

ADDICTED COSMETICS

LONDON

THE EVOLUTION OF MAKE UP

From the earliest accounts of human history, the use of various forms of personal beauty enhancement, cosmetic adornment and the application of colour make up have been prevalent in diverse societies all over the world. Throughout the centuries, the colour make up in particular has seen dramatic changes in its composition and use. This article provides a short history of make up throughout the ages, both in Europe and in as far flung regions as Africa and the Far East, to try to put into perspective just how much make up has evolved before finding its way to your make up purse.

The Ancient Times

The generally accepted position is that the earliest evidence of the use of make up was in Ancient Egypt during the First Dynasty (about 3000 years BC). The Ancient Egyptians, both male and female, were particularly interested in adorning their eyes with colour. Their motives were both decorative and spiritual, and included the use of Udju (a green shade of malachite made from copper ore), Mesdemet (a grey shade made from lead ore), and Galena (the earliest form of Kohl) - which had additional uses than just as a dark eye shadow or eye liner as it was used as a disinfectant, to protect the eyes from the glare of the desert sun, and even to ward off flies!

The Ancient Romans took the application of make up to a more sophisticated level. The benefits of cleanliness and hygiene were already well-known by that time and attending public baths, the remains of which we can still see today, were a popular form of social interaction prior to applying moisturising creams. The Romans would prepare their skin by applying foundations made of wheat flour, white lead (which proved to be poisonous), orris root or tin oxide, and daubed red ochre on their cheeks and lips as early forms of rouge and lipstick. The influence of Ancient Egypt, vast areas of which the Roman Empire had conquered, could be seen with their use of Kohl and Galena over their eyes; as well as many other shades of eye shadow made from Azurite or Antimony.

In Ancient China, particularly during the Tang Dynasty of the mid to late first century AD, facial make up is said to have been applied on women in seven steps (1) powder the face, (2) rouge on the cheeks, (3) gilding the forehead in gold, (4) tracing the eyebrows, (5) colour on the lips with vermilion, (6) dotting the cheeks, and (7) pasting on floral designs. This style of make up was known as 'sunglow' and had influences from Buddhism and the Northern and Southern Dynasties. The era of the Tang Dynasty is considered a high point in Chinese civilisation and a golden age for cosmopolitan culture, fashion and religious diversity.

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The Renaissance and beyond

During the European Renaissance period, pale skin became known as a sign of wealth. Given that the lower classes were likely to work outside and become prone to tanning in the sun, lighter skin became synonymous with an indoor-based, privileged lifestyle away from the ravages of the sun. Lead paint, which is poisonous, would often be used to achieve a lighter complexion, or white powders applied to create an aristocratic look.

In the sixteenth century it was common for both men and women to cover their face entirely with a thick, plaster-like foundation with rouged cheeks. Whilst the cheeks were light, they did still have a pink glow as women rubbed mercury into their cheeks to achieve their desired look.

Eye brows were expected to be light and fresh, and were tweezed or cut to achieve this look; and the eye lashes were cut short and thin. The lips would either be left natural or Vermilion could be applied for a full, red appearance.

Pre-twentieth Century

The penchant for retaining a pale complexion continued in the United Kingdom into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, faces were often pock-marked or scarred, and make up was used to conceal the blemishes as well as the use of fashionable black patches made from silk and taffeta.

Face powders would be used all over the face, as well as over the bosom to conceal and prevent tan. The lips and cheeks were excessively rouged, but eye make up (other than darkening the eyebrows) was not used.

During the Victorian era, the use of make up suffered a slight decline as it became associated with prostitutes and low-grade actresses (not least due to Queen Victoria's own utterances on the subject). Mercifully, natural ingredients like oatmeal, honey, egg yolk and rosewater replaced the use of lead and mercury-based cosmetics products. Today, we might consider the appearance of a Victorian woman to be somewhat unhealthy looking and pallid as rings under the eyes became prominent, the cheeks daubed lightly pink and lips, crimson.

The end of the nineteenth century has become known as a puritanical period, during which modesty and natural beauty were at the fore. Higher class Victorian women were expected to approach make up with caution and restraint, and any eye colour or lip shades would be pale and subtle.

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The Twentieth Century and Beyond

It could be said that the puritan years of the Victorian era, added to the advent of colour photography and colour motion pictures, made society fertile with expectation about the variety of colours and types of cosmetics products that could be available.

Whilst The Great War of 1914 and World War II in 1939 both left society with other, more pressing matters to consider, the post war years of the early, mid and late twentieth century saw a remarkable explosion of trends, fashions and colours in the cosmetics industry. We explore those trends, and the specific looks they spawned, in a decade by decade description of make up through throughout the twentieth century, up to the present day.

From the ancient Egyptians to the late Victorians, we can see how cosmetics and make up has evolved over the years, to arrive with the healthy number of both large and niche cosmetics companies, offering diverse choice and radiant colour to women of all ages and from all cultures.

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All Addicted Cosmetics' Web Articles, including "***Make up Through the Decades***", can be viewed and downloaded from the Infotheque page of our website.

Addicted Cosmetics offer a range of make up and cosmetics products for both private individuals and professional make up artists, including a variety of highly pigmented eye shadow shades, foundation formulae, lipstick and lip gloss shades and other colour cosmetic products.

Visit us at <http://www.addictedcosmetics.co.uk>, or contact us at info@addictedcosmetics.co.uk if you would like to know more about Addicted Cosmetics and our beauty products.

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