

Transformational Makeup:

Lecture and Classroom Demonstrations for Theatre and Art Students

Presented by Christopher Agostino

author of *Transformations! the Story Behind the Painted Faces*

The Art and Function of the Painted Face from Ancient Origins to Modern Theatre

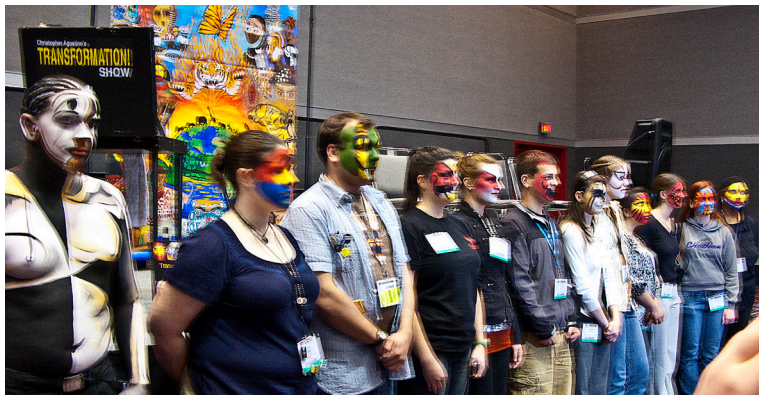
From the very beginning of human culture we have used makeup and masks to transform our appearance and create a new identity. As ancient ritual evolved into theater, makeup remained as the way for an actor to present an identity beyond their normal self. It is especially evident in non-western theater, such as the Chinese Opera in which fantastically painted faces transform performers into gods, demons, heroes and all kinds of creatures to bring myths to life. When Japanese Kabuki—with its superhuman heroes in red on white *kumadori* face designs—was presented in Europe in the 1950s “the most significant thing is that makeup thus recovered its magical function as a vehicle of the supernatural, deliberately transgressing the natural features of the human face” (Michel Thévoz, *The Painted Body*). Today, traditional designs are a source for creating theatrical magic in productions like Julie Taymor’s *Lion King* (with makeup based on Maasai body art) and the Metropolitan Opera’s *The First Emperor*.

Christopher Agostino uses makeup and mask art from world cultures to present the story of this fundamental art in a fascination performance/lecture illustrated by his amazing facepainting on audience volunteers. For rituals, celebrations, status markings, theater and simply as a beautiful art, the reasons why we choose to transform ourselves are as varied as the images we create. In Native cultures, symbolic signs and colors mark the wearer as a member of society and imbue him with totemic powers. In Asian theater the actors are the show, becoming living special effects through sophisticated makeup and costume traditions that are hundreds of years old. And in Africa there is a treasure of face and body art, from the Spirit Masks of the Bobo Oule to the profound aesthetics of the Southeast Nuba who daily turned themselves into a work of art in celebration of the human body. These cultural designs have an innate power and exotic appeal when used in their traditional form or as the inspiration for original theatrical makeup creations.



The Nao Dance Company of Orlando

The Nao Dance Company of Orlando painted for performance in designs by Christopher Agostino based on the traditional bodypaint of the Southeast Nuba of Sudan.



The faces from a Transformational Makeup lecture at the U.S. Institute of Theatre Technology Conference (USITT) in Houston, 2008.

Over a thirty year career, Christopher has drawn inspiration from cultural sources to develop a mask-like makeup style with bold designs that capture the essential quality of traditional body arts—presented to audiences as a performance art in his unique series of Transformations shows. He’s the founder and co-director of Agostino Arts Theatre in New York.