

ANCIENT MYSTERY TO MODERN MAGIC

FROM NEFERTITI TO MADONNA AND ADELE, KOHL IS ON FIRE.



Makeup and hair by Ilise Harris on model Alexandra. Photos by Dyanne Van Campen. All photos: IPA archive unless noted.

On a recent trip to Jordan, imagine my excitement when I found out that our eco lodge offered a demonstration on the making of kohl at the tent home of a local Bedouin!

Perhaps no other cosmetic has such a storied past. Beginning with Nefertiti and spanning the centuries, my mind spins with images of the doe-eyed, smoky eyed, feline-flicked icons of history: movie goddesses Liz Taylor, Sophia Loren, Audrey Hepburn, Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe. And, of course, their more contemporary sisters: Twiggy, Diana Ross, Nina Simone, Dita Von Teese, Madonna, Amy Winehouse and Adele. But kohl was never just for the girls: Charlie Chaplin, David Bowie, Kurt Cobain, Prince, Michael Jackson, Russell Brand, and Pharrell Williams all used kohl at one

point or another.

But let's go back to the Bronze Age in Egypt, circa 3500 to 1100 BC. Kohl, sometimes known as kajal, kollurion or surma, served multiple purposes in everyday life. Lining the eyes with an oily black product protected from the sun's glare, repelled flies and prevented airborne desert dust from getting into the eyes. The annual flooding of the Nile made conditions ripe for bacterial eye infections, and kohl was believed to have anti-microbial properties, with the added bonus of protecting the wearer from the *evil eye*. Kohl was even applied to the eyes of babies, and in certain parts of the world still is.

Kohl pots, grinding palettes and implements for application were found in the burial tombs of the poor and affluent alike, since everyone wore kohl and it was deemed necessary in the afterlife. The

rich stored their product in carved ivory containers, often with two chambers for different colors and a separate compartment for a stylus. The poor used more humble housing like stone or shells.

The nobility might have ground up pearls, lapis, emeralds, rubies, gold or silver mixed into their kohl. There could be ochre, copper ore, oxidized copper or even burnt almonds. Kohl was a complex and personal mix with hints of color and metallic highlights. Herbs like fennel, saffron and neem were sometimes added to increase the medicinal properties. These ingredients were diluted in oil, animal fat, milk or water, or a combination. Sometimes kohl was stored as a dry powder. An upscale look was glossy and rich; the poorer masses may just have used basic soot from fires. A common ingredient was the toxic mineral galena, a source



KOHL-MAKING STEPS:



1. The simple process of this most basic kohl is placing a clean linen cloth in a bottle of olive oil to serve as a wick.



2. The little torch is placed under the metal pan that is used for making the traditional bread called shraak and left all night.



of lead sulphate, this kohl was known as mesdemet. Another type of kohl was called udju and was made from green malachite originating from the Sinai. Over time, mystical and spiritual meaning was associated with the use of kohl—the idea that it protected the wearer from the evil eye is one possibility. Also, a dark-rimmed eye can suggest a hidden, alluring and seductive quality, almost like a “veiled” eye, something less exposed.

A variety of ancient medical texts and inscriptions have provided many recipes for kohl, so we know it was used medicinally. We also know it became a multitasking beauty product and its style trends changed throughout ancient Egyptian history, at times contouring the eye from the brows to the nose, occasionally defining the brows. From Egypt, the use of kohl spread throughout the Middle

East, Africa and Asia. There are references to kohl in the Old Testament.

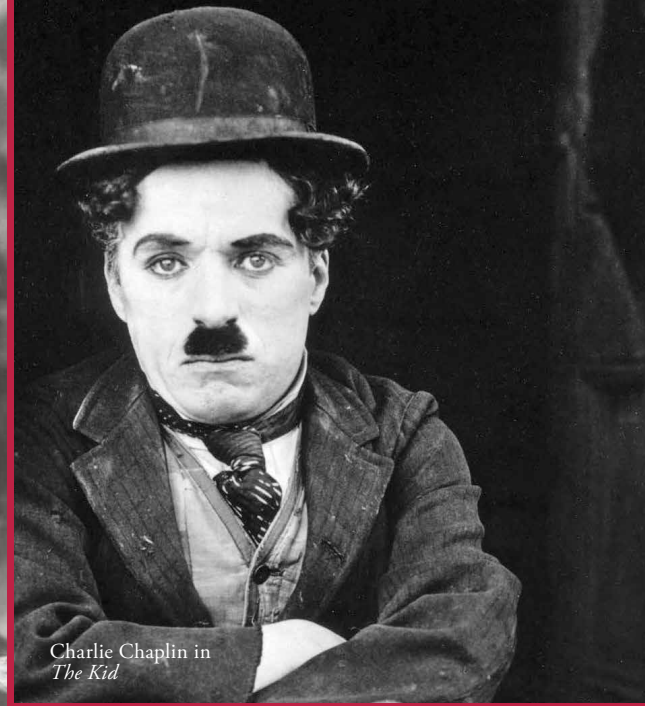
French researchers have analyzed samples from 52 kohl containers residing at the Louvre in Paris and found trace elements of four uncommon lead species. The researchers exposed skin cells to the lead sulfates and found an immune response ready to protect against bacterial invaders. So now we know the beliefs about keeping the eyes healthy has been scientifically proven. Today, we know that lead is poisonous—even if it is antibacterial—so it is highly advised not to use traditional kohl from certain areas of the world but stick with modern commercial interpretations for our make-up kits.

While kohl persisted in the East, as a health and beauty aid, Western taste preferred a pale complexion, nude eye,

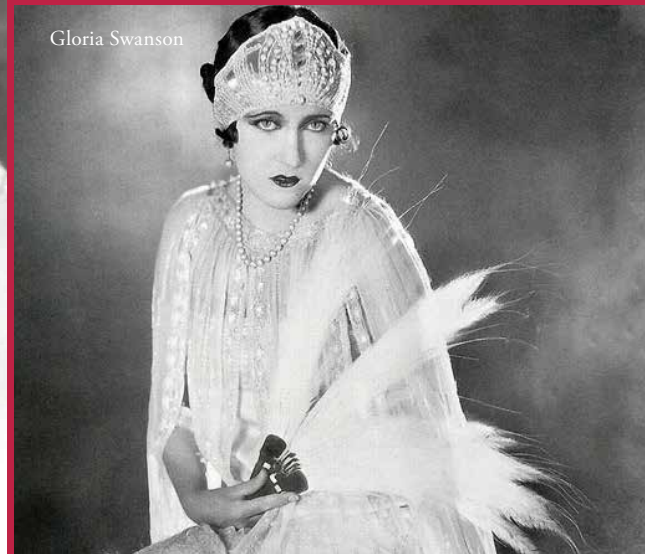
OUT OF THE KIT



Theda Bara in *Cleopatra*



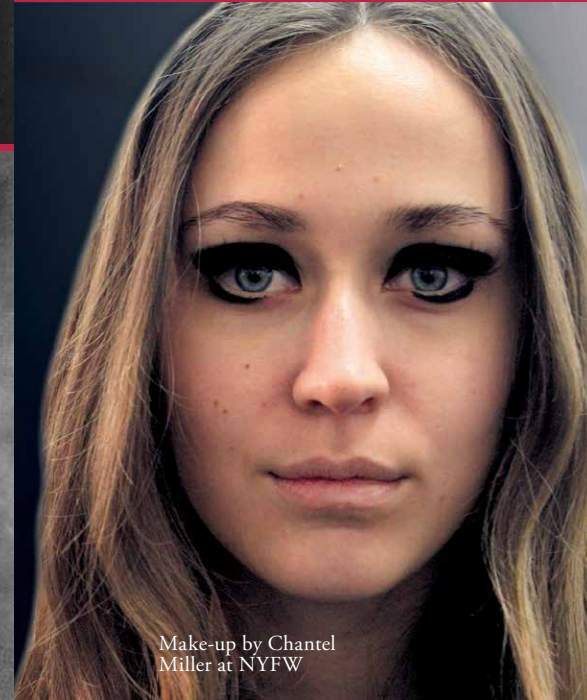
Charlie Chaplin in *The Kid*



Gloria Swanson



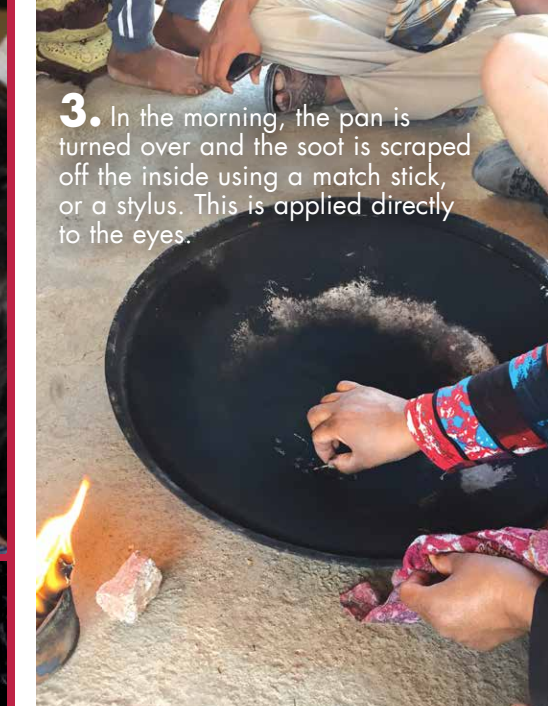
Kabuki creating a look at NYFW



Make-up by Chantel Miller at NYFW



Adele



3. In the morning, the pan is turned over and the soot is scraped off the inside using a match stick, or a stylus. This is applied directly to the eyes.



4. The little kohl pot with applicator is used to store this material for future use, and can be mixed with other ingredients as per the article.



Marilyn Monroe

Photo by André De Dienes © Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

rosy cheek and bitten lip until Nefertiti's bust was discovered in 1912, setting the Western imagination on fire.

Egyptomania created a style buzz that evoked the unknown, occult and mysterious. King Tut, the boy king with the eye liner right up to his temples, made us long for a blatant sensuality forbidden during Victorian times. The look was expressed in silent films of the day, led by actresses like Gloria Swanson and Theda Bara. Flappers flaunted a look called Vamp, which never ceased to titillate, and recurred in the '70s by Biba Cosmetics and in the work of two of my favorite photographers: Sarah Moon and Sheila Metzner.

An excellent tutorial on YouTube for a contemporary fresh-lined eye is by celebrity make-up artist Matin Byrdie, originally from Afghanistan. It's called "Red Carpet-Worthy Eye Tutorial," and in a sea of overwrought, heavy-handed YouTube

tutorials, his elegant work is worth a look.

A beautifully lined eye cannot go without a carefully crafted brow. M.A.C.'s Shape + Shade Brow Tint is the perfect tool for etching in hair-sized strokes with its superfine tip—the shade side is for adding shadowy depth.

For lining the lower waterline for a true kohl look, Kat Von D Beauty's new liquid Lash Liner was created just for this purpose. On our modern Nefertiti, I used the finer point of M.A.C.'s Technakohl Liner for getting in around the tear duct, and M.A.C.'s Liquid Eye Liner in Boot Black for the top lid—it doesn't budge and has a lovely depth. Kat Von D Beauty's Tattoo Liner is a fine all-purpose waterproof pen liner that is a go-to that comes in a rainbow of shades. To catch some firelight glow on my model's cheeks, I used M.A.C.'s Mineralize Skinfinish in Global Glow.

As a make-up and hair artist, I need to keep my kit tight. I love Hairstory products! For this shoot I used their Hair Balm to moisturize and define my model's natural curls. It's only sold through hairdressers (shophairstory.com/www.shopDirectLink/300154169/).

Today, we mostly refer to kohl as eye liner, be it liquid, gel, pencil or felt tip. We line, we flick, we blend, we smudge to make magic. It never goes out of style. We can create looks that are sweet and innocent, punk, smoldering, retro or modern.

From pharaohs to pirates and princesses, it looks like Kohl is here to stay. **MA**

Thank you to Lisa Eldridge's book, *Face Paint*, to the article "Ophthalmology of the Pharaohs: Antimicrobial Kohl Eyeliner in Ancient Egypt" found on blogs.discoverymagazine.com and to the Bedouin community for being key resources.

