

**Through the Eyes of Beauty: An Examination of Classic Beauty in
the United States in the 1920's to the Present**

Honors Thesis

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Abstract

Beauty is a key element of culture. Every culture has its own ideas and views of what is considered beautiful. These ideas come from inspirational figures of the time or what is portrayed in art or in the media as idealistic. In the United States, trends in beauty are always changing, but history always repeats itself. Elements of cosmetics become trendy, lose their edge and are reborn into the industry decades later. Often we see looks from the past becoming a part of trend again. How do elements of classic beauty continue to reoccur in trend? How can these classic trends be kept original, yet altered? As an artist, this matters because to understand current trends in beauty, you need to understand the past. This project is an examination of looks in makeup trend from the 1920's to the present. Different cosmetic mediums were used to create looks that define the standard for what the ideal of beauty was in trend. Each decade will be examined closely to see what specifically stood out. There will be a series of 10 photographs that showcase makeup that has features of each decade, but would be trendy and wearable for the average woman today. These serve as examples of how classic looks can be replicated to create current trends for everyday wear and show what elements of beauty from vintage looks remains a part of our culture.

Backgrounds on the Periods

Every culture has its own ideas and views of what is considered beautiful. These ideas come from inspirational figures of the time or what is portrayed in art or the media as idealistic trends of the time. In the United States, trends in beauty are always changing, but history frequently repeats itself: Often we see looks from the past becoming a part of trends again. Trends, as defined for this project, are popular elements of cosmetics and fashion that are showcased on the runway and in the media. An example of this is Twiggy's eye lashes in the 1960s. They were unusual, but people wanted to look like her, so they became an instant trend. How do elements of classic beauty continue to reoccur in trend? How can these classic trends be kept original, yet altered? As an artist, this matters because to understand current trends in beauty, you need to understand the past. To be able to recreate classic looks, an artist needs to be able to interpret them and mold them to fit both a face and a modern trend. This matters in the industry because women often want looks that resemble period makeup, but do not look as if in costume. An example of this would be if a bride was having a 1950s themed wedding. This is common. When brides do this, they often want a makeup look that echoes the past, but does not look fake. It is a skill to create a look that is modern, beautiful and resembles a decade, but does not look like stage makeup. This idea of classic beauty is something that comes up often in fashion. What is classic beauty? What makes certain looks trendy versus vintage? How can the idea of something being timeless be made couture for top fashion shows, yet wearable for the everyday woman?

In the United States, ideas of beauty have changed over the past decade. One of the first distinctions to be made is to understand differences between the definitions of "trend" versus "vintage". According to the Merriam- Webster dictionary, trend means, "a current style or preference" and vintage means, "of old, recognized, and enduring interest, importance, or

quality. This distinction is important because when looks from the past become trend again, one needs to be able to make a distinction between them. For example, grunge-style eye makeup was popular last fall. The trend was heavy, smudged, black eyeliner. It was crucial that when recreating this look, an artist did not overdo it or the trend would be lost and the eye makeup would look like costume makeup for a 80s party. Placement, texture and technique are important in creating distinctions between trend and vintage looks. Although at times the words are interchanged, the meanings of the words are in fact very different for makeup artists. For the purpose of this research, looks that are in current trends are modern. These are looks that are wearable today and these looks will be a result of the final project. Vintage looks are replicas of the past. These are original photographs of how women did their makeup or replicas of how women wore makeup, which if worn today, would look almost costume-like.

Replicating one of Marilyn Monroe's famous pictures, for instance, would be a vintage style makeup. Taking some of the elements of the makeup, like the tone of the lipstick or the shape of the eyeliner and recreating them with other more modern elements can be examples of looks that represent new trends inspired by vintage looks. "The modern period," for the purposes of this project, is the time that we are living in now. It is the looks on the runway for summer, fall, and winter 2014. The modern period is what girls are wearing in downtown Manhattan and Paris are wearing right now.

The influence of the media has been an extremely important feature with regard to how we see beauty in the United States. It has evolved in many ways since the early 1900s. In the early 1900s, women saw cosmetics primarily in art and print or media advertisements. Artists such as Andy Warhol and illustrators like Antonio Lopez in the mid 20th century created art that was inspirational and showed beautiful women as his muses. These women were popular in the

fashion scene and the Studio 54 scene. Art was important to these early decades because they were how women saw portrayals of idealistic beauty. Women saw beautiful women like Marilyn Monroe, Jerry Hall, Pat Cleveland and Marisa Berenson and wanted to look like them. These women were headlining fashion. The media was influential in pushing out these images of women in art and in fashion. Another later form of media was advertisements.

Advertisement for beauty products such as cold creams, vanishing creams, and rouges were popular in the early to mid 1900s. The most common forms were print and radio. Later, television advertisements became the primary format. The cosmetics industry was making it into the homes of women much more than it ever had before. They could open a paper to an ad, turn on the TV to a commercial, or listen to an ad on the radio between songs. The boom in advertisement for cosmetics caused a rapid increase in its popularity. It marketed makeup not for the celebrity, but for the housewife. This made it more accessible and popular.

Today, media representation is everywhere. Women can see what current trends are online, on television, celebrities, blogs, art and images as accessible as their smart phones. Access to beauty trends are now in the palm of women's hands daily. This generation is inundated with idealistic views of what is beautiful. The media is and always has been the primary way women see themselves through comparison. It has had a vast impact on trends because if it wasn't showcased on a famous person or advertised thoroughly in the mainstream media, many looks would not have gained their status of being "classic." The first decades effected by this media influence was the 1920s and 30s. This is the first decade that will be looked at for the purpose of this research.

The 1920s and 30s was an era of change. The women's Suffrage movements helped make makeup so important in the 1920s. According to Gabriella Hernandez " , with a newly

designed twist-up tube of lipstick, it was considered chic to apply makeup in public” (93). Women had more freedom. During this decade there were many famous women that were admired in the media such as Clara Bow and Louise Brooks, both silent film stars. These women helped to create trends of the 1920s. Bow made thin eyebrows fashionable. Darker lipsticks appeared because they were visible in black and white films. During this decade powdered faces with rouged cheeks were seen as beautiful. As we entered the 30s, the Great Depression influenced makeup. Rich women were incredibly glamorous while the poor could barely have enough to eat. This was a decade where cosmetics became popular as “[women] gained confidence and independence created by the changing social climate. It was essential to apply a full face of makeup before leaving the house” (105). Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich (Hernandez 110) were two of the most popular women of the decade. During this decade, less was more. Texture became more important than color. Women would use oils to create shine on their eyelids or brows rather than add colors (Hernandez 109). Like the 20s, fair skin was still seen as beautiful, but rouge was barely used and much more subtle.

The 1940s and 50s marked great change for the industry. In 1940, “World War II shortages put limitations on the production of cosmetics, which leads to rationing and a black market for lipstick” (Hernandez 116). In the 40s, practicality was more important than style for women. Lauren Bacall was one of the famous faces of the time. The skin became warmer toned, as women were working and colors more natural, if any color was used at all. When the war ended, there was a rebirth in cosmetics and a desire for a more feminine look. Marilyn Monroe’s popularity boomed and she was seen as the new ideal beauty in culture. “The film industry popularizes the blond bombshell and her sex appeal. She spurs the sale of bleaching products and even more colors of cosmetics” (Hernandez 116). Audrey Hepburn also became

one of the more popular faces of the time, but her brunette hair gave a different twist on the decade. These women created trends such as bold eyeliner and red lips. Marilyn Monroe almost always was seen in an either red or nude lip. Hepburn was more natural, but was rarely photographed without eyeliner. The 50s introduced more colors as a rebellion to the natural 40s.

The 1950s and 60s marked the height of Hollywood glamour. Many of the vintage looks that are replicated today are inspired from the bombshells of this era. Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly and Jacqueline Kennedy all dominated this era. “After their brief stint as factory workers during the war, women were once again matriarchs of the home” (Hernandez 129). This decade emphasized importance of always looking beautiful and put together. The 1960s was by far the decade of the Kennedys. Jacqueline was one of the biggest role models of the era. “The generations of teens from the 1950s, who were now in their twenties, wanted a free society and equality for all” (Hernandez 139). This decade created trends that were more free spirited, yet structured. Penelope Tree, Twiggy and Sophia Loren were the faces of this decade. They embodied what the beauty of this time was. The 1960s emphasized more on the eyes and eye lashes. The skin was clean and lips pink or peachy. Eyeliner and lashes dominated many of the advertisements of the decade. The clean skin and dewy lips showed the free spirits behind the decade, but hard liners and structured lashes showed the influences of rock and roll that were just becoming popular.

In the 1970s and 80s a whole new wave of trends set in. Farrah Fawcett and Cheryl Tiegs were two of the popular faces of this era. The 1970s was all about the bronzed look. Skin was bronzed and dewy. Eyes popped with blues and greens. Black eyeliner became prominent as did peachy lips. This highlighted a woman who was less glamorous and more effortless. It

was an era of music and inspiration. The 1980s was the opposite. It was an era of overindulgence. The 1980s showcased the boldest looks yet to be seen. Working women and music influenced these trends. Christie Brinkley, Julia Roberts and Brooke Shields were dominant trend setters in this decade. The face of the 1980s was “big, bold and bright” (Hernandez 169). The 1980s played with the color wheel. Colors that at one time were not used together because they were opposite were now used in the same look to create drama. Blue shadows popped in contrast to red lips. Bright eye shadows were more popular than ever as well as dramatic fuchsia blush. This decade was all about more: more color, more texture, and more drama.

This starkly contrasted the 1990s. The 1990s showcased sleeker, muted tones. Stars like Jennifer Anderson and Sarah Jessica Parker were beauty icons. Color palettes were more neutral. Less is more again became more popular and women wanted simple looks that were easy to apply. Another popular trend in this decade was playing with shades. Women contoured their skin. They wanted to be tanner. They also used shading on features like the lip to make them appear fuller. Dark lip liner and bronzer were popular. The 2000s kept many of the features of the 1990s, but rebelled against others. This decade focused a great deal on perfected, or seemingly flawless, skin and natural makeup with defined eyes. The amount of different types of cosmetics also became an important part of this decade. Eva Longoria, Halle Berry, Sandra Bullock, and Jennifer Lopez were all popular beauty icons of this time. The 2000s was a mixture of many of the trends up to that date. It also embraced other races and cultures more than trends before which were for mostly focused on lighter skin tones.

Today, thanks to technology, trends are changing faster than ever. Each season in the fashion industry is different. In this season alone many different looks from each of these

decades was popular. Fall/ Winter 2013 showcased oxblood lips, looks that emphasized clean skin with no makeup and a glossy finish, and rebellious eyes that are blackened with smudgy eyeliner. Every season focuses on new things. One may be a lip color, or a texture, or an eye liner look. In the past three years, more trends have happened than in the past 15 years. Trends that once lasted a decade now last a hot minute. This era is one that embraces trends from the past and incorporates vintage looks to make women more edgy and beautiful than ever before. Looks today are incredibly intricate on the runways of New York, yet made to look effortless on or for the average woman. This trend of bringing the runway home is one that is dominating our current era. Women no longer want to emulate their favorite starlet, they want the same exact products as they are using. They demand to know the color lipstick and the brand. They demand to know who the makeup artist was and what tools they use. Today, we face a more educated consumer than ever before.

The way that women see themselves is incredibly important to our society. Each decade is a reflection of all the events that took place within it. For this project, I plan on using what I know about these decades to create 10 looks for the modern woman. These looks will reflect some of the popular trends of each decade, but will look fresh. Fresh looks seem effortless. They are looks that are simple and look if at little or no makeup has been used. Sometimes these are the hardest and most skilled looks to create because of the level of detail that is needed to pay attention to.

To know what is going to happen next in trend we must first know the past. Some of these vintage looks are the most demanded looks by models, brides and your average consumer. As an artist it is important to know these looks and be able to not just recreate them,

but find the life in them again. The goal is to bring out the features in each look that made women feel beautiful then and make them feel beautiful now.

Post-Project Reflection

After completing this project I learned not only about the cosmetics industry, but about myself as an artist. This was a unique experience for me to expand my skills as an artist. This project gave me the chance to plan my own showcase of looks, design, and an exhibit. Looking back, there are only a few things I would have done differently.

One of the first skills that I strengthened while working on this project was how my makeup applications looked under camera lighting. When I created the looks, I did the makeup in the studio using studio lighting. This lighting was much harsher than traditional light, natural light, or the light I am used to working with in retail environments. Since the light was so bright, I had to really pay close attention to blending, colors, shades, and perfecting the skin. Blending was important because it was important for the skin to look natural in some of the looks. There were places that I wanted to contour and it was a challenge to find a balance between creating a natural contour and making it deep enough to show in the lights that were in the studio. Colors also were more vibrant under the studio lights. This worked to my advantage in looks in which I wanted the colors to pop. One challenge I faced was getting the skin to look perfect, but natural.

Some of the girls had textured skin and the lights were not forgiving of it. It was a challenge to build the right amount of coverage, yet make it look natural. Even when color corrected, some of the texture still showed. It was interesting learning how to play with the lights and the angles; I had the girls tilt their heads and faces to in order to create the right

lighting. I used powders to make some of the texture more matte. This helped a lot with bumps on the skin or small breakouts.

Another place that I learned a lot through practice was lining the lips. When doing every day makeup or traditional special occasion makeup in a retail setting, you do not have to pay too much attention to creating a perfect lip line. Often, people use light colors or apply glosses over lipsticks that smooth the lines without effort. When creating looks for this project, there were some where I wanted strong lip focuses. I struggled on the first look trying to create a perfect, dark, glossy lip. I had to take off and reline the lip several times before I got it as perfectly placed as I wanted it. The camera was not forgiving. If the liner was the slightest bit off, it was noticeable.

I found this interesting because I didn't have a problem at all with the eyeliner focuses which are a more challenging skill than lip. The liner focused looks were much easier to create and photographed well. I think the lip was more challenging because lips move more, the texture was soft so it melted a little under the heat of the lights and the gloss sheered the color out in some spots so it was difficult to make sure that the flash would reflect off of it just so. This practice working on perfected lip lines helped me a great deal because shortly after I completed the project, I completed a certification at MAC where I was given a magazine tear, or image taken straight from a magazine article, of a lip that I had to recreate, paying attention to color, texture, shape and how it photographed.

All of the challenges I faced while completing this project were extremely helpful in making me a stronger artist. Aside from just designing the makeup, I was the creative director of the shoot. It was a great experience because usually I am hired to do the makeup for someone else's vision when working on photo shoots. For this project, I got to style the girls

hair, tell them how to turn, what expressions to make, where to look, and how to pose. This was much more challenging than I thought. I am not a hairdresser and hair was not the focus, but in order to show the makeup, I had to do the hair. It was a fun learning experience. I also got to put my training in modeling to use in helping the girls make the expressions I wanted them to and pose in a way to capture the theme of each image. Each look was carefully designed. I paid close attention to every detail down to the direction their eyes were looking.

Organization was another important skill I improved while working on this project. It was difficult to coordinate around all of the girls and the photographer's schedule. All of us are college students. Trying to plan photo shoots around classes, school events, work, family, and commitments was quite a challenge. It took a great deal of organization and at times getting on top of people to be where they needed to be when they needed to be there. Timing was crucial. Aside from organization of people, my kit had to be kept immaculate.

If I needed certain eyeliner, I did not have time to dig through a messy bag of pencils, I needed to have every product I owned organized so I could find them quick. This helped me get my kit in great shape not only for the project, but for weddings, prom and other events that I do. I thought it was fairly neat, but when working on so many people with such different looks, I realized that it needed tweaking, which helped a great deal.

After the photo shoot, organizing the gallery viewing was the next challenge I faced. I had never planned an event like this before. It was incredibly stressful organizing a room, getting food, making programs, inviting people, and getting the pictures up to par to be presented. It was difficult to find easels to present pictures on, which was my original plan, so I had to mount them on the wall. It took time to complete a slideshow to play during the event that captured the real feel of what happened behind the scenes.

Printing the pictures and putting mats on them was a challenge. I used the University's printing facility because of my budget, but if I was to do it over, I think that having a photo studio print them would have produced a better quality. Also finding mats to put around the picture in such a large quantity (10) was difficult. I had to go to several stores to find everything I needed.

After everything was done, it was an incredible relief. Before people arrived, I had a moment in at the exhibit alone when I could just look at the room, and be proud. It was a great moment for me. To see the food and drinks set up with the programs, hear music playing in the background, be able to watch the slideshow and look at the pictures hung on the wall was a great relief and moment where I was so proud of everything that I had accomplished.

This project was an incredibly eye opening experience for me. I am so grateful that I had the chance to research something that I hold so close to my heart. This entire process was a learning experience from the research, to the execution, to the final exhibit. As a result of this project, I am more skilled and experienced as an artist and as a student. Presenting the project and watching others enjoy my work was one of the best experiences I have had in college. Through this project I not only got to know the cosmetics industry better, but expand my own portfolio and experiences as a professional in the field.

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The Pictures



















