



Kendall With Sad Roses, 2020
114x90x4.6cm, oil on canvas

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Untitled (Cupid Hearts), 2020
104x90x4.6cm, oil on canvas

All images courtesy of the artist

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In praise of
Cosmetics

Anyone who imitates nature simply
has no imagination.

Looking back, the motto was perfectly chosen. In May 2019, the last Met Gala – for now – took place in New York. Probably, the world's most spectacular fashion event ever, Susan Sontag's essay, *Notes On Camp*, inspired that year's theme. And even though no one really understood what this enigmatic term was supposed to mean, everyone gave it their all one last time.

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Harry Styles came hand-in-hand with Gucci creative director Alessandro Michele in a lace blouse and pearl earrings, Jared Leto also wore Gucci and carried a replica of his head under his arm, and Lady Gaga wore four outfits at the same time, which she gradually shed until she was posing on the red carpet in nothing but her underwear and platform boots.

Somewhere in between stood a slender young man with the perfect glow, looking almost inconspicuous in a mesh shirt made of safety pins. James Charles wasn't really a star like the others. He became famous on the internet because he shared makeup tutorials on YouTube as a teenager. Now, in his early twenties, Charles has a following of over 20 million. His presence at the Met Gala displeased some, who made fun of his appearance on the web over the next few days. They thought that putting on makeup wasn't a talent like acting or singing, nor was it a craft like tailoring an haute couture gown. At the time, I was delighted by the elaborate costumes, by the fact that so many men had decided against the black tie dress code and were wearing women's clothes. And also by James Charles, who always crows "Hey guys!" so adorably in his videos and was now touchingly gripped by his own importance.



Enrata with Butterflies, 2019
230x190x4.5cm, oil on canvas
courtesy: the artist & private collection

When everything is too much for me, I watch makeup tutorials. I find these videos relaxing because they transport me to a glittering world, where improvement always seems possible. Makeup tutorials have a

clear dramaturgy: The source material is shown, the goal and tools are explained and, in the end, something that surpasses the original state has been accomplished. Makeup never disappoints. There is something for every mood: dramatic, enchanting, playful, dystopian, or creepy. People get older or younger, change gender, transform into cartoon

characters or animals. In the "Mystery and Makeup" series, Bailey Sarian talks about true crime cases while she puts on makeup, others tell jokes or get drunk. Artist Molly Soda makes makeup videos in which she talks about her insecurities, bad dates, and sometimes paints her whole face pink. The question of whether makeup tutorials can be art does not come up. They are what they are: a coping mechanism. A way to relate to this strange world, to carve out a place for oneself – a place that no one else would have granted.

Kylie, Kendall & Skull, 2019
130x130x4.5cm, oil on canvas
courtesy: the artist & Sammlung Haus N



Some say that people who wear so much makeup can't stand their natural faces. That someone who is at peace with themselves doesn't need makeup. But I think that sometimes it's quite a lot to ask me to always be at one with myself. And that makeup can help in dealing with attributions that are brought in from the outside. The transformative aspect is critical in most of these videos. In the beginning, their main characters show themselves markedly unadorned: with a double chin, blemishes, dark circles under their eyes, or a large nose. They talk about their depression and their experiences with violence and bullying. Then they sit down and paint themselves a beautiful face. For me, that radiates incredible strength.

The only videos I never watch are the ones advertised with hashtags like #naturalmakeup or #nomakeupmakeup. Who seriously wants to dab twenty different shades of beige on their face to create the illusion of no makeup? Anyone who imitates nature simply has no imagination.

Kendall with Sad Roses, 2021
circle 150x150x4.5cm, oil on canvas
courtesy: the artist



Loren with Flowers, 2021
135x135x4.6cm, oil on canvas
courtesy: the artist & private collection

Sure, beauty has many faces — but none of them are despondent. Beauty is a spiritual need

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In 1846, Charles Baudelaire wrote in his “In Praise of Cosmetics” that it is nature that compels people, that it is brutal and cruel. Art, on the other hand, is the means by which one rises above it. Susan Sontag thought something similar in “Notes on Camp”: the turn to artificiality, the unconditional will for form lends strength in hard times. That’s why makeup isn’t a mask, as some think, but a self-chosen face. Camp icons like Leigh Bowery, Boy George, or Amanda Lepore used flamboyance and artificiality as an armor to escape homo- and transphobia and the general nastiness of the mainstream world. **Makeup is like caressing yourself.**

When I was a teenager, there were no makeup tutorials and there was no social media. Still, makeup was my favorite pastime. Hour after hour, I sat on the bed with my best friend, spread out around us an arsenal of brushes,

tubes, pots and pens, most of which we had stolen from Woolworth. We used magazines and record covers as models. Most of the time, we put on makeup for no reason. In the town where we lived, there was no youth club — and we were too young for the actual clubs. When we were done with a layer of makeup, we climbed out the window onto the garage roof and secretly smoked cigarettes. Then we would take off our makeup and start all over again. We didn’t even take photos; the journey was the goal.

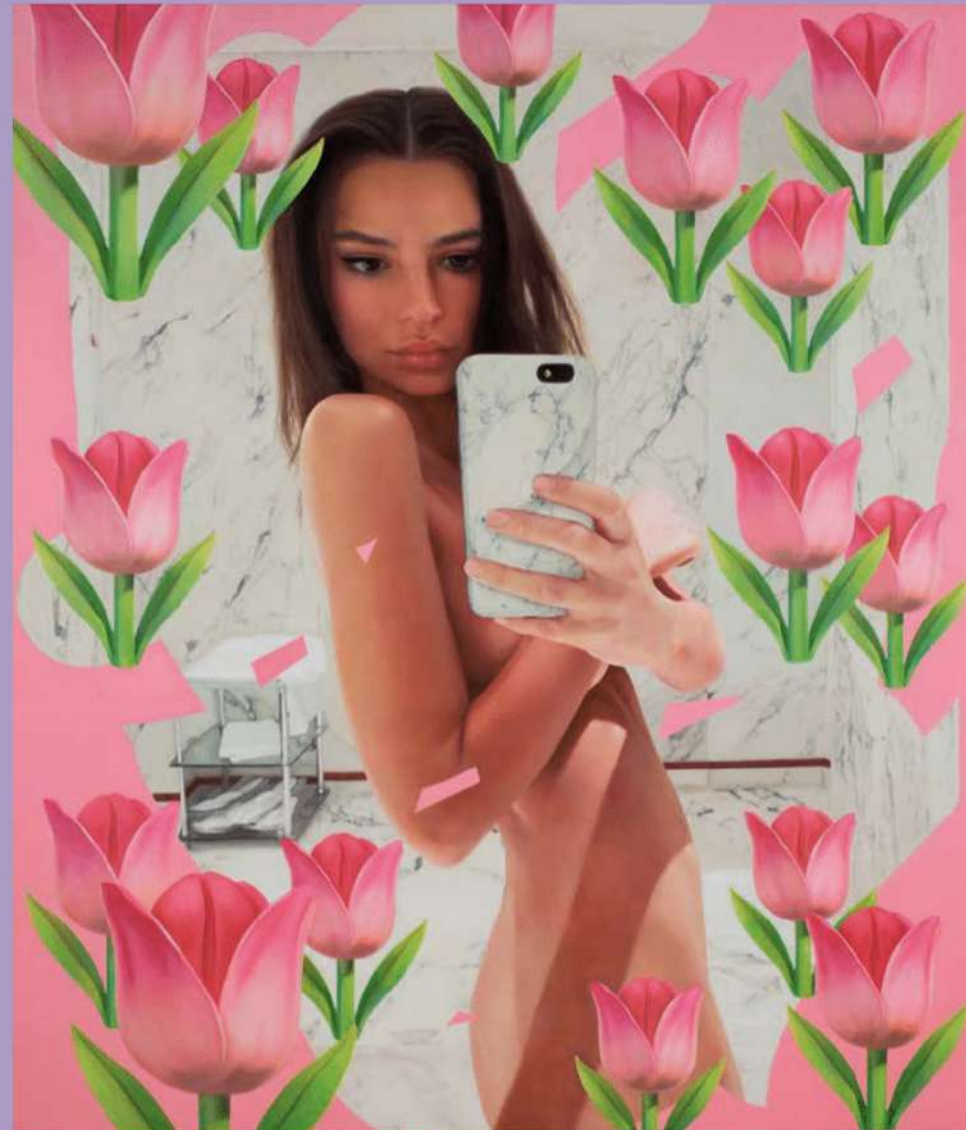


Helen with Unicorns, 2019
114 x 90 x 4.6cm, oil on canvas
courtesy: the artist & private collection

At the time, I didn’t know about British feminist Angela McRobbie, but I would have understood what she meant by the term “bedroom culture”: a safe space for girls to be whomever they want — partly because there’s no other place for them to do that. Sometimes, I think that teenage feeling was proper preparation for this pandemic time. Then, as now, there was a before, but no imaginable after. No out there, but only one: in here. **Only now, instead of looking in the mirror, I stare at the screen.**

Everyone talks about sweatpants now, suddenly finding it intolerably exhausting to wear regular clothes. Not to mention makeup and styling. There are no more red carpets. Nothing that even feels like it, and thus no reason to make yourself beautiful.

Emrata With Tulips, 2021
180 x 155 x 4.5cm, oil on canvas



Sales of decorative cosmetics are plummeting; people are buying hand sanitizer instead. You sit around and wait for the end in comfortable, elasticized fabric with a rubber waistband, no makeup and germ-free hands. Everything subordinates itself to the natural: Men no longer shave, women embrace their gray hair. Is that still self love, or is it just resignation?

Sure, beauty has many faces — but none of them are despondent. Beauty is a spiritual need; you don’t need a red carpet for it, not

even an audience. Just me and my mirror and a whole world of possibilities. Anyone who puts on makeup has not yet given up on themselves.

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