

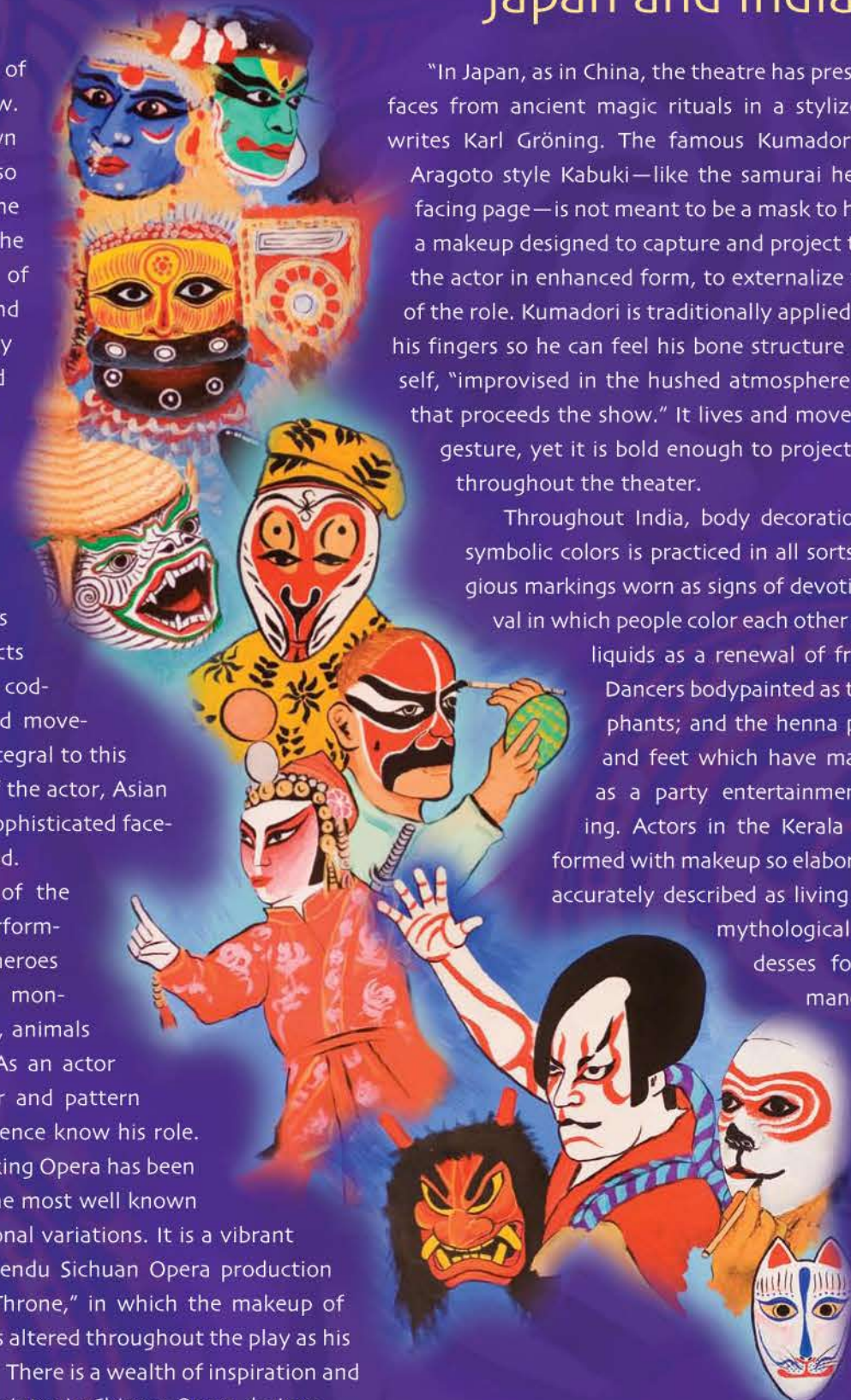


"Kabuki makeup is already in itself an interpretation of the actor's own through the medium of the facial features. On stage this interpretation becomes a temporalization of makeup in collaboration with the audience. The result is a decoding of the drama traced out in the graphic designs of the painted face." — Masao Yamaguchi

3 Asian Theater gods and heroes of china, japan and india

In the traditional theatre of Asia, the actor is the show. The stories are well known myths and historical epics, so everyone knows the plot. The audience is there to see the performers, their mastery of the stylized movements and voice and their otherworldly appearance in costume and makeup, as they embody legendary roles in a larger-than-life fashion. The formality and stylization of their appearance frees the performers from naturalistic expression. The actors become living special effects to present the story through codified gestures, postures and movements. As the makeup is integral to this complete transformation of the actor, Asian theater includes the most sophisticated face-painting designs in the world.

The spectacular faces of the Chinese Opera can turn performers into anything, from heroes and villains, or gods and monsters, to all sorts of clowns, animals and theatrical characters. As an actor appears on stage the color and pattern of his makeup lets the audience know his role. The makeup style of the Peking Opera has been used for 200 years and is the most well known of over three hundred regional variations. It is a vibrant art today, as in a 1991 Chendu Sichuan Opera production of "Wrestling the Dragon Throne," in which the makeup of wicked Prince Yang Guang is altered throughout the play as his evil ambition possesses him. There is a wealth of inspiration and innovative ideas for a facepainter in Chinese Opera designs.



"In Japan, as in China, the theatre has preserved the painted faces from ancient magic rituals in a stylized artistic form," writes Karl Gröning. The famous Kumadori makeup of the Aragoto style Kabuki—like the samurai hero design on the facing page—is not meant to be a mask to hide the actor. It is a makeup designed to capture and project the expressions of the actor in enhanced form, to externalize the inner persona of the role. Kumadori is traditionally applied by the actor with his fingers so he can feel his bone structure as he paints himself, "improvised in the hushed atmosphere of concentration that proceeds the show." It lives and moves with each facial gesture, yet it is bold enough to project the performance throughout the theater.

Throughout India, body decoration with signs and symbolic colors is practiced in all sorts of contexts: religious markings worn as signs of devotion; the Holi festival in which people color each other with powders and liquids as a renewal of friendship; the Puli Dancers bodypainted as tigers; painted elephants; and the henna patterns on hands and feet which have made it to the U.S. as a party entertainment like facepainting. Actors in the Kerala region are transformed with makeup so elaborate that it is more accurately described as living masks, becoming mythological gods and goddesses for secular performances that maintain the quality of ancient rituals.

Everything you might want to learn about face-painting can be found in the faces from Asia.