



Industry, Now

KABUKI

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Portrait by [Ben Hassett](#) for Models.com

#IndustryNow The cycles of social media impel us to embrace then move on from trends and discourses faster than ever before. The life span of a single work—an editorial, a campaign, a show, a stint—is shorter for it. Fashion's only unconditional term is the future: operating a year ahead, after all. So, in an industry where change and relevancy are the full stops at the end of every sentence, Models.com wanted to highlight individuals who add permanence to the community—some at their start and some at their top. Photographer Ben Hassett gets up close and personal for Models.com with the creative forces often behind the scenes. They are the Industry, Now.

A relative master of masquerade, [Kabuki](#) has contributed his genius in avant-garde beauty to every major magazine imaginable. A fateful jaunt down the once over-the-top Thierry Mugler runway would propel the Pyramid Club kid into a career spanning three decades with a resume that has connected him with the major models that have defined a generation. Always with a touch of the unexpected, the makeup artist has been able to transform faces into the seemingly simple to the painstakingly detailed.

What's your favorite part of the process?

The final stretch, because that's when I can feel if it's a winner or not. If the look gels and comes to life, that's exciting. Each situation is different. On a fashion show, the important thing is that the makeup works on everyone as well as it did at the test. It should enhance the collection and be memorable... in a good way. The models really get into the look when it's something unique or special. Positive energy makes the extra effort worthwhile.

For a red carpet or public appearance with a celebrity, I have to work quickly and make every detail flawless. I sometimes contribute my opinion about hair or clothing, if I'm asked for it. So, the fun part is, again, the end result and knowing that you've helped make the client feel confident and look radiant.

For an editorial photoshoot, I like to finish or adjust the makeup in front of the camera whenever possible. It keeps the energy up and gets the model to the set quickly. And you get to see exactly how the lighting is affecting everything. It assures you that your work corresponds well with the other elements of the image.

With more conceptual or avant-garde projects where I go out of that comfort zone, it can be quite confusing in the beginning. Since the goal is to surprise even myself, I cast a wide net in the early stages and refine the ideas as I work. It involves making pieces for a 3D element for the look, as it sometimes does. I have to go with my instinct and keep re-evaluating. A bad decision could destroy hours of work. Since I do watercolor illustration as a hobby, this is nothing news since watercolor painting is also an unforgiving medium. But, to be honest, I hardly ever have to start over. The materials that I work with guide me and let me know what they want to be.

What was the turning point of your career?

My career feels like it's been filled with turning points. I'd been doing makeup on myself as part of the NYC club scene in the early 1990s. This led to me being asked to appear in some pretty extravagant Thierry Mugler fashion shows in Berlin and Paris. And then the big call came: [Patricia Field](#) asked me to be the make-up artist for Sarah Jessica Parker and the girls on a new tv show called Sex and the City. A lot of other projects followed SATC including the film Party Monster. The film got [Steven Klein](#)'s attention. As far as fashion goes, this was truly a turning point. It was 2003 and Steven asked me to do my first shoot for Italian Vogue. The model was the incredible [Karen Elson](#) and I decided to really go for it. Steven told me not to hold anything back. So I didn't!

Is making a beautiful thing enough?

Generally, people want a makeup artist to make them look beautiful and not ugly. There have been some circumstances, usually in a film, where I've had to make the actor look like a drug addict or as if they hadn't slept in days, etc. But even in fashion shows or editorials, there often needs to be a twist, a strong point of view, otherwise, it is just a model looking pretty. The most beautiful thing is authenticity and integrity. That goes for flights of fancy as much as for real life. The camera is like a ray and it sees all.