



VANGUARD

KABUKI



Kabuki may have started life in the North of England but his magic is pure US of A.



Dropping out of school at 16, Kabuki (no one, to my knowledge, knows his real name and that's the way he likes it) headed to New York to work initially as a textile designer until he discovered the newly emerging club scene of the late 80s and early 90s. Nightlife bubbled with excitement and energy, creativity and chaos, teeming with outrageous clowns and the drug-steeped 'club kids'. Kabuki had found his place in the world. Here people understood his love of clothes and make-up and his outlandish outfits gained the attention he craved. "Every artistic industry is based on what you can bring to the table. I didn't know anyone when I first ventured out into clubland. Just as in fashion, if you do what you love, eventually it will be noticed by someone high up and things will fall into place" he says. Soon Kabuki wasn't going to clubs purely for entertainment: he was being paid to show-up and be fabulous.

And where the club world goes the fashion pack followed: so it was that Kabuki found himself on the runway of Thierry Mugler's 25th Anniversary show and discovered his future - as a professional make-up artist. With fervent encouragement from friends like Patricia Field, he landed the chief make-up artist role on 'Sex in the City', followed by a string of big screen productions such as Garden State and Party Monster, the tragicomedy film based on the life of Michael Alig, founder of Disco 2000, one of Manhattan's most successful club nights, who was imprisoned for murder in 1996.

An Italian Vogue shoot with photographer Steven Klein here, some inspired beauty editorial for Harper's Bazaar there and suddenly a humble, low-key artist is launched into magazine limelight. "I just work at what I have a passion for," he says. "All I want is the

freedom to create." Today Kabuki works with such photographers as Bruce Weber, Greg Kadel and Jean-Baptiste Mondino. Campaigns for MAC, L'Oreal, Max Factor and NARS as well DSquared, D&G are in all the magazines, in each instance perfectly channelling the artistic signature of the label. Despite the ultra-luxe arena within which he works, Kabuki's intrinsic skill is making beauty seem attainable for anyone regardless of current trends. "Would you trust a doctor who gave all of his patients the exact same prescription? You should also be wary of make-up artists selling trends"...

Wearable, easily adaptable make-up is Kabuki at his best but when he chooses to push against boundaries and take his make-up into the realms of fantasy, it is fantasy that rejoices at its subject's individuality. "I love his work", says make-up artist Emma Day. "It reminds me of the old Shiseido advertising campaigns from the 1970s by Serge Lutens, where the makeup became an art-form in its own right - pure decadence and expression. I think Kabuki and Pat McGrath have definitely influenced the new generation of kids - there is a massive resurgence in experimental fantasy makeup."

Kabuki has had his palms cupped under the chin of Gwen, Michael, Kylie, Madonna and Naomi. "Inspiration is in the subconscious. It takes a new situation for it to surface. For example, on Sunday I worked all day on a stop-action short film with ever-changing make-up. The next day I flew to a beach in Mexico to do a sexy swimsuit shoot. Tomorrow I'm working with Kylie for video segments for her tour. The best part of my job is that it's always something different and this is the key to inspiration."

I may never be able to recreate the masterpiece of Kabuki on myself, but then neither could I recreate the Mona Lisa. What I can do is sit in at a photo shoot by the feet of a modern master and stare in awe.
TL