, because what I find beautiful are things that exploit truth and that includes the dark and the light. A lot of people just want to show the light, especially right now. When I think of movies, if you ask me, ‘What’s a beautiful movie?’ I might say *Viridiana* by Luis Buñuel, about a woman who leaves a convent, and then she goes and lives with her uncle. She invites all of these homeless people to live in the house and they are at one point trying to kill her; to me, that’s beautiful. I’m not saying it’s the truth that homeless people want to kill people, but I’m talking about the reality of showing the truth of human nature.

Isamaya Ffrench: One of the most common questions I’m asked is, ‘How do you define beauty?’ It’s a really annoying question. Perhaps, right now, you’re helping me define it. I’ve always said that it’s something that moves me. And I’m moved by honesty and truth, I suppose. I’ve seen an interview you’ve given about how you bring together contrasting ideas, and that tension creates the intrigue. I was thinking about how people often talk about my work as being anti-beauty, but I feel like I work in a similar sort of process to you. Half the work for me is done because the context is always fucking ‘beauty’, so anything that I do contrasts very well with that, whether it’s in a fashion magazine, or it’s on a runway show, or it’s a face. It’s easy to make things striking and extreme, because most beauty doesn’t have a great deal of depth, whereas the grotesque and ugly and other things really do. You can go a lot further.

Jordan: Totally. You know, your industry is about concealment, and then in my industry it’s about constantly taking off the mask. When I was a kid, I was driving along with my uncle over one of the bridges between Manhattan and Queens, to get onto I-95 and out of New York. My uncle points and he goes, ‘It looks very beautiful there.’ I looked, and it was a smokestack, the sky was brown, it was grey, and it’s polluting, it’s doing bad things. And he said to me, ‘Look at all of those colours, that’s still visually beautiful.’ I never forgot that. I think that people have a hard time parsing those things away from each other. They feel like if something is potentially morally subtractive, then it’s not beautiful. But that’s not true. You asked me what’s beautiful. I saw a mouse that had been completely flattened on the gravel, and its organs had basically exploded and flattened out of its body. It was totally flat, profoundly flat. Seeing the contrast of the organs, the flattened fur and the silhouette of the mouse’s flattened corpse over this graded, dark asphalt surface, those contrasts of textures were beautiful to me. I took a picture. I go, ‘That’s very beautiful.’ Is it morally beautiful? I don’t know. It’s just something that happened.

Isamaya: I can generally get behind most people’s aesthetics. That’s what I have to do for my job, getting into somebody else’s head and then using my vision to help articulate their brains creatively. That’s kind of what I do for mega brands.

Jordan: What’s beautiful to me is more like a feeling. Everyone knows that you can meet someone who’s amazingly beautiful, but if they’re not able to express their consciousness in a very free way, if they’re not comfortable with who they are, they’re ultimately not beautiful. The most physically beautiful person in the world could be the most dull; they could be a person who takes too much energy, and you need to be away from them. It’s when you meet someone who is comfortable in their own charisma, in their own narcissism – and I mean that in a positive way, we all have narcissism, we all have all of these things – and if you can accept it, if you can laugh at it, you can be beautiful.

Isamaya: The last time I saw you, we were talking about how both of our respective industries like to advise or encourage us not to make work that carries particular themes that might be controversial or problematic. I feel like that attacks me because I’m unable to express my truth or even explore it. How do you feel about that?

Jordan: My industry is very lopsided, but I’m a professional and in order for me to do my job I’ll also accept that at times what I’m doing is unpopular. I’ve chosen my profession because I can’t work for anybody. The minute I start working for anyone, I become completely pathologically disinterested. In short, life is banal and stupid. And it’s a waste of time to do things that you don’t like, especially for other people. If you want to live a beautiful life, in my opinion, you need to find a way to accept that. It’s just so silly that we’re in this human world. We’re constantly playing roles. As an artist, I’m creating these artworks, right, and the artworks are kind of performers. And there’s someone who’s the audience, but I’m also the audience. There’s an audience and a performer and there’s an innate desire for us to create and sell things to each other. There’s an innate desire for us to basically witness and receive things. So this performer-audience dynamic, or merchant-customer dynamic, is somehow innately in us, and there’s so much absurdity around it. It’s just so silly, all the bullshit that we get caught up in. If there are aliens, which I believe there are, they’re probably watching us and it’s like a reality show, it’s the best show you’ve ever seen, because we’re just the biggest idiots ever. We are just very stupid, brutal, horrible, dumb animals.

‘It takes a lot of time to get it right.’

Pierre Dinand looks back on his 60-year career designing the world’s most iconic perfume bottles. Photographs by Charles Negre

Look at any perfume bottle from Pierre Dinand’s oeuvre and you can see his hand immediately. In the oblong shape and tortoiseshell hues of Calvin Klein Eternity, the architectural splendour of Giorgio Armani’s Crystal Edition, and the art deco stripes that decorate the cylindrical Saint Laurent Rive Gauche. Underpinned by an essential timelessness, Dinand’s designs feel just as contemporary today as they did when they were first introduced – a quality that has seen him work with every major fashion house over the past six decades, from Pierre Balmain to Paco Rabanne, Yves Saint Laurent to Giorgio Armani.

Born in Paris in 1931, the designer spent his childhood drawing and making sculptures out of wood. After dropping out of the École des Beaux-Arts, where he was studying architecture, and completing his national service, Dinand joined a small advertising agency which specialised in luxury goods. He came to designing perfume bottles by chance, after being introduced to Hélène Rochas who needed someone to design a bottle for her new fragrance, Madame Rochas. Making a stopper out of plastic and metal instead of glass, with this first bottle, not only did Dinand create something truly unique, he laid the groundwork for what would come to revolutionise the entire practice of perfume bottle design.

Thomas Lenthal: When you first started out, did the job of a perfume bottle designer exist?
Pierre Dinand: Not really. No one was interested in making perfume bottles. I had a major competitor called Raymond Loewy who wanted to hire me but I worked independently.

Did the tools that you used to make your ideas already exist?
They already existed but not in perfume. When we were creating the bottles for Madame Rochas and Eau d’Hermès in the late ‘50s I went to see some glassmakers to try and learn what we could do, and how we could change those horrible glass stoppers that everyone was using, which either got stuck or broke. We made a few attempts, and then I found a manufacturer of aluminium powder compacts who agreed to work on aluminium stoppers for Madame Rochas.

When did you start working with Saint Laurent on Rive Gauche?
In 1968, Saint Laurent came to New York with Hélène Rochas, where I was working for the broadcasting network CBS, and we went to meet Andy Warhol. He had just done the Campbell Soup can poster, and Saint Laurent said: ‘I want to do something with metal cans!’ I had a workshop at the time but we didn’t know if we could work with plexiglass and metal. So, we made metal cylinders to see if it was possible. We had to be sure that the perfume would stay in the aluminium, because if you leave a perfume for more than six months in a metal container, it starts to erode. People told us we were crazy, but we launched the product, and it was an instant success.

What was the story behind the Bayadère stripes?
They were inspired by an art deco vase by Jean Dunand that I found at a flea market.

Can we talk about Opium?
That all started in 1975. A buyer in the US was looking to stock another brand so I told him about Kenzo who was causing a stir in Paris. He told me to send some ideas and I made a maquette, but in the end he thought the whole thing was too Japanese and wouldn’t work. At the time, Americans still had anti-Japanese sentiments due to Pearl Harbour. I kept my maquette, and six months later, Pierre Bergé invited me to Marrakech where Yves Saint Laurent was living. He wanted to make a perfume inspired by Gustave Courbet and Eugène Delacroix. I modified my initial design for Kenzo and my wife came up with a colour inspired by Chinese cinnabar lacquer. I presented it 15 days later and he said: ‘It’s wonderful, that’s like the inrō boxes they put their

opium in!' So the name actually came from the bottle. However Squibb, the pharmaceutical brand who produced all the Saint Laurent fragrances, rejected the idea straight away because it was too radical. I remember the Squibb president came to Paris to meet Saint Laurent and he said: 'We will never launch this plastic piece of shit!' No one would do it. So, I had to take complete responsibility for it. I had to find the glassmaker and the plastic maker. It was a huge risk. But it came out, in France first, and was a fantastic success.

Tell me about your method.
Normally I would start by interviewing the couturier. Often they would say, 'I have no idea,' which was better for me. I would then ask about their favourite perfumes, and if they still had no idea, I would go to their house. It was Cristóbal Balenciaga who taught me that if they don't have any ideas, go to their house and you'll see what they collect. It's true, at Balmain's house, there were lots of ivory sculpted objects, so I made a bottle sculpted from a block of ivory. It was the same for Calvin Klein. In the entrance hall of his New York duplex, there were these

house in Milan. I was told I would have a 15-minute meeting at 2.30pm, so I arrived on time and we started talking. He asked me what I studied, and I told him I had done architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts and he said, 'Me too!' So he cancelled all his other appointments for the day and invited me to dinner. Over the course of the evening, we spoke a lot about architecture; for him, Andrea Palladio's buildings represented the ideal, especially Villa La Rotonda in Vicenza. He loved the dome and the columns. I knew Palladio very well of course, and so we based the design for the Giorgio Armani perfume on that.

Is the idea of perfection important in your work?
Yes, it takes a lot of time to get it right; a lot of technical surveillance. My grandson who works with me now, Jules, spends a lot of time surveying the quality of the glass, complaining when it is not exactly how it should be. By being more demanding with the glassmakers, we ended up forming the best makers in the world.

You trained them, in a way. Your exactitude forced them to meet the high expectations of

mainly the rejection of plastic materials, which aren't recyclable. I mean it's crazy, really, because the number of perfume bottles produced compared to plastic water bottles is minimal.

Your designs have a timeless quality, which in my opinion is why you're still working.
In 1996, I decided to stop, because I could see that we were using more and more standard designs. I didn't have a team anymore. I was a bit sickened by it all. But then I got caught up in it again by Paco Rabanne who said: 'You can't stop, we need your ideas!'

In a world where everything is presented in 3D, do you still work with paper and pencil?
Yes. Up until 1995, we had a mechanical workshop with milling machines and the tools to make our own maquettes. These days, we show a 3D object with a digital file, but sometimes we show a maquette that we have made with a specialist. With digital techniques, our work as sculptors has become less important. Back in the day, brands had huge budgets for the design, maquettes of all sizes, and the technical follow-up. Things have changed.

'I asked Paco Rabanne: "What is a perfume to you?" He said: "It's a couple making love in a car at a New York drive-in."'

enormous blocks of rocks, all smoothed over, that he had brought back from Tibet. They resembled phalluses. In another room, on a little table, was a collection of blonde tortoiseshell objects. The big oblong stones gave me the idea for the shape of Obsession, and the colour came from the tortoiseshell. When he saw the design, he said, 'That's totally me!'

Another funny story was with Paco Rabanne, Calandre. Antonio Puig's company in Barcelona wanted to make a perfume. At the time, Paco had just made a dress for Brigitte Bardot and had a little boutique just by the Folies Bergère. We went to meet him and the connection was instant. I asked him: 'What is a perfume to you?' And he said: 'It's a couple making love in a car at a drive-in in New York.' So I told him, 'You need a big car for that!' And he said: 'Yes, a Rolls Royce.' From Rolls Royce, we took the idea of a car grill which became the basis of the design for Calandre. That was the method – I always tried to find a word, phrase, or object that's linked to the couturier.

It was the same thing with Armani. In the early '80s, I got called to Giorgio Armani's

the projects you gave them.
It was the same thing with the metalworkers, the cardboard makers, and the pump makers. Getting rid of pumps that dripped or which used dangerous aerosols. That's why it's so important to have exactitude in terms of the quality.

You're a very modern man. You look for elements that will help you build a convincing story for your client, but when we look at your work, there is a very specific viewpoint and personal sense of taste. Where does that come from?
If there isn't an initial spark, it's harder to make something personalised. When you see new bottles today, so many of them just look like each other, there is a sort of standardisation. It's a shame. But maybe the personalised bottle went too far. There are people that find it too strong and they want to stick with a banal standard bottle à la Chanel.

When did you witness this change of approach in the market?
It started in the '90s. For other reasons too,

What's the future of all this?
There's no longer that contact with the couturiers. Everything has to go via the marketing departments who don't really know what they want. So, the easiest option is to make something standard. Apart from when occasionally someone wants to do an original bottle.

Is Pierre Dinand a dynasty?
My sons used to work with me. Olivier, who was more technical, spent a lot of time with the glassmakers, whereas Jérôme was an extraordinary designer. Now it's my grandson Jules who has been working with me for the last ten years. Not only does he present the drawings, he also has his own ideas. I don't always agree. But it's another way of seeing and doing things. I understand that people have probably had enough of seeing my bottles and they want to see something new.

I'm not sure that's true!

Fara Homidi Essential Lip Compact (Red 1), Smudge & Contour Lip Pencil (Premier).

‘I don’t know why we are not doing cosmetics that speak to the fashion crowd.’

Make-up artist Fara Homidi and model Paloma Elsesser discuss life as an underdog and what makes a brand. Photograph by Robin Broadbent

Paloma Elsesser is the face that launched Pat McGrath Labs, Glossier, Fenty Beauty, and Fenty Skin. When a brand is looking to signal a departure from tradition, it calls upon the 31-year-old model. That’s not just down to her face, but rather what Elsesser represents: an idea of individual beauty that transcends size, shape and skin colour. When it came to Fara Homidi launching her eponymous beauty brand earlier this year – a collection of clean, luxury lip products – there was nobody else she wanted to front her inaugural campaign. But there was another reason for this choice. It’s a face that Homidi knows intimately having been doing the model’s make-up for the past eight years.

Where other brands pick ambassadors on the basis of their fame, choosing Elsesser to represent hers was about friendship, community, and shared experience. Both know what it feels like to be othered. Homidi was an indie kid who shopped in thrift stores and listened to rock music while growing up in a small Afghan community in Fremont, California, while Elsesser, who is of African-American and Chilean-Swiss descent, was raised in a predominantly white area in Los Angeles. Both now work in an industry built on specific ideas of what models, make-up, and beauty brands should look like. In spite of this, the pair have been able to carve out a space for themselves as leaders in their respective fields.

Tish Weinstock: Tell me a bit about your relationship.
Paloma Elsesser: We met eight years ago on a Nike shoot, I sat in her chair and she put this really dark ochre lip on me, and I was like, ‘This bitch gets me.’
Fara Homidi: We speak the same language. We both like excellence, but that doesn’t mean perfection. I like being pushed to rise to the occasion and I feel safe with Paloma when she pushes me there.

Is feeling safe a rarity in this industry?
Paloma: It becomes very difficult and painful to relate to an industry that once made me think they cared about change. There is part of the industry that genuinely does, but there is a huge majority that doesn’t.
Fara: Paloma has created her own path. It’s that idea of the underdog I can relate to.

What inspired the launch in the first place?
Fara: There was never a luxury beauty brand that existed in the fashion space that my friends and I could relate to. I don’t know why we are not doing cosmetics that are speaking to that fashion crowd. Though some fashion brands do beauty, something becomes diluted. There’s a certain level of quality and expertise to the clothing. But with the cosmetics, yes, there is something “luxury” about them, but it’s not at the same level. The beauty campaigns are also more commercial, whereas the clothing campaigns are shot by edgier photographers. I wanted to create something that felt special and didn’t compromise on quality. Everything is custom-made: custom formulations, custom packaging. I would be lying if I say I don’t want it to be a household name and in all the girlies’ bags. I think that will happen, I really believe in it. But even if this ended tomorrow, I would still be beyond proud of it.

What is the significance of the blue packaging?
Fara: I am all about optimism and this colour embodied all of that. I feel like all the possibilities are available to me if it’s a sunny day, and the place I feel most grounded is the ocean.

You launched with lip products, what’s next?
Fara: It’s a complexion product that I think is groundbreaking. I just got a DM from a model who was like, ‘Everytime you’re on set I don’t have to bring my complexion products. I know that you will match me. I am grateful.’ That is so powerful but also so sad that someone had to say that to me. Complexion is a big thing to me. It was a no-brainer that this collection would be complexion-considerate from its inception.

Paloma you’ve been a part of several beauty launches, what do you make of that?
Paloma: I feel really lucky to have been part of their DNA.

Do you think of yourself as a brand?
Paloma: Only as recently as my book launch. It made me think of myself as an entity that people want to be a part of. I was so moved that so many people showed up. When I die I can say at least I existed as something to make people think, consider, critique or just be.

Where is beauty heading?
Paloma: People are becoming more pulled back. But I think we should be investigating what pulled back means, because oftentimes sophistication and chicness is exclusive to thin white people. There’s this idea that representation needs to be about armpit hair, glitter, colour and all this stuff, all the time, which is fundamentally not chic. Whereas thinness and whiteness is clean and simple and right. I would like to see these worlds blended.
Fara: To piggyback on what Paloma is saying, I want to be chic too, I want to buy something that makes me feel like I belong in that ‘you can sit with us’ club of what chicness is.

Humanrace 7D Retrograde Gel Cleanser.

‘Humanrace has always been much bigger than me.’

For Pharrell Williams and Edward Robinson, Humanrace reveals skincare is *wellcare*. Photograph by Robin Broadbent

For as long as one can remember, multi-award-winning musician and producer (and just about everything else within the disciplines of fashion, music, collaboration and design), Pharrell Williams has been plagued with questions surrounding his indubitably flawless skin. In 2020, he put those questions to bed with the launch of his very own skincare brand, Humanrace – more music to the ears of his ardent devotees.

The mission statement was simple: to create accessible and effective skincare products, with an emphasis on self-care. With there being no space between Human and Race, the brand’s vision goes beyond a world-renowned cultural figure artlessly allocating their name to a product in order to increase their revenue stream. The brand is as shrewdly selfless and open-ended as its creators say it is.

Taking philosophical cues from the Japanese doctrine, Wa, Humanrace instils unity over any personal interests, building a sirenic sensibility through a specific design simplicity, which has since expanded its universe to include clothing and sneakers in collaboration with Adidas.

Unlike most skincare brands, a Humanrace product authentically speaks for itself without inordinate need for extreme visual accompaniment through the allure of image-making, overzealous marketing or overtly ambitious brand communications.

Rahim Attarzadeh: What were the motivations behind starting Humanrace?
Edward Robinson: I felt there was a gap in the direction of inclusivity. It lacked a global perspective. Often it’s felt that beauty has to look and feel a certain way and that the customer has to be a specific person. But with Humanrace, we’re speaking to all genders, to all skin types and tones and thus we’re allowing everyone to feel welcome. I think one of the big ones for us has been breaking down what skincare means and opening the door for men to be a part of the wellbeing conversation. The few beauty brands that have catered only to men have very rigid preconceived ideals of what men want or what men will respond to. Where we’ve innovated is how we stand by ourselves and not let the traditional beauty brand guide us.

Pharrell has previously expressed his desire to enter a space where there is room for individuality and artistic discipline. What makes Humanrace a unique entity within the overall scale of the skincare and bodycare market?
It’s the messaging at the core of our brand. Humanrace is about pausing and taking the time for yourself, even if just for a few minutes in the morning and at night. It’s about taking that time to reflect and care for yourself. Ultimately, the products that we’re offering are to be used on your skin or to be worn on your body, but it goes beyond the physical form.

How does Humanrace challenge the preconceived notions surrounding beauty?
Preconceived notions are often based on one’s past reality. We don’t call ourselves a beauty brand, we’re a ‘Being Well’ brand, which is Pharrell’s way of saying ‘Wellness’ to encourage you to care for yourself. Throughout Pharrell’s career, it became clear there was an under-serviced customer that was interested in being well but needed some guidance.

What informs the packaging?
We wanted to create objects that could be their own character. We want them to live in your home where you can project your energy onto them. I’m a big believer that the objects we have around us strongly affect our atmosphere. We created our packaging as soft forms yet with a strong stance.

What did beauty mean to you growing up?
Pharrell Williams: Growing up, I would only hear the word beauty associated with things that were effeminate, related to women, or environments, or places and scenes but it was never associated with anything masculine or towards men. It just wasn’t part of my environment and it wasn’t what I was seeing on television. Since then, I realised that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and if we think about it, all things are beautiful, all things are necessary.

At what stage did you realise the importance of skincare?
I remember Naomi Campbell telling me years ago that I needed to start taking care of my skin. I was then introduced to my dermatologist and now friend Dr. Elena Jones, who has been with me for 25 years and is also the chief dermatologist at Humanrace. Before I met her, skincare was not really a priority.

Tell me about your skincare rituals?
I always start with movement, either a workout or riding my bike. I then have a hot bath followed by a cold shower and the final part is the Humanrace Three-Minute Facial. I always find time to practise gratitude daily, that’s the most important part of the process. Self-care is absolutely essential to the message we are trying to tell with Humanrace. We want to provide tools, products and resources that inspire you to be well. We feel it goes beyond the physical product you hold but is more focused on the actual ritual and the time you are investing in yourself. It also doesn’t have to be time consuming.

Does Humanrace follow the same synergy as your other creative practices?
Humanrace is different because it’s for the mind, the body and the soul. Interacting with an entity that is Humanrace can help one to become more centred in their existence and centred in their intentions, and so that shines above and beyond anything else that I’ve ever done.

How does Humanrace convey an honest product that champions and goes beyond the difficulties associated with celebrities and creatives simply sticking their name on a product and trying to sell it?
I’ve never really seen Humanrace as ‘me’. I prefer to be more behind the scenes, but Humanrace has always been much bigger than me; it’s a movement.

Dior Addict Lip Glow Oil (Clear 000).

It’s nice to feel the shine

How one product category has virally been outshining the rest.
Words by Biz Sherbert
Photograph by Robin Broadbent

Dior Lip Glow Oil has been viral since its 2020 inception. It has a distinctive look, producing a shine so intense and smooth that it’s almost like a CGI-rendered version of a glossed lip. The feel is important too; unlike most high-shine products, it isn’t sticky or greasy. It’s a frictionless lacquer that’s captured the hearts of millions.

The massive and continued popularity of Lip Glow Oil reflects an ambient richness that’s settled over beauty in the past few years, marked by products and messaging that seem to luxuriate in their luxuriousness – a shift from ‘oil-free’ formulations in the ’90s. Beauty critic Jessica DeFino notes: ‘You always hear about Cleopatra bathing her skin in oils and we have this sort of romanticised, historical idea of oil as a beauty product.’

Peter Philips, creative and image director of Christian Dior Makeup, says that post-pandemic, people are on the lookout for products with caring elements that don’t compromise cosmetic results, like the cherry oil infused in Dior Lip Glow Oil. ‘There is something pure about oil – something that nourishes,’ says Philips.

DeFino also believes there’s something to the fact that oil is nourishing to the body, beyond the skin. ‘Oils are a huge part of food culture. So it makes me think of how foods are really popping up in the beauty industry right now as these sort of inanimate icons.’ Gisou’s product range, including its viral hair oil, centres around the use of honey. Laneige’s Lip Sleeping Mask – another viral product – is formulated using the brand’s Berry Fruit Complex. Meanwhile, Hailey Bieber’s Rhode Skin has oriented its image and offerings around desserts since launching in 2022, almost always with viral success. Bieber initially promoted the line as a way to achieve ‘glazed donut skin’ and later collaborated with donut company Krispy Kreme to create a Strawberry Glaze variety of the brand’s lip treatment.

This isn’t happening in silo, DeFino says. Rather it can be understood as part of a larger change in beauty. ‘It’s interesting to me that all of that is happening at the same time as we’re seeing a big resurgence in diet culture behaviours and Ozempic – it feels like sublimated desire for the things that we won’t eat.’ Instead of stocking our larders, we’re adding luxury lipids to our beauty routines the way we might drizzle olive oil over a dish.

This generation of viral products also feels like a spiritual departure from the footnoted femininity of mid-to-late 2010s beauty, as defined by Glossier. Sure, Glossier made a birthday cake flavour moisturising lip balm, but the confection of that choice was tempered by the product’s tech-twee name, Balm Dotcom. And while visually millennial pink is only one or two shades away from the pink that forms the shell of many Dior lip products, the latter feels like it could be found painted on a delicate nineteenth-century teacup. If Glossier, a brand built on and through Instagram, is remembered as girlboss beauty, today’s TikTok-viral products are just girl beauty. ‘We had this very heavily made-up look that was trending for a time which the Kardashians are representative of. And then we got into this sort of Glossier, faux-natural beauty,’ DeFino explains. ‘Now the pendulum is starting to swing back in the direction of excess.’ Lara Violetta, a fashion and beauty creator, describes her tube of Lip Glow Oil as the ‘opposite of quiet luxury.’

Philips sees the no makeup-but-actually-lots-of-makeup approach still at play, but in a new and indeed more baroque way. He recalls that in the early 2000s no-makeup-makeup was typically a matter of Vaseline, a little concealer on any pimples, and maybe mascara to darken the roots of your lashes. Now, he describes the new natural look as ‘much more colourful and much more elaborate,’ often created using a variety of products. ‘Lipstick is not about a perfectly drawn lip, or perfectly drawn eyeliner. But it’s more about the naturality of how you apply your product… maybe tapping with your fingers, or it’s the creamy eyeshadow that you apply with your fingers and let it all blend in.’

Lip Glow Oil made its way onto Violetta’s wishlist after she encountered a photo of Bella Hadid tearfully applying the product after watching Serena Williams’ final tennis match in 2022, which was doing the rounds online. For Violetta, it was ‘a moment of heavy cultural weight.’ A glam-refresh following an exceptionally photogenic cry seems to capture what this beauty epoch, and the viral products that define it, is all about: making sure every single moment is coated in the lustre of a viscous femininity.

In 2011, Lana Del Rey tweeted: ‘U should feel lucky to have my $79 lipstick kisses all over your face.’ More recently, user @mar-8ot shared the screenshot of the tweet with the caption ‘me after getting a dior lipgloss for christmas.’ Similar jokes about rationing kisses coloured by a luxurious lip product have become popular online. The implication here is that the varnished kisses carry the luxury of the brand itself – almost like a lip-print logo. DeFino notes that the appeal of luxury brands in beauty could be tied to the return of literal logomania, which has already made its way through fashion as part of the 2000s revival and is now edging into beauty. This is especially interesting at a time when dupes have never been more widespread and accessible in beauty – the ‘real thing’ has never been so replicated, and perhaps for some, it occupies an even more venerated space at the top of the product pyramid as a result.

The cost-per-kiss jokes also reflect a kind of winking nod to the price of beauty; in this case, riffing on the cost-per-use of a product. DeFino ties the rise of luxury-coded beauty to ‘a rejection of the idea that we need to hide our aesthetic labour.’ Even the high-gloss, high-shine finishes can be seen as a ‘display of the labour and a display of the product,’ which is at odds with past ideals of natural beauty propped up by a myth of effortlessness. In contrast, today’s routines relish in making effort apparent: influencer Alix Earle became one of TikTok’s biggest stars for getting real about what it takes to achieve her high-glam, bombshell looks – from a boob job and acne-obscuring filters, to every product she uses to mask a hangover and get ready for a night out (including Lip Glow Oil).

Over the past few days, I’ve been reapplying Dior Lip Glow Oil almost as soon as it gets the chance to dry. It smells like vanilla-mint, like how I’d hoped my candy-flavoured childhood lip balms would when I revisited them in a burst of nostalgia. There’s something both life-affirming and armoured about the feeling, smell, and motion of applying the gloss – I understand why it’s inspired a kind of cultural fanfiction. It’s nice to feel the shine.

Designer: Haider Ackermann.
Make-up artist: Lucy Bridge. Model: Saskia de Brauw

Patches of chewing gum

Words by Saskia de Brauw
Photograph by Julien Martinez Leclerc

The pavement outside the R.G. Ortiz funeral parlour in New York City is covered in patches of chewing gum. Their colours have mixed with the surface of the ground, dust, dirt, and imprints of things that walked through the sticky stains. They are shades of grey, pink, mint green and blue. It looks like the landscape of a crater.

I'm standing here in front of this funeral parlour, alone as it is quite early, and I become acutely aware of gum pattern on the street surface. I trace a line in my mind's eye, joining the dots of gum, connecting the people who once stood here for the same reason. These patches of chewing gum are traces of lives. These marks left by others now gone remind me of a friend I lost too soon. She was part of the crater landscape of my own life with its own invisible lines of connections.

Miep is one of the few people I have known and lost that I continue to see in the bodies of others. Each time it is as if I see her from the back. Her distinctive curly bob of flaming red hair, her dainty posture with wide hips and a confident walk. These women I see are of course never Miep, just her echo that lives inside of me.

Miep was an artist and a lot of what I have learned about beauty I owe to her.

She photographed women in a painterly manner, with contrasting colours, bright daylight, and sharp shadows. She was so fond of some models that we were more to her than only sitters in her work. Miep wasn't motherly, but in her very own way she took care of many of us whom she photographed. She cooked for each of us, and sometimes even all of us. She took us out to dinner or took us to thrift stores in search of interesting (old) objects that she surrounded herself with. She saw how these worthless objects could get a valuable new life inside her house. I became part of her life, and I didn't know it yet, but she was trying to show me something.

My friend Miep had immaculate taste. The food she prepared was always full of colour and the tableware was always chosen carefully. However, nothing was expensive. She could sew and embroider, paint and chop wood. Miep wore self-made trousers which only fit her body, often with a white blouse tucked inside the high waist. She was childlike and playful.

She lived in a simple wooden cabin in the woods that she fully renovated, much by herself. The walls were covered in photographs, paintings, and some valuable odd finds. The weekend home turned into a modern house with concrete heated flooring, large windows opening into the forest, and a small attic where the white crisp sheets would welcome a guest for the night.

I remember one day I arrived at the house and on the outdoor metal table a large ceramic tray was filled with rainwater from the night before. The petals from the surrounding trees had fallen into the tray. As everything that surrounded Miep, it looked like it had been made on purpose. It seemed planned, as if she had created the tray, the fallen leaves, and was pointing her bright light at just the right spot. It would not have looked the same were it not standing inside the forest under a tree on that table, filled with rainwater and petals. Would it have looked the same if it had not been standing in front of Miep's house but still inside the thrift store where she found it? Simply, beauty needs a context to be revealed.

It was here, at this very instant, that I saw how beauty can stimulate your senses and can forever alter your perspective. It dawned on me how beauty can fill the purpose of your life, not superficially, but intertwined with life, harmony, and peace.

Years later, as Miep's life lessons and the petals in the tray of water trickled through, I walked through a different forest in the presence of the late Zen Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh. We walked in silence to a river. He spoke of beauty that day. He shared the saying: 'There is no lotus without mud.' There is no light without darkness, and we say the same for beauty, no beauty without the beast. As we watched the river flow, we were also reminded that once we see beauty appear, it's already gone. Like the petals in the tray and the river going by, it's life's fleeting journey.

One day Miep had a horrendous accident. It is possible she knew this terrible fate would befall her as she had been working on her death cloth for years. She embroidered the names of her friends in large colourful letters on the cloth, at times even removing some names when the relationship had changed. Eventually, she took this beautiful cloth on her journey to the other side.

Miep's physical body is no longer here. Yet with the invisible connections that she created throughout her life, she instilled a sense of beauty in me and surely in others too. These parts of her are the echo I still hear as I walk the street and see her body in those of others. The petals in the tray take different shapes. Despite sadness, there is even beauty in loss, as new things arise from it.

It is not universal what each one of us sees as beautiful, but what beauty does to us is. It makes us happy and free, and it connects us to ourselves and to others. Beauty gives us a sense of belonging. It lifts us up like goosebumps lift our skin, arising out of nowhere when we are moved by something we cannot describe with words. The place it hits inside of us is where beauty resides. As in darkness we look for light, so must we look for beauty.

‘Why would I ever touch my body? I was perfect before.’

Kylie Jenner and Haider Ackermann discuss their evolving relationship with beauty.

Haider Ackermann is used to working with his usual coterie of androgynous-looking women. Like the model Saskia de Brauw, who stars in the campaign for his recently launched collaboration with luxury skincare brand Augustinus Bader. Or the actress Tilda Swinton, who has worn Ackermann’s designs on countless red carpets. So when it came down to creating a dress for Kylie Jenner for the 2023 Met Gala, a woman celebrated for her sumptuous curves and overt sensuality, he was presented with the ultimate creative proposition: to reimagine his own aesthetic within the context of Jenner’s signature vision of beauty. After all, here is a woman who has managed to commodify her appearance to the tune of one billion dollars thanks to her highly bankable line of cosmetics. The result was a seamless union of two distinct worlds and an unlikely friendship.

Elizabeth von Guttman: Growing up, can you tell me about your first encounters with beauty?
Kylie Jenner: My earliest memory was playing with my mum’s beautiful acrylic make-up case. She had all of these Chanel lipsticks and sparkly powders. I was always the girl with make-up on but I wasn’t trying to be expressive. I was just having fun.
Haider Ackermann: I have always been seduced by the beauty of the gaze. I was raised in countries where women were covered in veils. Some of them would wear those white cotton veils with a cut-out triangle showing just one eye. It was something very unsettling and penetrating. It would fix you more than anything else; it would undress you. This very eye rimmed with kohl – a black powder they used as eyeliner – made the gaze even more mysterious and almost dangerous.

Who was the first person that represented beauty to you?
Kylie: The strong female figures in my life, like my grandmother who has always been such a hard worker and always dressed to the nines. And then my mother, who’s the same. The confidence that all the females have in my family. Everyone has such a strong belief in themselves. The presence that emanates from that fills a room.
Haider: Certainly my mother. Her angular face, her elongated neck, this masculine haircut, her endless fingers holding a cigarette, leaning at the dining table. Fearless, she dared in front of those conservative family members – it made her so provocatively seductive in my eyes. Her beauty was all about gestures.

Were there any male figures that inspired you too?
Haider: Defining a man by the word beauty is not appealing to me. His attitude, style, and elegance will make him attractive. His words and gestures will define his beauty.
Kylie: For me there was my dad. I have lots of brothers too. It’s funny because within the beauty industry it’s becoming much more accepted for men to wear make-up and to represent beauty. I think a lot of men have come out of their comfort zone and feel comfortable about it and are just experimenting and having fun.

Growing up in the public eye, and with social media, do you think that has affected your perception of beauty?
Kylie: I do. Being on social media and in the public eye from a young age can be really damaging. It is a lens on you that you can’t even imagine. It made me recognise things about myself that I would have never normally seen. Social media gives people this platform to be able to criticise, like someone saying, ‘She has really wide shoulders.’

When was the first moment you felt beautiful?
Kylie: It would have to be with my mom. She loved to dress me and my sisters in the most beautiful outfits.
Haider: It’s not the first time, but rather the last time. I was coming out of my room dressed in my tuxedo as we were on our way to the Opéra Garnier. The way my partner laid his eyes on me made me feel handsome. I was moved. I believe that we feel beautiful through the eyes of our loved ones.

Haider, how has working in fashion shaped your understanding of beauty?
Haider: As the season passes, you begin to understand women and men even more. You get to know their body, feed on their strength, use their imperfections. Each collection, each critique, and each fitting allows you to question the concept of beauty. Beauty lacks substance when it is not supported. The garment tells a different story depending on the person who embodies it. There is no beauty without personality.

Your first encounter was at the 2023 Met Gala. Coming from two different aesthetics, how did your collaboration develop?
Kylie: As a child, I never spoke up when I used to do things. Over time, I think I’ve learned to have this voice and I remember going into the Zoom meeting and Haider’s voice was just as loud on the call! In the best possible way. We were talking about the colour of the dress, and then Haider was very honest about his opinions. We always met in the middle. Then I had my first fitting in Palm Springs and he was on FaceTime. I was so impressed, fully trusting him and his vision because whilst I am very particular, it was his design and he is the expert. The things that he saw over FaceTime that I couldn’t see in person were remarkable. It only took him an hour over FaceTime. Haider is such a natural and is such a perfectionist. It was the first time that I let go.
Haider: You did not completely let go…
Kylie: Okay, yeah, I did not totally let go! [Laughs]
Haider: I remember meeting Kylie privately, and I was seduced by her kindness. From then on, I didn’t doubt for one minute whether or not I should accept her invitation. What was intriguing and challenging about this collaboration is that we are two different people with two different approaches and personalities. A different education of beauty. Where I am used to a certain ‘pudeur’, the people I collaborate with, in general, would not suggest sexuality as much as Kylie. We had a lot of conversations to understand each other and find the path where these two very different worlds meet. But when we explore other perspectives and aesthetics, I find that our spectrum expands, and the notion of beauty then takes on its full meaning. Coming back from the red carpet, she ran to embrace me with those words: ‘Thank you for allowing me to be myself.’ I suddenly realised how we, designers, sometimes forget that we are at the service of those women and not only our visions. I took it as a massive compliment.
Kylie: I think we both had the same intention and goal. It was a conversation.

What was it about Haider’s designs that made you feel beautiful?
Kylie: I love to feel sexy but it wasn’t just that. I just felt so classy and chic and like a grown woman and a mother. It captured the sexiness in an elegant, chic way. I felt like myself more than I have done in the past.
Haider: She was glowing with sensuality and it is this specifically that I wanted to work on and emphasise. This led me to play with lines and curves, so the cuts of the dress would embrace the movement of her body, like a caress. For her to remain desirable while being covered. Where beauty meets desire.

What else do you find beautiful?
Kylie: My kids have made me feel more confident. I have gained so much more self-love from having kids. Being able to see my features in my kids, how I see their beauty and how I can see my beauty outside of my body.
Haider: I think words. Words that you read, or words that are expressed to you. They can transport you.

Kylie, as someone who owns their own beauty brand, what do you hope to communicate and contribute to the world of beauty?
Kylie: Make-up to me is not about hiding. It is about expressing yourself and extending your own natural beauty.

There are so many variations around it.
Haider: Yes, one can not be judgmental about how people own their own beauty. A friend of mine has just undergone a lot of surgery, and it was very disturbing for me because I’m one of those people who find a lot of beauty in the evolution of a face over the years. As in every wrinkle, there is a story to be told. But my perspective changed when I saw him feeling so beautiful and happy. Who am I to say? Working with other people, you learn even more what beauty is, because it is such a big word and has a different meaning for everyone. By listening to each other, we learn how we can embrace different kinds of beauty.

It is an expression. What is the most extreme treatment you have done to make you feel beautiful?
Kylie: Probably my breasts and my body. I haven’t done much. I haven’t touched my face. I got my lips done, but people think I have reconstructed my face. That is probably what I hear the most about me, which is really interesting, and I haven’t spoken out about it because you can never win with the internet. If I say something then I am just going to be deemed a liar. To me, it was more when I was 19, I was influenced and having fun – it wasn’t so much that I was insecure. I don’t like to live with regrets, but a lot of times I find myself thinking: ‘Why would I ever touch my body? I was perfect before.’
Haider: We cannot have one definition of what beauty is. Beauty is subjective, it seems not everyone fully understands this concept, as we can see through social media. I find that very unfortunate. It is deplorable that so many people feel entitled to pass judgment. It is too violent for me, and I would like to say to all those: stop doing this because it isn’t a beautiful gesture.

Haider, what is Kylie’s most beautiful quality?
Haider: Her smile is so endearing. Her generosity is enchanting. Her true kindness is absolutely disarming.

And Kylie?
Kylie: I feel the same way about you. When I first met you, I felt this ability in you to make me feel so comfortable around you. I feel so safe when I’m with you. I just think about your personality and your openness.

The art of make-up, or Bruce Nauman's *Art Make-up* (1967-68)

By Róisín Tapponi

Bruce Nauman, an artist who continually evolves his practice, often positions himself as a 'beginner beginning'.[1] What could be a more fitting way to elucidate that concept by exploring the art of face paint, which, for many of us as children, provided an introduction to make-up? Nauman's iconic film series *Art Make-Up* (1967-68) is an early example of video performance, and delves into the transformative and experimental nature of face paint. Shot on 16mm film, it comprises four ten-minute films, where Nauman applies white, pink, green, and black paint to his face and body. We see Nauman take control of his image, posting as actor, director and make-up artist. The artist is transformed into a work of art, offering a critical examination of the process of 'making up' art.[2] Consider *Art Make-Up* as the most avant-garde of beauty vlogs, and the act of applying make-up as a performance itself.

Nauman was born on December 6, 1941, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and saw his artistic career take flight between 1964 and 1969, while living in Northern California. His video performances from this period are early examples of his exploration of self-making, self-erasure, and masking. He used a budget 16mm wind-up camera purchased from a pawnshop, predominantly employing his own body for performance. In an early interview, artist Joseph Raffael asked Nauman why he ventured into video. Nauman's response was that 'films are about seeing, and I wanted to make things for people to see while making them as challenging to see as possible.'[3]

Performance played a central role in Nauman's videos, which was an emerging interest for young and avant-garde artists at the time. He saw performance as an extension of his sculpture practice, and employed his body as a material, manipulating it in the same way he worked with materials like fibreglass, aluminium foil, or galvanised iron. In fact, Nauman produced *Art Make-Up* for a sculpture commission at the San Francisco Museum of Art, but the museum's director, Gerald Nordland, could not see the sculptural aspect of Nauman's performance videos, and excluded him from the exhibition.[4]

Nauman's early video performances made the 'behind-the-scenes' visible, challenging the notion that artistic processes should remain shrouded in secrecy, with only the final artwork or 'product' made available for viewing.[5] This finds parallels in the traditions of antiquity, and its foundations of the Western beauty industry. In *The Art of Love* Book III Part IV, the Roman poet Ovid argues that women's beauty regimes should be performed in secret, and that men should never be privy to their acts of transformation.[6] This has shifted in popular culture with the onset of beauty tutorials, which reveal make-up's artifice for the benefit of others. They can also challenge and reject the rules we are spoon-fed about beauty from society, seen in Jackie Aina's popular YouTube series, Trends We're Ditching. The processual nature of beauty tutorials also helps influencers and their audiences to feel empowered, through discussing their flaws.[7] The demographic who seem most unhappy with this are heterosexual men, specifically 'incels', who fire accusations of 'catfishing' in the comment sections of make-up tutorials.

Through his video work, Nauman also blurred the line between the artist and the artwork, the producer and the product. During the 1960s, Nauman also held a significant concern for his physical appearance, and his own egotistical concerns for perfection. In 1966, he compiled a list of things that mattered to him, with 'personal appearance and skin' ranking as his top priority.[8] Nauman's concern with his appearance is evident in *Art Make-Up*, and in other video works such as *Walk with Contrapposto* (1968), raising questions about physical perfection, reminiscent of the harmoniously 'golden' bodily proportions found in classical antiquity.[9]

Arguably, the most striking visual element of *Art Make-Up* is Nauman's use of colour. The colours converge on his body as if they were moving themselves. Pink reinvigorates ghostly white, green transforms pink into a light grey sheen, and the body shimmers in shifting layers of viscosity and volume. Nauman's enthusiastic application of colour was humorously described by Lucy R. Lippard as 'spiritlessly urban, but not commercial, like a shrimp pink house badly in need of a paint job.'[10] Using broad and sweeping gestures, Nauman certainly applies make-up to his body like a house receiving a paint job, without the detailed care of a make-up artist. He applies make-up with a carefree vigour, like a child applying face-paint. This contrasts how adults typically apply make-up, to the specific effect of making themselves look hot, or otherwise. The gestures in *Art Make-Up* are liberating, given the objective of transformation, rather than cosmetic enhancement.

The resulting image of Nauman's painted body looks theatrical, and *Art Make-Up* highlights the theatricality of applying make-up itself. Nauman uses his fingertips for blending, ensuring complete coverage, even inside his ears. After each layer of paint, he performs preening gestures, briefly pausing to look at himself in the mirror. Nauman is transfixed by his reflection, never averting his gaze or blinking. As the application progresses, a series of anxious gestures emerges. He wrings his hands, occasionally lifting them to blend smears of paint into his body. Nauman remains locked in self-scrutiny. It's only about twenty minutes into the film that he briefly diverts his gaze to the upper left corner of the frame, momentarily losing focus and concentration. As he applies the final layer, he starts applying paint at twice the speed. Nevertheless, there's precision in his sweeping movements, a result of practice and repetition. Art critic Parveen Adams observes a certain anxiety in Nauman's compulsion to repeat, and it's in this repetition that the object takes on an uncanny quality.[11]

The use of sound in *Art Make-Up* is relatively subdued, relying heavier on the production of images. This juxtaposes his other video performances produced during the same year, such as *Violin Film #1 (Playing The Violin As Fast As I Can)* (1967-68), later included in Nauman's experimental EP, *Nauman's Record* (1969). In contrast, *Art Make-Up* is soundless, apart from the hypnotic clicking of the recording instrument, and the gentle drone of the camera, which creates a stream-of-consciousness soundscape. The incessant clicking resembles a swarm of paparazzi, as if Nauman were a Hollywood celebrity, getting ready to face his fans. On that note, in 2010, James Franco produced a lacklustre version of *Art Make-Up*, available to view on NOWNESS. However, Franco appears more like a hipster applying sunscreen on a beach in Palo Alto, lacking the profound intent and intensity of Nauman.

In *Art Make-Up*, the viewer needs to learn how to look. Much like in beauty tutorials, where the viewer learns how to create a specific look. The series creates a dual effect, alienating the viewer whilst inviting them to watch. The result is mesmerising: Nauman's eyes dance at the edge of the frame, focusing on his reflection in the mirror rather than the camera. He monitors the careful construction of his image, in an exaggeration of the genre of self-portraiture. He produces a highly regulated and controlled environment, which extends to the exhibition display, instructed by the distributor of *Art Make-Up*, Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI). The four make-up application films must be projected onto separate walls and played linearly, ensuring that all walls display the same colour simultaneously, achievable through a single source. These videos loop, creating an environment that persists whether a spectator is present or not. These instructions emphasise the immersive qualities of the installation design, increasing the phenomenological effect – or, affect – of the viewing experience.

Beyond its formal components, *Art Make-Up* must be understood within its specific postmodern context. There is no dialogue in the four films; make-up functions as its own form of language, producing social discourse.[12] Nauman uses make-up to question the trappings of visibility, including how skin colour and make-up participate within wider historical narratives. Nauman's interest in skin as a material and surface began in his sculpture practice, where he used cast fibreglass to blur the distinction between the 'inside' and 'outside' of sculptures, as if they were bodies.[13] This is developed further in *Art Make-Up*, where he paints his skin darker and darker, with the introduction of colour on the skin undoubtedly provoking racial allusions that unfold in complex ways.[14] According to artist Jacolby Satterwhite, 'Nauman's work can be understood within this [racialised] context as an interrogation of the banality of his white male body: its scale, identity, and relationship to his environs.'[15] In other words, Nauman thinks through race, using its complexities to visualise binary meanings that permeate society, down to his artist's studio.

As a man who decides to use face-paint – and yet still fails at blending – Nauman is an anti-beauty icon. However, as shown by the viral success of beauty tutorials today, sometimes the 'perfection' associated with beauty isn't always the most interesting route to transformation. In fact, make-up can be quite conservative, especially when coupled with all of beauty's rules and historical baggage that dampen creativity. *Art Make-Up* shows that a willingness to experiment with your body can be the best way to learn about it, beyond prescribed or definitive processes of beauty, or 'becoming' beautiful. After all: aren't we just making it up as we go along?

1. There is a drawing by Nauman, titled *For Children/For Beginners* (2009), which opens with the text 'Beginners Beginning' Additionally, there is a 2010 video work by Nauman titled *For Beginners (all the combinations of the thumb and finger)*.

2. Quoted in Michele De Angelus, 'Interview with Bruce Nauman', *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman's Words*, edited by Janet Kraynak (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 265.

3. Quoted in Joe Raffael, 'Bruce Nauman on Fishing, Surrealism, and Filmmaking, in 1967', *ARTnews* Vol. 66 (1967), 39.

4. Jan Butterfield, 'Bruce Nauman: The Center of Yourself', *Arts Magazine* No. 49 (1975), 174. According to Barbara Rominski, librarian at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition referred to is likely Untitled 1968*, an invitational co-organised by the museum and the San Francisco Art Institute that included 23 painters and sculptors from the US.

5. This fascination with the artist's studio is by no means something new – see Gustave Courbet's painting *The Artist's Studio* (1854-55) and Daniel Buren's 1971 essay 'Function d'Atelier', translated into English by Thomas Repensek and published by The MIT Press in *October* Journal in 1979.

6. Ovid, *The Art of Love* Book III, translated by Roy K. Gibson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 57.

7. Emily Tarvin, 'You Look Disgusting: A Case Study of The YouTube Beauty Community', *Studies in Popular Culture* 41, No. 1 (2018), 37-65.

8. Marcia Tucker, 'Bruce Nauman', *Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965 to 1972* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1972), 41.

9. Caroline Bourgeois and Carlos Basualdo, *Bruce Nauman: Contrapposto Studies* (Venice: Marsilio, 2021). This is an exhibition catalogue; *Walk with Contrapposto* (1968) served as a departure point for a highly-acclaimed 2021 exhibition at Palazzo Grassi/Punta della Dogana.

10. His use of shading evokes something more complex – Briony Fer highlights how Nauman draws out the 'in-betweenness' of shades to hold time differently on the body, making the duration as palpable as the temporal progression of the film. Lucy R. Lippard, 'Eccentric Abstraction', *Art International* Vol. 10, No. 9 (1966), 57; Briony Fer, 'Disquiet Colour', *Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts*, edited by Kathy Halbreich (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 227.

11. Parveen Adams, 'Bruce Nauman and the Object of Anxiety', *October* 83 (1998), 112.

12. Amelia Jones has pointed out that Nauman's cosmetic painting improvises with a gendered historical division of masculine artist and feminised materials. Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 111.

13. Willoughby Sharp, 'Nauman Interview', *Arts Magazine* (1970), 237.

14. Scholar Levi Prombaum writes, 'Since colour structures, and not only appears in, *Art Make-Up*, a critical emphasis on representation alone risks leaving time and process behind.' Levi Prombaum, 'Sinking Colour/Colouring Skin: Thinking through Race in Bruce Nauman's Body Painting', *Wasafiri* 35 (2020), 48 and 52.

15. Jacolby Satterwhite, 'Jacolby Satterwhite on the Art of Bruce Nauman', *Artforum* 57, No. 2 (2018), 56.

‘I am more attracted to unfamiliarity than familiarity.’

Photographer Cho Giseok on unexpected harmony and his interpretation of K-beauty.

Photographs by Cho Giseok
Make-up and nails by Oh Seong Seok
Hair by Gabe Sin

Make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), KIKO Milano High Pigment Eye Shadow (18 and 50), MAC Connect In Colour Eye Shadow Palette: Hi-Fi Colour, Diorshow Overcurl Mascara (black), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent).

Make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), Chanel Les 4 Ombres (362), Diorshow Overcurl Mascara (black), MAC Lustreglass Sheer-shine Lipstick (lady bug), MAC Weightless Loose Power (translucent). Opposite page, make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), Dior Mono Couleur Couture (240), NARS Blush Impassioned, MAC Matte Lipstick (chili), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent).

Make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), KIKO Milano High Pigment Eyeshadow (54), Diorshow Overcurl Mascara (black), MAC Matte Lipstick (matte royal), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent). Opposite page, make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), KIKO Milano High Pigment Eyeshadow (18), Diorshow Overcurl Mascara (black), MAC Lustreglass Sheer-shine Lipstick (lady bug), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent). Following double page, make-up: Dior Backstage Contour Palette (001), MAC Lip Pencil (cherry), KIKO Milano High Pigment Eyeshadow (18), MAC Matte Lipstick (chili), HERA Soft Finish Loose Powder.

Both pages: Make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), Diorshow On Set Brow (00), MAC Lip Pencil (cherry), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), KIKO Milano High Pigment Eyeshadow (47, 50 and 54), Diorshow Overcurl Mascara (black), MAC Lipglass (ruby woo), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent). Jacket by Bottega Veneta.

Make-up: Make Up Forever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Lip Pencil (cherry), KIKO Milano High Pigment Eyeshadow (18), Diorshow Overcurl Mascara (black), MAC Matte Lipstick (chili), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent). Opposite page, make-up: Shu Uemura Hard Formula Eyebrow Pencil, NARS Blush Impassioned, HERA Sensual Powder Matte Liquid (145), HERA Soft Finish Loose Powder.

Make-up: MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), Dior Backstage Contour Palette (001), Dior Rouge Blush (475), MAC Matte Lipstick (chili), HERA Soft Finish Loose Powder. Top by Bellnouveau. Opposite page, make-up: MAC Lip Pencil (cherry), KIKO Milano High Pigment Eyeshadow (18), Chanel Les 4 Ombres (362), NARS Liquid Blush (orgasm), MAC Lustreglass Sheer-shine Lipstick (lady bug), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent). Top by Bottega Veneta.

Make-up: Shu Uemura Hard Formula Eyebrow Pencil, MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (brown), Dior Backstage Contour Palette (001), Chanel Les 4 Ombres (362), NARS Blush (exhibit A), HERA Sensual Powder Matte Liquid (145), HERA Soft Finish Loose Powder. Opposite page, make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), Chanel Les 4 Ombres (362), Diorshow Overcurl Mascara (black), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent). Following page, make-up: Make Up For Ever Flash Color Case (white), MAC Pro Longwear Fluidline Eye Liner (black), MAC Eye Shadow (carbon), Dior Mono Couleur Couture (240), NARS Blush Impassioned, MAC Matte Lipstick (chili), MAC Weightless Loose Powder (translucent).

Styling by Jang Heejun. Production: A PRJECT. Producer: Kelly Suh. Models: Yujeong at Shsenter, Soan at Petiteconcierge, Ziun, Niko at Etcmgmt, Geumone at Modeldirectors, Luce kim at Morph.

Delicate and fragile they may appear, beautifully-winged, heart-shaped butterflies are actually the result of aged resilience. In traditional Korean folk painting, the butterfly is the most common insect to appear, and has long since been enshrined as a symbol of longevity, which may explain why Korean artist Cho Giseok returns to it as a constant photographic motif.

In fact, Giseok's subjects are often surrounded by or are at one with natural elements. In one image, a parrot casually rests on a man's face, its wings spread, ready to take flight. In another, a woman, shedding tears of blood, exhales smoke out of a red flower. In a third, fine strands of yellow feathers flutter through the wind, their careful placement on a man's face turning him into a sort of dandelion. Giseok's masterful blending of the natural continually yields something supernatural, a meticulous balance of strength and elegance, the corporeal and ethereal.

The Seoul-born creative's foray into photography began as a means to document his other artworks. As a child, he always had a penchant for drawing and making things with his hands. While pursuing visual communication and graphic design in college, Giseok took on side jobs creating sculptures and set designs for magazine editorials. Dissatisfied with how his work was captured by other photographers, he taught himself how to manipulate lighting and adjust camera angles, and began taking his own photos when he launched his fashion brand KUSIKOHC in 2016.

Since then, Giseok's images have graced the pages of numerous *Vogue* editions, as well as *Dazed* Korea, *Perfect Magazine*, and *Kinfolk*. After an extensive solo show at Fotografiska New York in early 2022, he was selected as one of the 500 most influential people in fashion by the Business of Fashion. While operating KUSIKOHC in tandem – which earned him a semi-finalist title for the 2023 LVMH Prize – Giseok has also been dipping his toes into videography, starting with Kali Uchis' music video for *I Wish you Roses*.

What Cho Giseok hopes for in his work, whether it's photography, video, sculpture, or fashion, is to relay a deeper story. Like a butterfly transforming from a larva, his work is ever-evolving. And like a butterfly's offering of long life, he wants his story to endure.

YJ Lee: How did you develop the concept for the System beauty *shoot?*
Cho Giseok: We started from the question: what is K-beauty? I'm not sure how to define that, but since traditional elements tend to have more defining features, we combined that with modern K-beauty elements. I don't like attaching 'K' much because it feels too constricting.

How do you interpret Korean beauty in the traditional sense?
For the make-up, we took inspiration from hahoetal (traditional Korean masks), and the patterns on dojagi (Korean pottery). I gravitate toward primary colours and things that are straightforward and intuitive.

How do your standards of beauty compare with conventional Korean beauty?
Personally, I tend to like conventionally beautiful people. But when looking for subjects to photograph, I look for faces that can convey a lot of emotions, whether it's laughing or crying. It's sort of like looking for actors who can deliver what I want to express. I just thought of that, but I think that sounds pretty good.

Korea is also the plastic surgery capital of the world. Why do you think Koreans became so obsessed with beauty?
This isn't my own theory, but something I heard in passing a long time ago. Since we are a monoethnic country with more than a fifth of the population living in Seoul and its vicinity, it's easier for us to compare ourselves with each other. We are such a compact nation and there's no diversity like there is in other parts of the world.

What is the throughline of all the beautiful things in your life or work?
I am more attracted to unfamiliarity than familiarity. I like to combine things that are unexpected and create their own harmony. Putting unexpected things together can be beautiful. I was bullied as a kid and used to act differently in public because I wanted to be liked. I would try to act social, but be completely different when I was alone at home. I used to be confused about it, but one day I realised that's just me. I can be both. When I accepted that, I felt more comfortable with my work.

You've told me before that you use tears in your photography as a tool to maximise an emotion. What is the importance of maximising an image?
I think it would be more memorable for the viewer if you can distil a story in an image. It's also more fulfilling for me as a creator because I project myself into my work. If the viewer can feel an emotion in my photography, it will last longer in their mind. I've been studying video lately, and am trying to approach photography the same way, where a series of photos become a sort of movie snippet. I want to try making a short film next year.

You incorporate a lot of nature in your work, but also unnatural objects like toys and tech devices. How do these help amplify your message?
It's along the same lines as combining unexpected things. For instance, I heard it's quite a strange sight for foreigners to see places like Gyeongbokgung Palace amidst skyscrapers in Seoul. That's because Korea went through rapid economic development. I think these objects are very Korean in that sense.

With things like toys, school uniforms, and traditional Korean motifs, there's a sense of nostalgia in your photography. How did growing up in Korea influence your work?
My childhood bullying provided me with a story I want to tell, things I want to express. I think it's ingrained in my memory because I was at an impressionable age. Adolescence has a huge influence on anyone's formation, no matter where you grow up.

You taught yourself photography. Is there a moment you remember when you mastered something that made you happy?
I was really happy when I learned to use a film camera and develop film. I loved that I tried hard and learned how to do something not many Koreans were doing at the time.

What are your thoughts on AI-generated imagery?
I've experimented with some but I'm not sure yet. It's become easier and more approachable to simulate or create imagery, which is a good thing. But ultimately I think the creator's message and intention are more important. AI may solve technical needs, but not the story or idea. I always think about how I could make something different from AI.

What have you been experimenting with lately? What is your next challenge?
I want to create photos or videos that have a story like a short film or work of fiction. It would be nice to tell my own story.

What was or is the most perfect thing in your life?
There are none. I don't think anything can be perfect. I'm far from perfect.

Sure, no person can be perfect, but what about finding happiness or perfection in small things?
If you're the type of person who can feel happiness in small things, I think that's possible. But I'm not like that. What can I do? What is perfection? I don't know.

Then what do you find joy in?
Love.

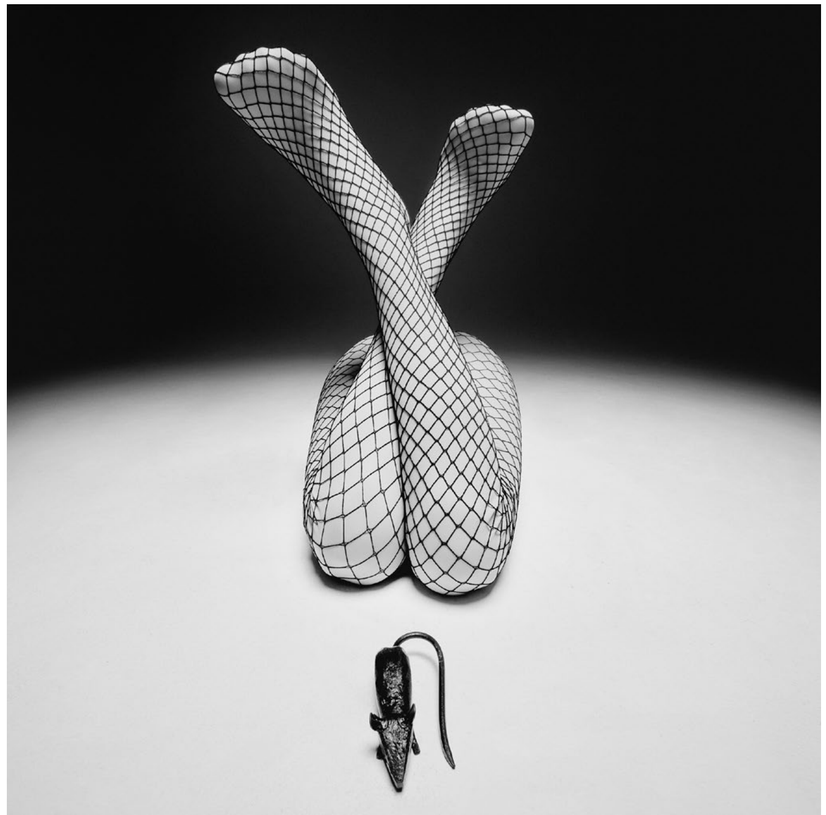
‘Distorting the image brings me closer to my emotional experience of reality.’

Photographer Julien Martinez Leclerc abstracts the conventional with his striking beauty vernacular.

Photographs by Julien Martinez Leclerc
Hair by Olivier Schawalder
Make-up by by Thom Walker

Make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Glow Foundation, Surratt Expressioniste Brow. Make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Glow Foundation, Surratt Expressioniste Brow Pencil (brunette), Shu Uemura Lashes, Givenchy Le Rouge Interdit Intense Silk Lipstick (beige sable).

Make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Matte Foundation, NARS Brow Perfector (atacama), Paris Berlin Eyelashes.



Make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Glow Foundation, Shu Uemura Lashes, Givenchy Prisme Libre Prep and Set Glow Mist.

Opposite page, make-up: Givenchy Skin Perfecto Serum, Givenchy Prep and Set Glow Mist, Givenchy Le Rouge Interdit Balm (00).
Make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Glow Foundation, Surratt Expressioniste Brow Pencil (brunette),
Shu Uemura Lashes, Givenchy Le Rouge Interdit Intense Silk Lipstick (beige sable).

Opposite page, make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Matte Foundation, Givenchy Prisme Libre Loose Powder (02).
Make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Glow Foundation, Hindash Beautopsy Gradient Palette, Givenchy Prisme Libre Prep and Set Glow Mist.

Make-up: Givenchy Prisme Libre Skin Caring Matte Foundation,
Givenchy Prisme Libre Loose Powder (01), Givenchy Le Rouge Interdit Intense Silk Lipstick (37).

Hair by Olivier Schawalder at Art+Commerce using Oribe.

Manicurist: Beatrice Eni. Set Designer: Afra Zamara. Movement Director: Ryan Chappell.
Casting Director: Franziska Bachofen-Echt. Production: Farago Projects.

Models: Levent at XDIRECTN, Lisa at Anti Agency, Ena at Noah, Gwen at Viva, Muna at Viva, Kenza, Edem, Carmen.

For Julien Martinez Leclerc, beauty lies in the detail and the connection he shares with his subject. Since graduating from London's College of Communication in 2017, the photographer and filmmaker has developed a striking and singular style: a monochromatic framework of symmetry, sharpness and severity. Now nearing ubiquity, his portfolio boasts an absorbing client list: Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Miu Miu, Hermès, Bottega Veneta, Moncler and Christian Dior – a rare entity for a photographer of 28 years old.

Martinez stepped into the spotlight in 2014 with his masterful use of lighting and rigorous capacity to create architectural structures out of compositional lines, realising the almost obsessive attention to detail required for creating expressive and evocative beauty imagery.

Backed by philosophical considerations and his deep respect for both art and photography's rich histories, in particular the work of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cézanne, as well as '60s fashion photography doyens, Bill Brandt and Steven Meisel, Martinez's work combines a lightness of touch with a concept-driven understanding of proportion, distortion, character and contrast. Here, Martinez speaks to *System beauty* about refining his unique language, the fantasy of proportion, and the enduring appeal of the in-person experience.

Rahim Attarzadeh: When were you first exposed to beauty?
Julien Martinez Leclerc: It was probably through paintings by Van Gogh or Picasso because that formed my education. I'm often drawn to bodies of work that feel truthful, obsessive and original. I like to identify repetition of motifs in the work of an artist because it's a sign of perseverance and quest. I am on a quest to find out what my artistic truth is, to find out what lies deep inside. The challenge of working in fashion is that it is a constant distraction to getting to that truth because there is so much more in the equation than just myself.

The deconstruct-reconstruct ethos consistently underpins your work. Is this modus operandi something you have developed consciously or subconsciously since you started out? What forms your initial starting point?
My starting point is always a dialogue with my own work. I have different chapters within my work, like seeds I plant. When I start a project, I generally look back at a picture from a couple months or even years ago and if the intention still excites me I will push that idea and aim to make an enhanced version of that. I ask myself 'how can it become a more mature, more perfected version of that same thing ?' I wake up every day and I think, 'How can my work be better?' It is that discomfort that drives me to the next project.

Does the feeling of self-acceptance play a role in your work?
I am in a phase of transition in my work and I feel the need to get closer to my subjects. Beauty photography as opposed to shooting fashion is facilitating that relationship by bringing you physically closer to your subject. Some of my fashion images are quite cold and severe – everything can be a bit mannequin-like, and I think I am moving away from that. With time, I can see myself allowing more emotion and warmth to come through the photographs. The thing with shooting a silhouette is that there is a lot more to deal with in terms of clothes, details, posture. Therefore, the emotional bond can be easily lost. When your focus is solely on the face there is less distraction and I can connect with my subject on a deeper level. A regret I often have when I leave a shoot is to think, 'I have no clue who that person I just photographed was!' I wish I had more time to get to know my subjects.

Stylistically, your work recall the great '60s fashion photographers. How does your appreciation of the past enable you to contextualise the present?
I reflect a lot on photography before I take photographs and unavoidably that appreciation of the past comes into play as I am creating my own language. I personally love when a photograph is grounded in art and fashion photography history. A picture with strong referencing acts to me a bit like a madeleine de Proust. If I see a picture by Juergen Teller and I sense that he has seen a painting by Cézanne, that connection touches me. It anchors the image on a timeline of art history and forms a gateway in order for the past and present to have a dialogue with one another.

Your approach differs from more recent trends in fashion and beauty photography in the sense that it feels more subtle and quietly considered. Through this, do you think that you have started to form your own aesthetic?
I believe you could say there is a spirit emerging and a red thread. It is like a draft that is coming together slowly and I think there is a lot more I will surprise myself with. I am very considered with the things that I show. If I feel like I have nothing interesting to say then I prefer to remain silent. There is so much 'noise' out there and I don't want to add to the confusion. When it comes to creating my own aesthetic, I do think there was a lot of comfort in the beginning to use references almost to shield myself from criticism and maybe as a way to conform to what fashion photography should be, and feel validated. It takes time to feel ready to 'appear'. I always think of Helmut Newton and how conventional his work was for decades until he started to create the work that got him acclaimed. I am careful to never underestimate anyone because you never know what lies in the deep end waiting to emerge. Photographers should be allowed more time to develop their vision and sometimes I find myself pressured by the rhythm of things. Development takes time and I am very lucky to have the support of a few mentors who have guided me in my journey to self-discovery.

Tell me about the story you put together for this issue. What impulses did you want to create around the human body?
I wanted to work with Olivier Schawalder as I think perfection is synonymous with his work, especially his wig work. The idea for this story was something along the lines of beauty meets design. I had never seen a beauty shoot involving furniture in that way. In terms of scale it is not easy to fit both a whole chair and a face in the same frame. I had a lot of Picasso paintings in my head, where perspectives are challenged and you see bits of chair popping out here and there around the model, where they merge into one another.

What is the significance of proportion and distortion within beauty photography?
A photograph is so impersonal in a way, as it is made by a machine, and I think the distortion helps me mould what is in front of me. It's a bit like sculpture. I find that distorting the image brings me closer to my emotional experience of reality. Almost to express how life cannot be contained. To become the architect of space allows me to appropriate the subject.

How much consideration do you give to the hair and make-up in your beauty imagery?
I think for any photographer who is meticulous, they will tell you that hair and make-up is a great part of the picture. I don't think you can create a good fashion image if you don't have the right hair and make-up. It's a very odd language that creatives speak together on a shoot. You just know when something is right, the same way you know it's wrong. It has to be a mix between something purely instinctive and a common understanding of what good taste is. Sometimes I look at pictures and I think, 'It would be a beautiful picture if that eye make-up wasn't there'. It is interesting how sometimes just the wrong eyeliner or the way the hair is done can make an image completely dull.

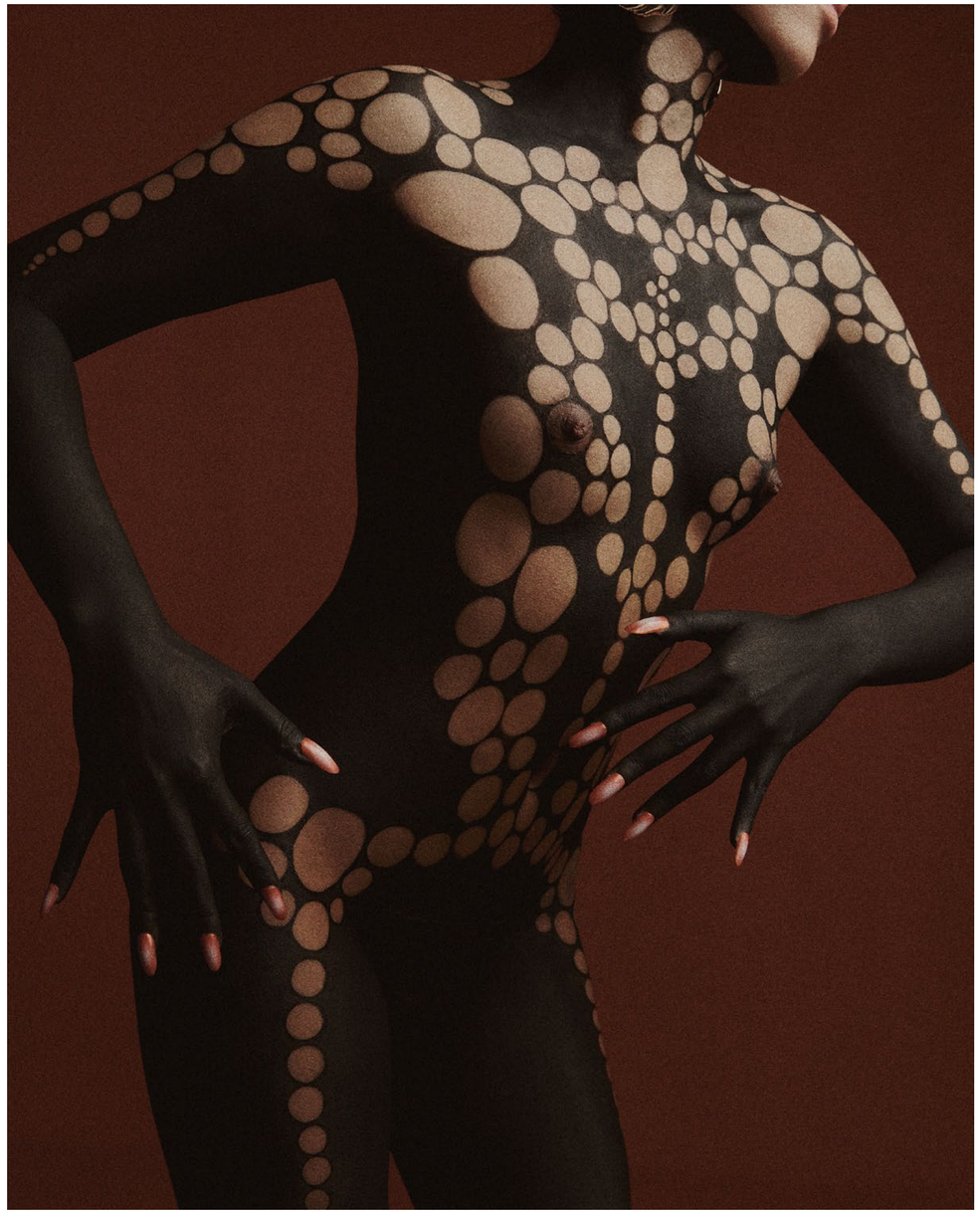
‘Perfection is the wrong word.’

Photographer Nadine Ijewere and make-up artist Ammy Drammeh on the rules of representation and how do you know when a picture is *the* one.

Photographs by Nadine Ijewere
Make-up by Ammy Drammeh
Hair by Ali Pirzadeh

Rachael wears gloves by Erdem.

Isla wears earrings by Hugo Kreit.



Christall wears earrings by Moya.

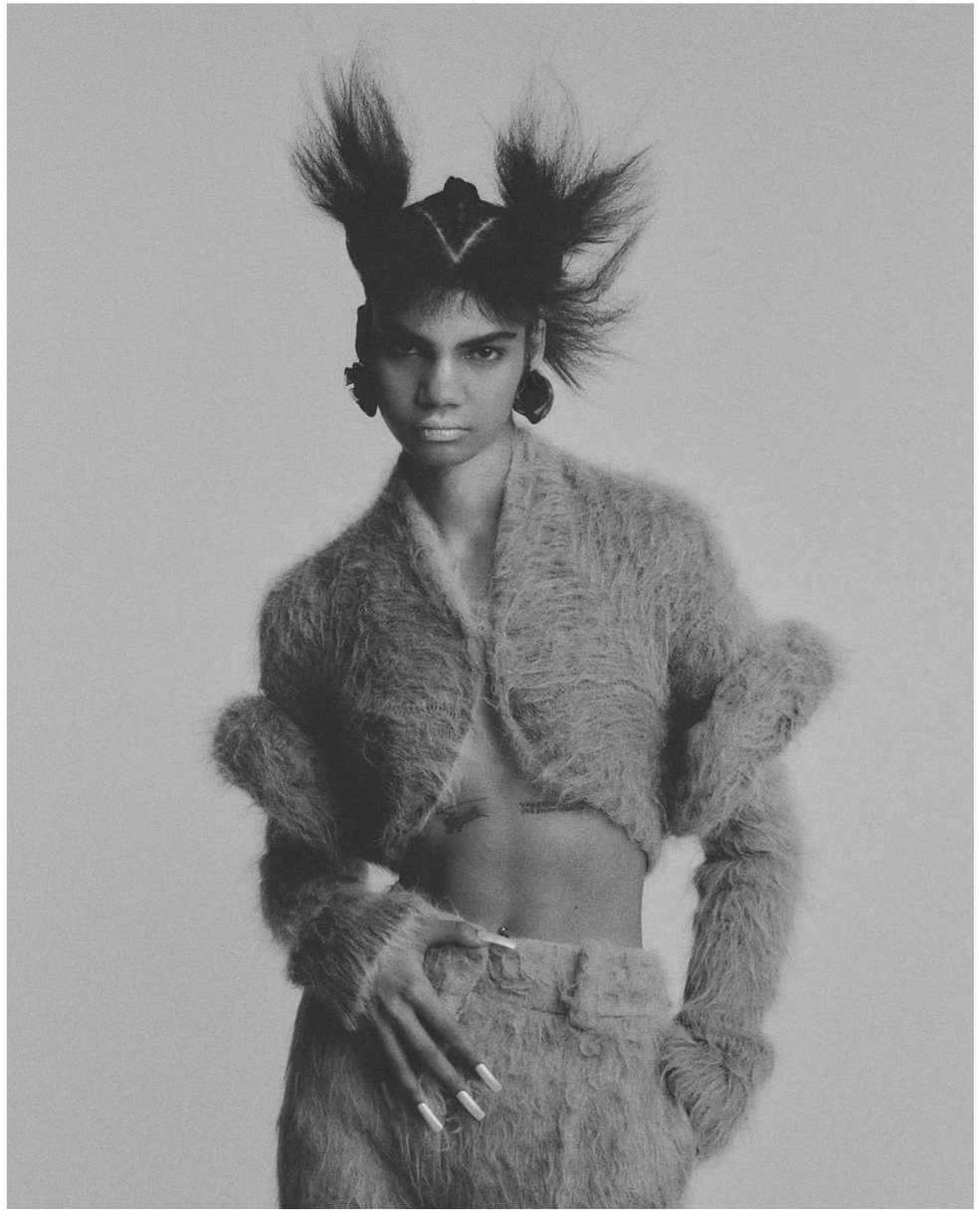
Rachael wears ring as earring and necklace by Susan Fang.

Isla wears a leather coat and earrings by Chanel, and layered vintage earrings by 4element.

Isla wears a knit top by Christopher Kane, and vintage earrings by 4element.

Alva wears a cape by Mithridate, earrings by Schiaparelli, and bangles by Alexis Bittar and Tilly Sveaas.

Rachael wears earrings by Alexander McQueen.



Riya wears a top and trousers by Rabanne, and earrings by Dinosaur Designs.

Isla wears a shirt by Mugler, and a bra as headpiece by AREA.

Hair: Ali Pirzadeh at CLM using all Oribe products. Stylist: Nathan Klein. Manicurist: Ama Quashie using Chanel Le Vernis 23 Collection and Chanel La Crème Main. Casting Director: Anita Bitton at Establishment New York. Producer: Sydney Marshall. Post Production: Touch Digital. Models: Isla Gaskin at Storm Management, Rachael Carruthers at Storm Management, Alva Claire at IMG, Seoyeon Lee at Next Model Management. Body model: Christall Reign Quinto at Anti Agency.

For photographer Nadine Ijewere and make-up artist Ammy Drammeh, to talk about beauty is to talk about representation. Inspired by her Nigerian and Jamaican heritage, much of Ijewere's work celebrates the rich beauty of Black culture that she never saw represented in magazines growing up. After graduating from London College of Fashion with a degree in photography, in 2018 she became the first woman of colour to shoot the cover of *Vogue* in the magazine's 125-year history. Since then, the South Londoner has created film and photography campaigns for Calvin Klein, Hermès, Louis Vuiton and Dior, and has participated in exhibitions at both Photo London and Tate Britain.

Drammeh followed a similar trajectory, growing up in Barcelona where diverse representation was also hard to come by. Forced to look elsewhere, Drammeh soon discovered make-up as a medium through which to communicate her own ideas about beauty. She moved to London in 2018, where she met Ijewere, and together with creatives such as stylist Ib Kamara, photographer Campbell Addy, and nail artist Ama Quashie formed a coterie of artists preoccupied with conversations surrounding diversity and challenging the industry's norms. Continuing to buck the system, Drammeh's emphasis on raw beauty and imperfection has seen her work with everyone from Bottega Veneta to Burberry, Gucci to Chanel, where she is currently Global Makeup Creative Partner.

Tish Weinstock: What did beauty look like to you growing up?
Nadine Ijewere: Growing up my first exposure to beauty and fashion was through my mum and her sisters, who were always buying magazines like *Vogue*. I grew up around Black women who had incredible hair and make-up styles – metallic lips and matching eyeshadow, the super thin eyebrows – and yet I wasn't seeing this reflected in those photographs. When you're young, you're already so self-conscious of how you look, but when you're constantly seeing images of people from a different background, where the hair is super straight, or they had lighter skin, it's a bit of a woah moment. I was like, 'Where do I sit?' It has always been an ongoing thing for me where I have tried to assimilate to European standards. It was only when I reached 30 that I became more like, 'Fuck it.'
Ammy Drammeh: Unfortunately, unlike Nadine, I didn't have many Black female figures around me growing up. My dad is from Gambia, but my mum is from the south of Spain and I grew up in Barcelona where representation is still not even a thing now. Luckily I had two older brothers who were obsessed with music, so that is where a lot of my references came from: R&B, hip-hop and neo soul. I remember being aware of the dominant beauty trends in the late '90s and early 2000s, which were all to do with heroin chic, being extremely thin and having no curves. I developed really early and had a curvaceous figure, so I didn't fit in with the beauty standards. It wasn't until I went to places like Gambia and New York and got attention because of how I looked, that I realised we don't all have the same notion of beauty.

How does make-up fit into all of this?
Ammy: I was very young when I first started experimenting with make-up. One of my classmates brought a copy of Kevyn Aucoin's Face Forward into class and I asked to borrow it. I started practising all the different looks at home on my friends using my mum's make-up. I would also do everyone's make-up for school plays. Eventually my teachers told my parents that I should consider pursuing it as a career.

Nadine, when did you first pick up your first camera?
Nadine: My dad always had the latest gadgets, so I was exposed to that from an early age. I used to do cringe photoshoots with my friends, but in terms of an interest in real photography, that came when I studied it at A-level.

What do you hope to communicate in your work?
Ammy: At the beginning, all I wanted to do was have fun with make-up. Now I see it as a tool for empowerment. I want to show an idea of beauty which allows people to feel represented, and feel good. I also want to create characters and bring something a bit more cinematic into the mix.
Nadine: Initially I was just interested to see what fashion imagery would be like if there was more diversity. What would it be like if there was a Black woman as the main model, who hadn't straightened her hair or didn't have a light skin tone? Beauty is multifaceted; it's not about one specific look and that's always been a theme that underlines my work both in terms of casting and the teams I work with.

What about perfection?
Ammy: I don't care about perfection, it's not important to me. It's not about creating perfect eyeliner or a perfect lip. It is about what that lip or eyeliner can communicate.

With that in mind, how do you know when a look is 'right' or complete? What are you basing your aesthetic judgement on if not an idea of perfection?
Ammy: You just feel it; you keep adding things and taking things away if it's not right or if my eye is not happy with it. At the moment, there is a trend for hyper perfection on Instagram, where the skin is baked and highlighted in all the right places, the eyeliner is perfect and the eyebrows are thin and have been painted on. While I think it is beautiful, I don't want that to be the only way of doing make-up. And that's something we wanted to play with in our shoot.
Nadine: I'm the same as Ammy. There are elements in my work that are perfect, but that is more technical, like with lighting. Outside of that, I don't want to communicate an idea of perfection, because then I would be doing exactly what those images did for me growing up with their idealised notions of beauty, hair type and skin colour. In terms of judging when I know a picture is the one, I'll be looking through my lens and there will be a slight movement or an expression or even an energy and I will just feel it and I'll capture it and will be like, 'We have it', but I can't explain how or why that is.

Perfection is obviously a very loaded word, given its historical connotations. Do you think it's something we should just do away with when it comes to discussing beauty today?
Nadine: I do think it's the wrong word. It's a man-made word that has been used for a very long time in society, probably by men who have decided what women should look like and aspire to.
Ammy: It's outdated. Work should be about the feeling you get when you look at it, based on your tastes and preferences.

Both across fashion and beauty, more and more creatives are rejecting this idea of perfection, galvanised by calls for diversity and inclusivity. How do you think that is going to evolve? Is it just a trend?
Ammy: I hope it stays, but there is a pattern, and the pattern always continues, it will circle back to whatever it was before and then circle back again to what it is now. I think some things will stay, although even now you can see it on the catwalk; already we've gone back to seeing very slim girls. Even the Kardashians, who had fuller figures and almost looked racially ambiguous, are now all skinny.
Nadine: I agree with you Ammy, but I don't think we will ever go back to how it was. Before people only had magazines and television as a reference point, but now we're exposed to so many different things thanks to phones. It will never go back to how it was because many more people are so aware now that they won't let it.

‘I would be lying if I said I wasn’t trying to make things beautiful.’

Make-up artist Ana Takahashi discusses growing pains, being a nerd, and a return to the individual.

Photographs by Liv Liberg
Make-up by Ana Takahashi
Hair by Olivier Schawalder

Previous page, make-up: YSL Crushliner Waterproof Eyeliner, YSL Dessin du Regard Pencil and Blending Tip, YSL Dessin du Regard Waterproof Eye Pencil.

Previous right page, make-up: YSL Dessin du Regard Pencil and Blending Tip (05), YSL Mascara Volume Effet Faux Cils Radical. Both pages, make-up: YSL Couture Blush (2 and 8), YSL Couture Mini Clutch Palette (100), YSL Mascara Volume Effet Faux Cils Radical, YSL Touche Éclat Le Stylo, YSL Rouge Pur Couture Lipstick (155).

Make-up: YSL Dessin du Regard Pencil and Blending Tip (05), YSL Crushliner Waterproof Eyeliner (6), YSL Touche Éclat Le Stylo, YSL Mascara Volume Effet Faux Cils Radical.

Hair by Olivier Schawalder at Art+Commerce using Redken. Casting Director: Ben Grimes Casting. Production: un/produced. Fashion Coordinator: Kevin Grosjean. Model: Greta Hofer at Elite Model Management London.

In three short years, Ana Takahashi has gone from relative obscurity to industry-wide acclaim – an unusual trajectory for a young make-up artist. But Takahashi has never been one to play by the rules. 'If someone tells me to do something, I just want to do it even less,' she says. Growing up in South West London, she spent her formative years experimenting with make-up that her mother – a manager in the beauty department at Duty Free – would bring home from work. Renouncing conventional standards of beauty (and her mother's unsolicited beauty advice) Takahasi's approach to make-up was punk and instinctual. 'I just wanted to look like a baddie,' she muses.

After dropping out of beauty school in 2019 – she found the course too constraining – Takahashi was able to focus on her personal work, eventually catching the eye of photographers Nick Knight, with whom she worked on a conceptual visual album for Gareth Pugh's Spring/Summer 2021 collection, and Harley Weir, who invited her to work on her seminal self-portrait series. Since then, Takahashi has keyed looks for brands such as Miu Miu, Marc Jacobs, Balenciaga and Blumarine, building up a reputation for her emotionally resonant images and layered character work. Here, she talks to *System beauty* about the transformative powers of make-up and the perils of being a perfectionist.

Tish Weinstock: Tell me about the inspiration behind your shoot for this issue.
Ana Takahashi: We've accidentally gone a bit autobiographical. Liv [Liberg] wanted to shoot a girl in a field – summer vibes, very pure and whimsical. But what I took from that was, 'Let's just make this a really angsty, bored girl who is at home all summer.' Growing up, I would stay indoors all summer and ruin my mum's make-up doing horrible looks on myself. I was also inspired by this Japanese artist called Aya Takano, who creates lanky female figures with red raw joints, which went with this idea of growing pains. In our story, it actually looks like sunburn, because we were shooting the girl outside. So you can interpret it in different ways. But I like the idea of this girl having growing pains and them manifesting in the red joints.

As teenagers, we often experiment with make-up as a way to deal with these growing pains, as we come to terms with our own image. Was that the case for you?
I was painfully insecure and it didn't really help that I grew up in South West London at a catholic school where all the girls were white, blonde and had blue eyes. I was this half Asian, half Brazilian, weird looking person. I used to watch this woman called Michelle Phan on YouTube, who would transform herself into Angelina Jolie or Edward Scissorhands with make-up. She also used eye tape to make herself look more Western. I remember being quite fascinated by the transformative aspect of make-up, because I didn't like my face. I learnt some really good skills along the way. So, my relationship with beauty was born out of insecurities, but then transformed into a love of playing with make-up.

What was the first product you played with?
A Lancôme mascara that my mum brought back from work. She was a manager in the beauty section of Duty Free so she would get loads of free make-up. Whenever I was experimenting with make-up, she would give pointers, which I hated because at that time your mum is the enemy. She wanted me to look classy and stunning and not like someone who has watched too many Lady Gaga videos.

What was it about Gaga's approach to make-up that resonated with you?
She was such a big influence on me back in her heyday, when I was about 12. Val Garland did most of her make-up looks and she worked with Nick Knight on a lot of the imagery. I used to copy her really ornate double wing eyeliner looks and the duo chrome sparkling eyeshadow. Anything that was going to get me noticed. I'd spend hours on my make-up for parties. People would always comment on it when I arrived, and I loved that, it made me feel seen.

When did you start to think of make-up as a career?
I did a make-up course at London College of Fashion, but some of the techniques we learnt felt quite dated and I didn't like how academic it was. I'd go home and look at techniques on YouTube, which I thought were better and easier. I started getting asked by friends, mainly fashion students, to do make-up for their projects which is how I got the best practice. I also started getting paid jobs, so I was working more outside of uni than I was going into uni so I just dropped out. The first thing that probably put me on people's radar was when I shot a film for Gareth Pugh with Nick Knight during the pandemic. Someone got Covid last minute and had to drop out. People must have seen that and thought, 'OK, we can trust her.' Then I started shooting with Harley Weir, who is obviously respected but also very young and fresh and has a very interesting view on beauty and shoots it in a very special way. I got so many requests after that.

Tell me about your approach to beauty.
I'm quite a nerd when it comes to planning my looks. I think hard about what girl I'm going to use, how the make-up is going to sit on her face, what colours are going to look good on her, how the hair will inform the make-up. I always ask photographers before we shoot, 'What's the story here?' Then I think about how the make-up can facilitate the greater narrative. I have a deep consideration for the composition of the make-up and that comes from studying the masters. Pat McGrath is an obvious inspiration. It's very easy with make-up to take it too far so I have to police myself. I struggle to go with the flow, because I overplan and am quite OCD. With our shoot for this issue, I tried to be a bit more open and think less about what I'm doing.

Which is probably why it became autobiographical. The one time you relinquish control it speaks to a time when you used to mess around with make-up.
The shoot was based around naivety when approaching beauty, which is something I have lost now because it is my everyday life and I get paid to do this. The body painting was inspired by the kind of painting I used to do when I was 16, when I got my first watercolour Kryolan palette, I just changed the colours. It was an ode to that time when there was nothing polluting my brain.

What are your biggest influences?
Travel. I went to Japan twice this year and that made a huge impression on me. There are things you can find abroad that you can never get here, like weird books and pieces of clothing. It's like finding treasure, it's really inspiring. Also my models inspire me. The vibe they bring informs the make-up.

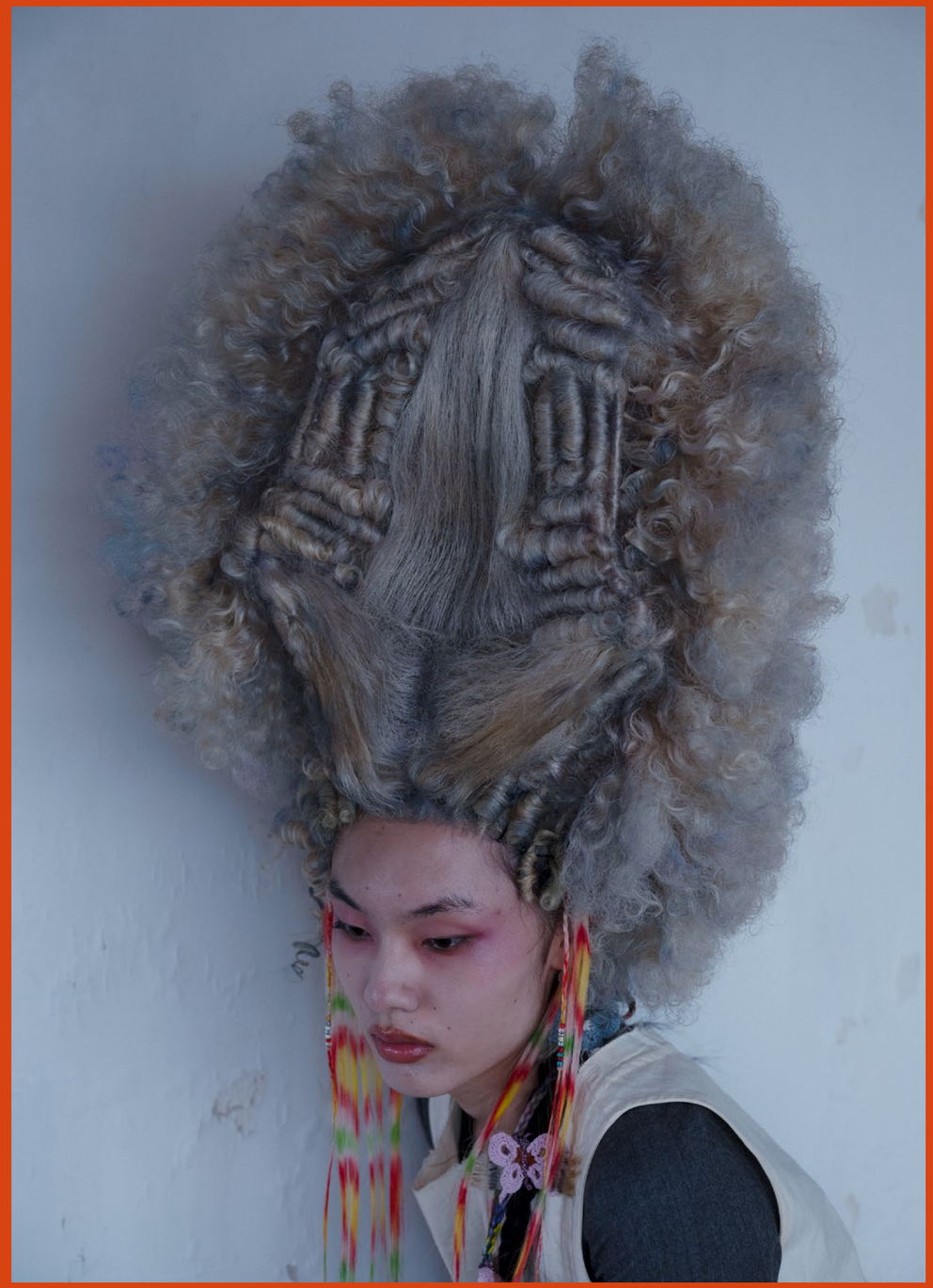
How much does the notion of beauty play into your work?
I would be lying if I said I wasn't trying to make things beautiful. Why bring more ugliness into the world? No thanks! But then who am I to say that's what beauty is, because it would be just my preferences or taste.

How do you see beauty evolving?
I just hope that individualism comes back. So many people pick their styles from a catalogue of archetypes. You can just go online and get any reference you like, so why bother coming up with something yourself? So I hope we go back to focusing on the individual and not trying to cater to whatever is popular at the time.

‘Wig making is time-consuming but I enjoy the rewards of patience.’

Hair and head prop wig artist Tomihiro Kono on his own sense of enigma.

Photographs by Takashi Homma
Hair by Tomihiro Kono
Make-up by Masayo Tsuda



L’Oréal Paris Elnett Hairspray

got2b Glued Spiking Hair Gel

Iriya Spiky Mist

L'Oréal Paris Elnett Hairspray

Iriya Spiky Mist

Iriya Spiky Mist

got2b Glued Hair Spray

Iriya Spiky Mist

Gel + Special Treatment (secret)

Gel + Special Treatment (secret)

L'Oréal Paris Elnett Hairspray

L'Oréal Paris Elnett Hairspray

This and following page: L'Oréal Paris Elnett Hairspray

Production and Casting: Taka Arakawa and Ino Yu at Alter. Photography assistants: Yumi Inoue, Souta Kasahara.
Models: Isa Tamotsu, Kaseno Soju, Kien, Kou U, Mannan, Raiki, Rikako, Tenko, Yamada Yuta, Yilin at Alien Management.

Since the early 2000s, Tomihiro Kono has been staunchly positioning himself within the disciplines of fashion and beauty. Born in Ehime, a district in the northwest of Japan's Shikoku Island, Kono began work as a hairdresser in Tokyo, where he mastered the conventions associated with Geisha hairstyles. In 2007, he moved to London as he progressed to session stylist, contributing to publications such as *Dazed & Confused*, *i-D* and *10 Magazine*. It was here where Kono honed his craft and established his core values of integrity and irreverence, drawing on the spirit of Britain's sprawling countercultural beauty scene.

In 2013, Kono moved to New York, where he began collaborating on 'head prop designs', as he refers to them, for Jil Sander, Proenza Schouler and Junya Watanabe. Taking cues from the art of origami, for Watanabe's Autumn/Winter 2015 show, Kono fashioned headpieces from angular foam sculptures, and in doing so contorted the boundaries of wonted hair design.

By forming his own bespoke wig brand in 2016, Tomikono Wig, Kono shifted his focus to further the art of wig making and has since created designs for the likes of Karen O, Grimes, Maison Margiela and Marc Jacobs' Heaven line. Inspired by everything from punk to goth to a touch of Bowie, each wig is constructed into a different character, using 2D shapes, curved lines, typography, and materials such as rope, beer bottles and rubber tubes.

System beauty sat down with Kono to discuss the enigma of the avant-garde, individuality and identity, and channelling the essence of collaborator and photographer Takashi Homma's seminal 1996 street style book *Tokyo Teens*.

Rahim Attarzadeh: Can you describe your earliest encounter with beauty?
Tomihiro Kono: I was 14 years old and I had my hair cut at Groovy salon for the first time, which doesn't exist anymore. Before, when I had my hair cut at a barber, they never asked me what kind of haircut I wanted. They just do the same so-called short cropped hair on every man. At Groovy, they started with a consultation. I was so impressed with how they treated me. I brought a cutout picture from a fashion magazine. The one I picked was my favourite style from a street style movement happening outside Japan. This new experience of self-transformation was very satisfying to me. I decided to become a hairdresser based on that experience.

It wasn't long until your designs were being featured in fashion publications. How did you enter the world of editorial? Was that a difficult cultural transition coming from the fringes in Japan?
When I was working as a hairdresser in Japan, I used to go to book shops to see international fashion magazines. At that time, magazines were the main entry point into Western aesthetics and sensibilities. I knew I wanted to enter the world of editorial. Luckily I didn't have difficulty moving to a new industry. The language was the hardest part but when communicating with people in the creative industry, a shared vision can overcome obstacles of geography and language barriers.

Can you tell me a little about your underlying creative process? There is a great deal of physical work involved with materials and structures. What is your initial starting point?
I start by moving my hands and then I knot the hair into a lace foundation when I'm making a wig. Sometimes I start with blonde hair or I knot the hair that I had dyed in different colours. After completely knotting the hair into a full head, I move on to the styling. Cutting, curling, colouring. Designing the character for each hairstyle comes last.

What made you decide to shift your focus from session styling to what you call 'head props'?
It was when I moved to London in 2007. At that time I started working as a session hair stylist and I wanted to create a signature piece. I started making headpieces which I called 'head props'. Rather than making a hair accessory, I wanted to create a character by changing hairstyle dramatically. I also liked collecting different materials such as lace fabric, metal pieces, feathers, nails, studs, and making head props out of assemblage.

By constantly pushing the boundaries of what wigs can do, you've redefined the conventions associated with the craft. What role did wigs play in your more formative years?
I had always wanted to make an art piece from scratch. So when I ventured into wig making, I wanted to gain a new skill of arts and crafts. It was also a form of meditation for me to knot hair into a lace foundation. Wig making is very time-consuming but I personally enjoy the process and the rewards of patience. I wanted to create my own wigs after having worked as a session hair stylist for so long. At that time, fashion trends were more about street casting and less about hair techniques. I became a little bored, so it was a good moment for me to start something new. I would say a wig has more power to connect with an individual character.

Would you say that, in terms of your designs, you have to know the rules in order to break them?
Yes. There is a lot to learn in the beginning when it comes to hairstyling. It took me almost ten years to gain the basic skills of hair cutting, colouring, and perms, and then another year to learn how to style and make head props using different materials and wigs using human hair.

You've often been described as 'avant-garde' as well as a master of disguise. How would you describe your aesthetic?
I like the word 'avant-garde'.

Let's talk about your head pieces for Junya Watanabe. How did he first approach you and what was challenging about working with a disciplined, dissident and discreet designer? I read that his briefs can be as opaque as a single-word, never revealing anything about the forthcoming collection.
Junya reached out by phone asking me to do the hair for his Autumn/Winter 2014 collection. The way we worked was very unique. Junya operates differently to any other designer. He never told me the theme, concept, or anything about the clothes for the upcoming collection. So I had to keep coming up with ideas until he said yes. It was just a few days before the show in Paris that I could see his final looks of the collection. I was so impressed to see how my head props worked with the clothes without me having seen any of the collection in advance.

How do you see your wig designs as being connected to identity and the formation of specific characters through your creations?
Hairstyles are closely related to our identity and aesthetic. We express ourselves through our hairstyles and we also consider how we are looked at by others. Wigs can alter one's look instantly without changing our own hair, so it can be a new medium to transform into a new self.

Let's talk about the imagery you put together with Takashi Homma. What do you want the images to articulate? Where did the inspiration come from?
I wanted to revive the mood of Takashi's book *Tokyo Teens*. Street kids in Harajuku at the time were so cool. Unfortunately no more kids like those exist now in Harajuku. For our shoot, I styled each character after seeing their own clothes to blend with their personality. Takashi shoots so fast, almost like in a flow. I like the speed because I was able to change so many wigs on the models. I change wigs fast. Our energy on set fits well.

Lip and eye
by Thomas de Kluyver

Photographs by Charles Negre

‘You can find beauty in things that are both perfect and imperfect – it tells a story.’

Eye: Gucci Rouge À Lèvres Matte Lipstick (701), Gucci Éclat De Beauté Effet Lumière Gel Face Gloss. Lip: Gucci Rouge À Lèvres Satin Lipstick (700), Gucci Palette Beauté Des Yeux Gorgeous Flora, Gucci Éclat De Beauté Effet Lumière Gel Face Gloss.

The Perfection Questionnaire: Jordan Barrett

Photograph: self-portrait by Jordan Barrett.

Which three words first come to mind when you hear the word "beauty"?
Laughter, kindness, confidence.

What does perfection mean to you?
Perfection is the state of being perfect, but what that looks like to me might not look the same to you.

Does perfection exist?
Perfection exists but it is never objective.

Who is the perfect human?
Bowie was pretty close to perfection.

What's your perfect meal?
Anything with hot sauce.

Describe the perfect day.
My perfect day would be spent by the ocean, meditating, and being around the people I love.

What has beauty given you?
Beautiful things inspire me.

What three beauty products can't you live without?
Dr. Barbara Sturm's Face Mask – I use it as moisturiser and sleep in it. I also use the Dr. Barbara Sturm Sun Drops every day. And the Dr. Barbara Sturm Calming Serum.

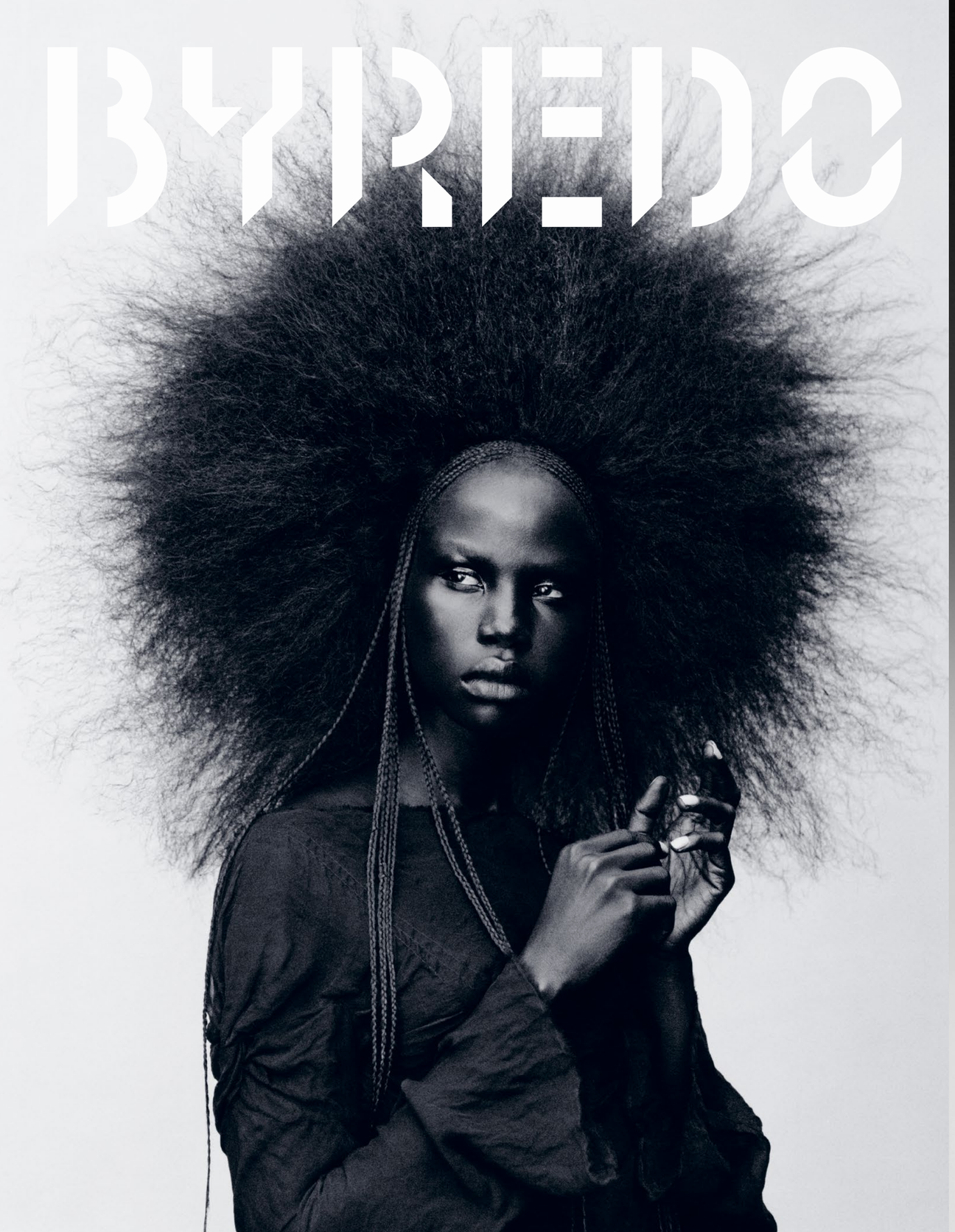
If you could inhabit someone's body for a day whose would it be?
Christian Bale in *American Psycho.*

What song or soundtrack sums your life up perfectly?
The Beach soundtrack, mixed in with the soundtracks to *Lost In Translation* and *The Fifth Element.*

How do you see the idea of "perfection" evolving in the future?
I think the notion of perfection will become less and less important.

What is the best beauty advice you've ever received?
Always wear SPF.

BYREDO



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