



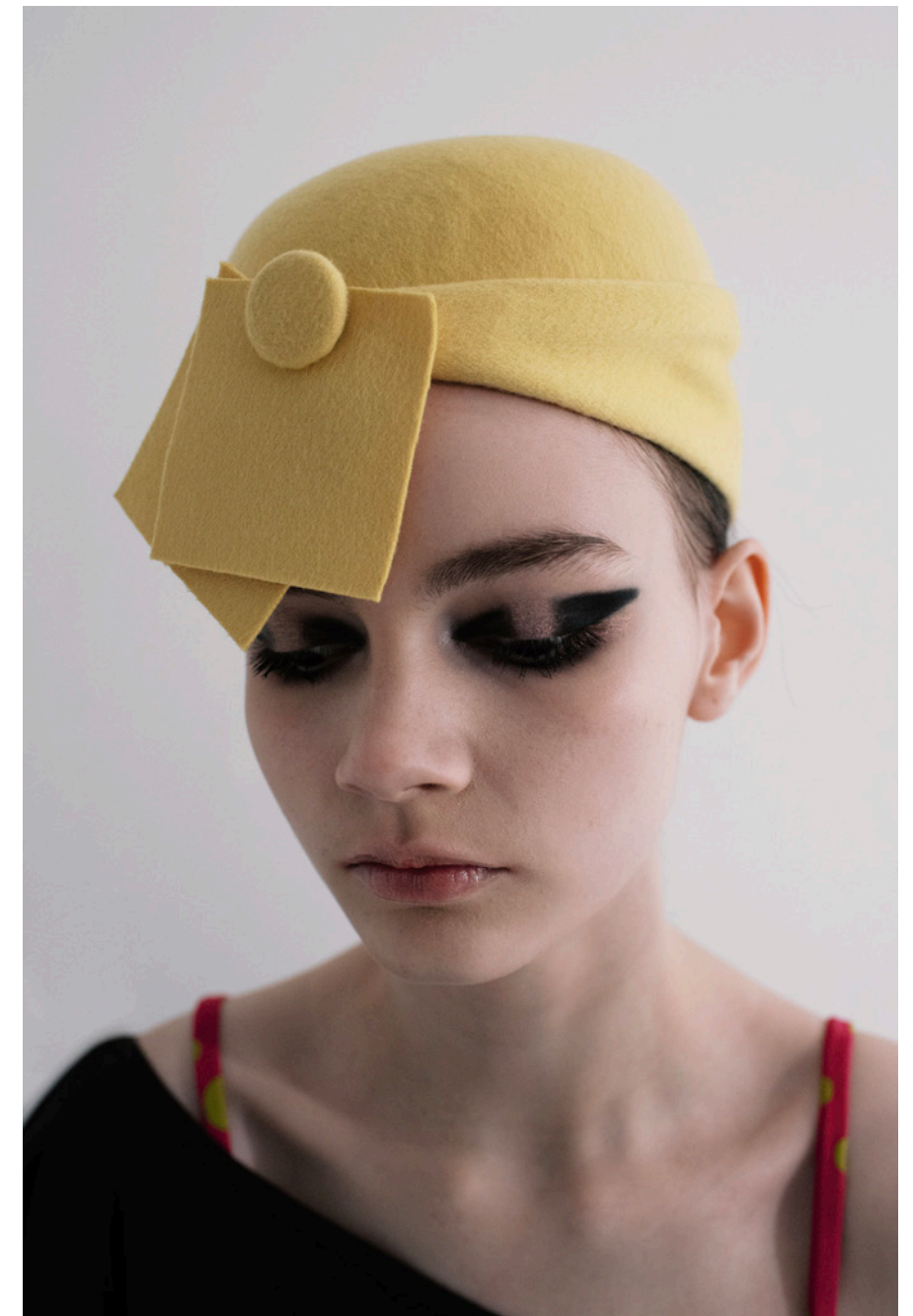
BEAUTY TALK

Hiromi Ueda on the art of make-up
words RACHEL WEINBERG

For Hiromi Ueda, a compulsion toward beauty, an impulse to trifle with “colour and expression”, emerged early on in life. Growing up in Osaka, Japan, where national beauty ideals emphasised flawless, natural skin, she turned to the wider world of fashion magazines and Fashion TV—during its prime 400-million-viewers prime—discovering that make-up could be used as a mechanism for magic. Enamoured with this glamorous world, Ueda moved to London after finishing school, where she briefly studied make-up before finding the opportunity to assist Alex Box, who helped her realise in full that beauty could be twisted, shaped and transformed into anything, especially with the right people by your side.

Still based in London, Ueda continues to keep one eye on the wider cultural landscape, drawing inspiration from cinema and art to craft looks for magazines like *AnOther*, *i-D*, *System Beauty* and American *Vogue*, and in collaboration with photographers David Sims, Paolo Roversi, Tim Walker and Juergen Teller. Appointed Global Make-up Artist for Armani Beauty in 2024, Ueda worked alongside the late Mr Armani to shape his vision for the runway and campaign imagery, often defined by finely sculpted brows, muted blue eyes, flushed lips and luminous skin.

I spoke with Ueda in September, during the Venice Film Festival, where she was presenting a series of masterclasses and preparing looks for the red carpet. In a brief window of time, our conversation touched on the importance of mentorship, voicing one’s perspective on set, and knowing when to strip a look back to serve the image. I learnt that her images emerge through focus and agility, balancing precision with play and rooted in both understanding and communication—contrasts she repeatedly navigates when creating her own kind of alchemy.



opposite SPARROW wears DOLCE & GABBANA dress and YSL necklace from GUZZI ARCHIVE.



MELODY wears stylist's own vintage dress and earrings.

RACHEL WEINBERG In the spirit of Venice, I'd like to begin with cinema. Much of your work, and many of the looks you create, carry a cinematic quality, often refined, conceptual and developed for on screen. What references do you draw on when creating these looks? Do you consider a range of artistic disciplines in the process, or are you responding to something else?

HIROMI UEDA For the show looks, I often reference film images, especially ones that play with light and shadow. That's usually the theme of the show. Mr Armani is always thinking about how light will hit the garments, and he often speaks about that. I try to translate this into the make-up, complementing the imagery with my own approach.

Sometimes I draw from a particular film, sometimes from a specific person, but the goal is always to make the look cinematic. Even with something very simple, I want it to carry a sense of sophistication and subtle drama. For example, if the skin is kept natural, I'll make sure the eyelashes are precisely defined so they stand out. It's always about creating tension within the make-up.

RW Was cinema a significant part of your life growing up, or did it become more important to you later on?

HU It was more something I discovered later on. Growing up in Japan, I wasn't really exposed to Western films until my mid-teens. My older sister was a big influence—she loved them. There was a satellite channel, Sky TV, that often played Western movies, and through her I started watching. As soon as I did, I found them so beautiful, so cinematic, especially the way light was used. That really inspired me.

When I was younger, though, I was mostly watching Fashion TV. I was fascinated by the supermodels of that era. It was so glamorous and such an incredible moment in fashion. I adored them, and that was the beginning of my love for fashion and make-up. I also drew inspiration from magazines and images, always looking at how beauty and style were presented.

RW I read that you were first exposed to make-up when you were around seven or eight years old. Do you remember that moment?

HU Yes, when I was around seven or eight, I went through my mother's make-up bag. I just wanted to play with colours. I remember picking up one of her lipsticks and thinking, *what's this?* I ended up drawing with it on the mirror. When she came back into the room, she was really shocked. I had used up an entire lipstick. From then on, I was fascinated by colours. I also loved drawing when I was young, so for me it was more about playing with colour and expression than thinking about beauty in a traditional sense.

RW When you left Japan, you moved to London and assisted Alex Box, who gave you your first big break and introduced you to the industry at large. I wanted to talk about assisting and mentorship, and how they shape not just the kind of artist you become but also the kind of professional you want to be. Today, with social media, someone can become a global sensation almost overnight, but the idea of learning and growing alongside someone feels more sacred. What were the benefits of assisting for you, and how did that experience shape the make-up artist you are today?

HU When I decided I wanted to be a make-up artist, I honestly didn't know where to begin. I studied make-up for a year, but when I finished the course I still wasn't sure how to start my career. So, I kept telling everyone around me that I wanted to do make-up. Many of my friends were fashion students, and one of them introduced me to a designer whose show Alex Box was working on. Alex came to the make-up test without any assistants, and my friend encouraged me to come along. She was so kind to me from the very beginning and took me on right away. I was incredibly lucky to become her first assistant so early in my career. It opened so many doors for me. But more importantly, she was a mentor. She didn't just teach me technical skills, she showed me how to communicate with people, how to collaborate, and how to think about make-up as art. She encouraged me to voice my perspective and to say what I believed was best for the picture, even if it was different from what others expected. That guidance shaped not only my career but the way I see myself as an artist. She also gave me a real structure for understanding this business. It wasn't just

about make-up technique, it was about how you communicate with people and how you build your own path. She always reminded me, "This is your journey, it's not a race, and it's not anyone else's. Don't compare yourself to others."

RW Great advice. You have collaborated with some remarkable people. Looking through your portfolio, I was struck by the photographers you've worked with—David Sims, Craig McDean, Tim Walker—and with incredible brands like Louis Vuitton, Saint Laurent, and Giorgio Armani. What was it like to go from admiring these figures in magazines to actually working alongside them?

HU I feel very lucky to have worked with so many incredible people. Each time I collaborate with such iconic figures in fashion, I'm amazed. In the beginning, meeting people like Guido and David Sims was surreal. They were the ones I admired when I was young and looked at in magazines and on Fashion TV. They shaped such powerful images of fashion. To later find myself working alongside them was an incredible experience.

RW Do you remember one of your first experiences being on set with those photographers? What was it like stepping into that world for the first time?

HU Yes, Tim Walker was one of the very first photographers I worked with early in my career. Katie Grand, the stylist, brought me onto the shoot, and Tim just said, "Do whatever you want—let's see what you can do." He gave me total freedom, which was incredible. The collaboration felt so organic, and I realised how much make-up could be part of the storytelling, an essential element of the image-making.

At first, I was a little hesitant to voice my opinions, but I also felt encouraged to share what I thought make-up could bring to the picture. Often, you don't know how everything will come together until you're actually shooting. The hairdresser might propose one idea, I might propose another, and sometimes they don't immediately align. But that's the magic. Everyone brings their own perspective, and through adding, removing or adjusting, something new emerges. There's always a moment when the creation clicks into place, and that's when the magic happens. That's the beauty of fashion.



SPARROW wears vintage floral headband, CHLOÉ top and CELINE pearl necklace from GUZZI ARCHIVE, leather shrug from YURAH.
opposite MELODY wears stylist's own vintage dress and cuffs.



MELODY wears MARNI dress from GUZZI ARCHIVE and LEAIR bandeau.
SPARROW wears CHLOÉ top, DOLCE & GABBANA swimwear from GUZZI ARCHIVE, LEAIR hat.



RW When you're on set, what do you think are the qualities that make you a strong collaborator?

HU I think you have to believe in your own perspective but also stay open. Collaboration is about listening—you can't just insist, "This is my make-up, this is what I want to do." I always try to read what others are thinking and focus on what will be best for the picture or for the look overall.

Make-up is just one element of the image. It has to be balanced with everything else, working in harmony. So, for me, collaboration is the key. I want to make sure all the parts come together to create something unified.

RW Your technique has become recognised for its versatility. You can create bold, colourful, almost pop-inspired body paint, but also extremely natural, refined and delicate looks. What draws you to this balance of precision and play? And how do you navigate both ends of that spectrum within your practice?

HU I usually plan the make-up in advance, creating face charts and deciding on a few options. But sometimes, once we're on set, what I've planned doesn't work in the picture. Having a plan can be useful, but it can also be a mistake if you hold onto it too tightly. It's more important to have a starting point, then adapt through collaboration.

As I mentioned before, make-up is only one element in creating something magical. If it doesn't work—even if I've spent an hour on it—we sometimes wipe everything off and start again. For example, if there's an elaborate gown in a palace setting, a dramatic make-up might overwhelm the image. In that case, minimal make-up works better.

You have to be ready to change at any moment, to adjust to what the image needs. I also believe it's important to respect the photographer's perspective, because they're the ones capturing the final image. My role is to understand what they want to see through their lens and to shape the make-up in a way that supports that vision.

RW And are you always comfortable letting go of a look if it doesn't serve the image?

HU I'm very comfortable letting go of my initial idea. Of course, sometimes I feel that

a look works and I'd love to keep it, but that's part of the job. The beauty of make-up is that it's never permanent. You can always take it off and create something new the next day.

RW I imagine you have felt a desire to create something more lasting? With Armani Beauty, you've been able to establish defined looks that continue beyond a single show, and filter into product ranges and consumer goods. What have you learnt in this process?

HU Yes, creating products has been a really exciting challenge for me. I'm fascinated by the whole process. It takes such a long time, sometimes years of planning, which is very different from fashion shows or photoshoots where the focus is on creating an image in the moment.

For shoots, make-up is about artistry and storytelling. But with products, I have to think about what people want in their daily lives. It's a different perspective as a make-up artist, and it allows me to look at make-up from another angle. I find that really inspiring, and it's been an amazing new challenge.

RW It's almost like creating products shows you how make-up can exist in the world beyond a single moment—how it continues on. Are there other parts of working on the business side of the industry that have been meaningful for you?

HU As a make-up artist, I'm used to working with endless colours and combinations, always trying to create something impactful, something for the red carpet or a striking editorial. But through product development, I've learnt that the everyday consumer doesn't always want that. They want something simple, intuitive and easy to use in daily life. With Armani Beauty, the focus has been on products that are mistake-proof, that fit into a modern lifestyle where nobody has an hour to spend on make-up. So we think about multipurpose products—something you can use on the eyes, lips and cheeks all in one.

That's been a big shift in perspective for me. As artists, we're spoilt with options, but consumers are often choosing just one product out of many. Learning to see make-up through their eyes has really changed how I think about it.

RW Has working on products changed the way you approach your editorial work as well?

HU I think it's given me a deeper understanding of make-up overall. It's been an amazing experience, and it's really helped me grow and develop my career.

RW Across both the commercial and editorial sides of your work, what's one thing you wish people understood better about make-up and beauty, or something you wish they appreciated more?

HU I think the beauty of make-up is that it can take so many different directions. It can be highly creative, constantly changing, or it can be something consistent—some people wear the same make-up from the age of twenty to 60. I find that really beautiful too, because it becomes part of who they are and gives them comfort. For me, make-up is a powerful tool of self-expression. What I love most is that it's dynamic. There's no single way to use it, and everyone can find their own relationship with it.

RW How often do you pay attention to what's happening in the industry more broadly? Do you think about trends, or are you more focused on the idea of make-up as something that evolves and continues over time, as you've just described?

HU I think it's a good thing that make-up is evolving so quickly, especially with technology advancing so rapidly. The products themselves have become more sophisticated—the textures, the formulas, the wider range of colours now available. The industry is moving fast, but in a really positive way.

RW When you think about clarity in your work, is it something you find in the planning stage, or does it only arrive once you're on set and can see everything come together?

HU Even when I plan the make-up in advance, it rarely feels completely finished in the make-up room. What we create there is maybe 80% of the look. The final 20% always happens on set—when the model is dressed, the garments are in place, and the hair is finished. That's when everything comes together. I keep adjusting until that moment. I never feel the look is truly complete until I see how it works in the full picture. With the digital world now, it's even easier. We can see the images instantly on the photographer's monitor. When I look at the screen and see that the make-up is working seamlessly with the fashion and the setting, that's when I know, *this is it, this is finished*.



photographer EDWARD MULVIHILL
creative producer RACHEL WEINBERG
stylist STEPH REID
make-up artist ALANA LUCKY
hair stylist BRADWYN JONES
make-up assistant EVE LOUISE GALE
hair styling assistant EILIS O'MAHONY
talent SPARROW SALTAMP and
MELODY LULU-BRIGGS from CHADWICK MODELS
film GABE HANVEY
studio SN6



MELODY wears MARNI dress from GUZZI ARCHIVE, LEAIR bandeau, stylist's own MIU MIU shoes, ARMANI BEAUTY make-up throughout.
SPARROW wears CHLOÉ top, jeans and DOLCE & GABBANA swimwear from GUZZI ARCHIVE, LEAIR hat, ARMANI BEAUTY make-up throughout.