CATHY LOMAX TALKS TO GRACE O'CONNOR AND GINA BEAVERS, AND MAKEUP ARTIST SHARON DOWSETT

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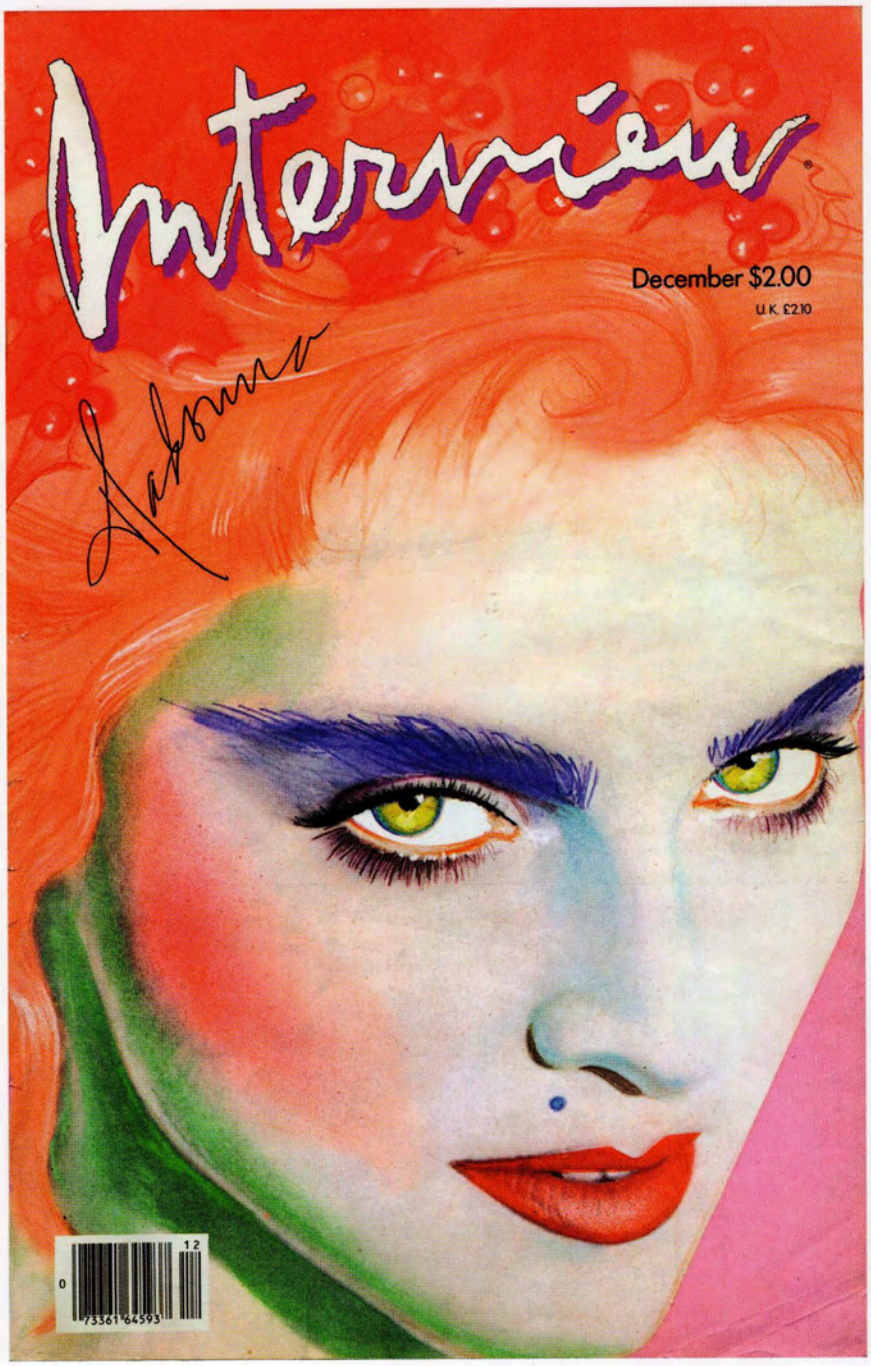
Cathy Lomax: I'm thinking about the intersections of 'painting' and 'makeup'. Gina, you paint makeup being applied, and close views of makeup on faces.
Gina Beavers: Yes, I find online makeup tutorial videos interesting. In the comments section they have conversations about brushes and pigments, just like painters.
Sharon Dowsett: I love Gina's 'step-by-step' paintings. Step-by-step is exactly how I learned to do makeup. I bought a makeup palette aged thirteen or fourteen. It had a diagram on the back showing the light shade, the medium, and the dark shade, and that was it; suddenly I was transformed, and it was easy.
Grace O'Connor: There's a makeup tutorial based on Whitey Snyder's makeup for Marilyn Monroe. Whitey would draw a trompe-l'œil shadow under Marilyn's eyes so that it looked like her lashes were heavier. Once you know that, you can't help but see it in photographs of Marilyn.
CL: Readers of *Turps* will be familiar with terms like 'trompe-l'œil' and 'chiaroscuro', but makeup has its own terms, like the 'cut crease'.
SD: Yes, I've never been fond of the cut crease, but I love Tamara de Lempicka's paintings. I've done many editorials inspired by her work. From early on I was inspired by the Fauves' unexpected placement of colour, and by de Lempicka's representation of facial architecture.
CL: With drag culture being so popular now, there is a lot of interest in very strong transforming makeup with crazy contouring.
GB: The Kardashians have also influenced that. Culture today is so much informed by photography, with everyone always in front of a lens. But with my paintings of makeup, I can tell that there are still a lot of men who immediately think *"Oh, that's not for me."* It's almost as if they see the subject of makeup as 'off-limits' to them.
CL: There is an idea that the surface of things is a feminine concern, with decoration and ornamentation gendered as female and therefore not important. An interest in colour is historically considered as feminine. In cinema, during the transition from black and white to colour, black and white was used for the more important films, and colour was used for the more frivolous films, like musicals and melodramas.
GO: When I was a child, I learned to draw by looking at Alberto Vargas pin-up girls and copying from a book of Patrick Nagel's artwork. He painted the cover art for *Duran Duran*'s album *Rio*. His ideal type of woman has a very cleanly delineated face with perfect makeup. Later I loved Antonio Lopez, and I adored Richard Bernstein because I worshipped Andy Warhol. That pop connection ties into the great Way Bandy. How wonderful his makeup would be to emulate in a painting.
SD: Way Bandy mixed transparent fluids for natural skin colour (red, peach, and bronze) which enhanced and didn't 'mask' skin. There is makeup that makes people pretty, and then there is this almost transgressive, expressive characterful makeup that can say so much.

Richard Bernstein
'Madonna' cover for Interview Magazine
1985
Photo by Andreas Hofweber

Courtesy of The Richard Bernstein Estate Archive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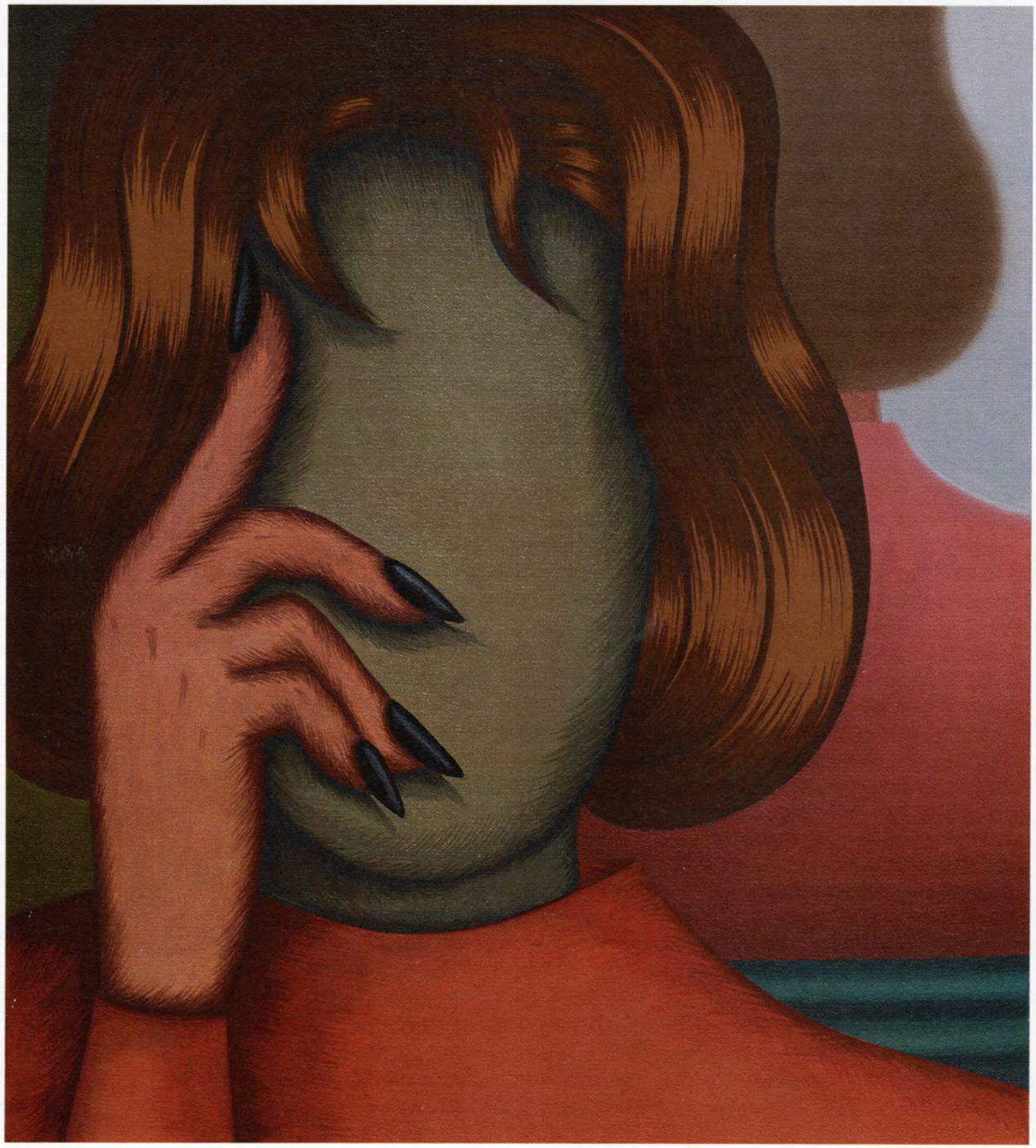


CL: The idea of makeup as simply cosmetic, as a corrective, is quite boring.
GB: Yes. Horror makeup tutorials are interesting because they take the whole beauty standard into another realm. I'm fascinated by seeing these gorgeous girls make their faces into skulls.
CL: I was looking at one of your images, Sharon, of a girl with a very shiny face and crazy eyelashes.
SD: They were feathers. We cut bird feathers and put nail varnish on them to make them into lashes. I first did that for Alexander McQueen because he brought a book on bats and fish, that was our inspiration for the show. It really helps, to have that exchange of visual references. Sometimes it's film, but I find that art gives you an alternative way of seeing... it's more original than referencing photography.
GO: I think my imagination was fed by growing up in the 70s with older sisters, seeing them do their hair and makeup obsessively.
CL: Your paintings, Grace, have a dreamy, aspirational quality, like a fantasy. I'm thinking of your paintings of Priscilla Presley leaving Graceland. I was always fascinated by how Priscilla looked when she was young, because Elvis styled her, didn't he? With the huge beehive and the eyeliner.
GO: Yes.
CL: That's almost like Joan Riviere's theory of the 'masquerade': that women adopt a mask of femininity in order to get by in a man's world. Makeup can play a part in that effort to conform to the way you think you should look, which I think is perhaps what Priscilla was doing.
GO: What about painting and drawing with makeup? My mother-in-law, Gladys Perint Palmer, is a fashion illustrator and she draws with actual lipstick. The line is beautiful.
SD: I make face charts to communicate to my assistants what I'd like the makeup to be. I draw step-by-steps with makeup and it's lovely, it's like working with pastels.
GO: Lipstick is very much like an oil pastel.
SD: Yes, and vice versa, when we're doing makeup we're always experimenting with pigments and paint, although obviously it has to be safe for the skin. But the face is like any canvas, you have to prepare it. You can put on a protective base.
CL: When I was sixteen I made prints by putting makeup on my face and then printing it onto paper. I still have them.
SD: One difference between painting and creating an effect on camera is teamwork. You could do the best makeup you've done in your life, but it might not get captured by the camera. Or you could do bad makeup, but it comes out looking amazing because there's a fantastic team. But for painters, you're working alone, so the result is all down to you. You can't blame the stylist, the lighting guy, the photographer.
CL: I was a makeup artist before I was a painter, and part of what I like about painting is that it's just you; you're the art director, the photographer... you're like the god of your little world.
SD: I hadn't seen cosmetics in paintings until Cathy's, apart from an exhibition about prostitutes, *Splendeurs et misères*, where the eye makeup was obvious. A Degas ballerina was also featured. Her face was whitened and lips and cheeks reddened, like Elizabethan paintings. They rubbed red leather on cheeks and used lead to whiten complexions, luminosity being a holy grail that led to serious skin damage, poisoning and death... We have better products now, painters and makeup artists alike!
CL: This article is about painting and makeup, but you don't paint faces.
Julie Curtiss: No, I don't paint faces, but I'm interested in the way that women fashion themselves as a form of representation and self-creation. In my

Julie Curtiss
The Mirror
2019
Acrylic and oil on canvas
40.6 x 45.7 cm

© Julie Curtiss
Courtesy of White Cube

Sharon Dowsett
Maye Musk's makeup for Style Magazine
January 2017

Photograph by Jason Hetherington

Opposite:
Gina Beavers
Passo a Passo
2020
Acrylic and foam on linen on panel
243.8 x 182.9 x 15.2 cm

Courtesy of the artist

life I don't really care about makeup. I put on minimal makeup when I wake up, but when I paint skin or hair I stroke the surface a lot; it is carefully and lovingly brushed, smoothed out. The attention I give to the surfaces of my paintings reminds me of the obsessive meticulous attention that some women pay to their makeup.

There is also something present in my work, and in the way I think, involving a desire to please, or to seduce, or draw in, with pleasant pretty colours, but also to repel with something disturbing. That's perverse, perhaps, but also truly feminine, I think. It's a push and pull.

CL: In *Film Noir* of the 40s and 50s it was all about the 'femme fatale'. She was the most seductive and beautiful, but also the most dangerous and evil, and had to die.

JC: I'm obsessed with Hitchcock. His female protagonists are so on-the-surface, like makeup, and they have this magnetism. They are classic archetypes and there is power in that, but at the same time they are super-opaque, they're concealing so much.

CL: In Hitchcock's films the male gaze is in full tilt. We are absolutely looking at those women as objects, and yet they have something about them.

JC: To me, there is something strange about the term 'male gaze'. I see it more as a co-creation because – as we see with makeup – being seen is not only passive. Those women present a powerful elaborate construction. It's like a form of play: a dance that men and women are doing. In Hitchcock, of course, it's his movie so he's directing his actresses with all his projections about women – working out his issues – but I find that fascinating.

CL: I'm thinking of *Marnie*, *Vertigo*, and *The Birds*.

JC: Yes, I watched *Vertigo* again a few years back because it was restored. The colours were amazing. And recently I watched *The Red Shoes* – my God!

CL: Beautiful. There is so much red in that film.

JC: It's gorgeous. The female character is a complex person, and there's this complicated male-female relationship involving projection...

CL: ...And art...

JC: ...Yes, and possession: the way that the owner of the ballet is proprietorial over her.

CL: A *Pygmalion* thing. She wears very interesting theatrical ballet-makeup. I'm fascinated by the product names given to makeup colours that are connected to 'bad' women: things like *Plum Fatale*; *Original Sin*; *Love Crime* – these are all lipsticks – *Wicked*; *Bitch Perfect*; *Too Bad I'm Bad*...

JC: Oh my...

CL: There was a blusher called *Poison* and nail varnishes called *Queen of Tarts*, and *Tart Deco*. It would be interesting to name the colours in your paintings. They are very particular: a chestnut hair colour; a pink that's a little off, a little dark, which I might call '*Play-Doh Pink*', like when you mix *Play-Doh* colours together and get a kind of puce. There's a great film by Kenneth Anger called *Puce Moment*.

JC: Yes! That's so funny. There is a movie academic who's going to write a piece for my *White Cube* catalogue, and she told me to watch *Puce Moment*.

CL: It's a great makeup film. Puce is often seen as vulgar, somehow 'off', not pretty.

JC: Maybe because it's *passé*? It's a colour from the 1960s, right? Or 1930s?

CL: It seems always to be a colour from another time. Always not quite right.

JC: Yes.

CL: There is a really nice green that you often use; it's soft and not pure.

JC: I always mix my colours myself. I mute them by mixing with complimentary colours, to get that vintage 1960s industrial kind of palette. I like those colours because when you put them next to a more vivid colour it really

Grace O'Connor
This is my Heaven
2019
Oil and gesso on panel
20 cm x 20 cm

Courtesy of the artist

pops. That's the same with makeup. Skin tone has so much green and blue in it, but they're very muted.

CL: You can put a green pigment on skin to reduce redness, like broken veins for example. The green balances out the red.

JC: In makeup tutorials it is clear how much makeup is like painting. It's most interesting when they completely transform their faces.

CL: Yes, I think people like the idea that, with the right tricks, they could transform into whomever they want to be.

JC: Do you ever wear a complete makeup?

CL: Not really. Even when I was a makeup artist, I never really liked the 'mask'.

JC: I once got a free makeup 'mask', and I felt deeply uncomfortable with it. Makeup has a complicated relationship with nature and artificiality. I think a lot of my work is about that pivot from nature to culture, back and forth, between the two. That's why there are so many nails and hair-dos in my paintings. Recently painted nails have become very present in the collective unconscious of artists. Everyone's painting nails now, or making art with nails.

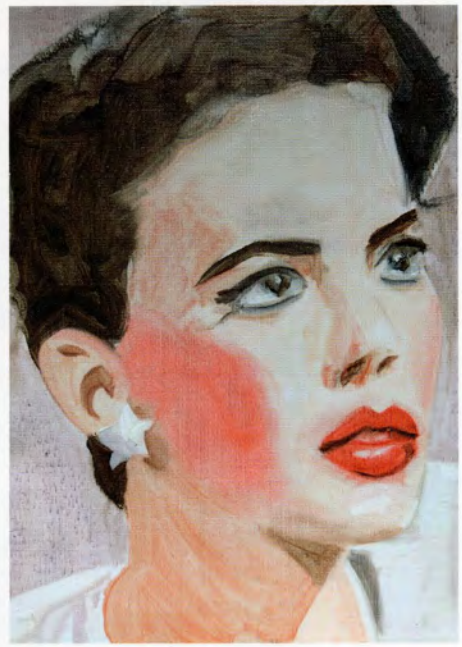
CL: Maybe the most interesting makeup isn't the type that is trying to look natural, but rather the fake nails, the big eyebrows – things that make a conspicuous statement.

JC: Those were the makeups I was most interested in. Although I don't present faces, I think the nails and accessories in my paintings express the idea of makeup – the creation of a stereotype or archetype. There is a fine line between enhancing your features and actually covering your individuality to become something of a social fabrication.

There are strong female characters in my work: female projections present in culture, but also within me. I'm into Jung and the collective unconscious, so I guess I would ask, what do these characters represent in my head? They're like protagonists. They're something that everyone can project themselves onto, which is why I don't paint faces.

CL: I think that's an important aspect of watching a film – being fascinated by a character, like in *The Birds* or *The Red Shoes*. I think we project ourselves onto those characters, maybe because their extreme stylisation makes them almost like a blank face. They're something more than just a person.

JC: Exactly, they're something more than a person, like a trope: culturally specific, but weirdly universal.



Cathy Lomax
Orange Vermillion Lips: Morning Star
2019
Oil on paper
25 x 18 cm

Courtesy of the artist