NATHALIE GAGNÉ MAKEUP DESIGNER

Nathalie Gagné

Ever since she was a teenager, Nathalie Gagné has been fascinated by makeup and the impact it has on the actor's craft. From the age of 12, when she first discovered this passion, her cosmetic brushes have always been close at hand. For Nathalie, makeup is a reflection of the character's soul. After studying theatre production at Saint-Hyacinthe Collage she became one of the first to graduate from the Montreal branch of the renowned Parisian makeup school Christian Chauveaux.

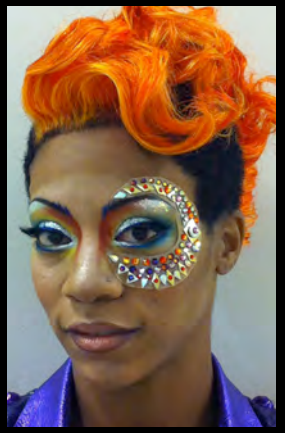
Before joining Cirque du Soleil in 1995, Nathalie has worked in the theatre, film and television industry. Through her work she had the great opportunity to travel around the world, which has greatly influence the result of her inspiration. Nominated twice for a Gémeau Award by the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television for "Best Makeup".

All along her career she has the honor to work with many great creator like; Franco Dragon, Robert Lepage, Andrew Adamson, Thierry Mugler, Eiko Ishioka, Jamie King and Michael Curry, Dominique Lemieux, to name a few. Since 1995, she has created over 2,000 makeup designs for Cirque du Soleil, with the final concepts being selected from more than 5,000 sketches. After 20 years as Makeup Designer with Cirque du Soleil, she contributed to the success of more than 19 shows including O, Love, Zumanity, Ka, Mystere, Believe, Zaia, Iris, Corteo, La Nouba, Saltimbanco, Quidam, Delirium, Varekai, Elvis, Joya, Michael Jackson ONE, Iris, Paramour and Joya. Nathalie participated as the key/ makeup designer in the 3D movie of Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away produced by James Cameron and directed by Andrew Adamson in 2012.

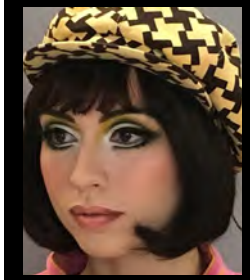
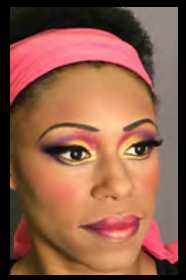
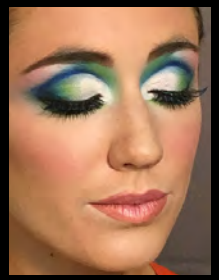
As she often says makeup is an ephemeral art that disappears every night in the sink but can be reborn every day even more beautiful than the last time. Like a Phoenix!

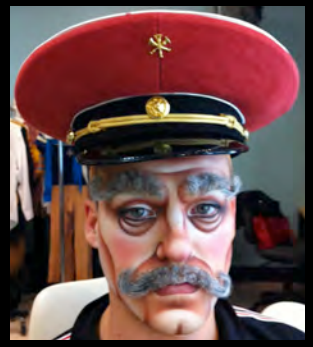
Zumanity
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Thierry Mugler

MJ One,
Michael Jackson Las Vegas
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Zaldy Coco

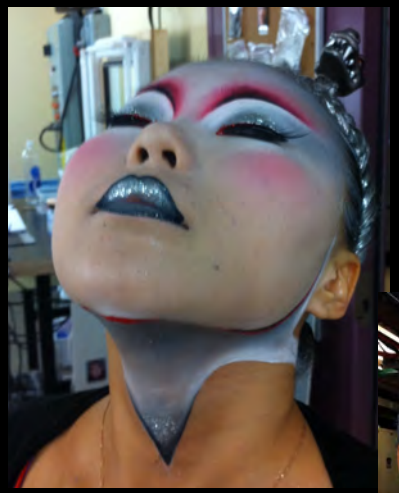
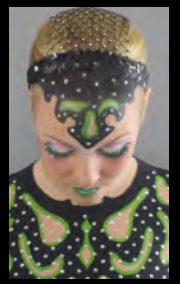


LOVE
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Philippe Guillotel

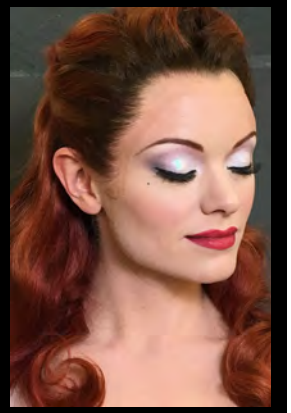
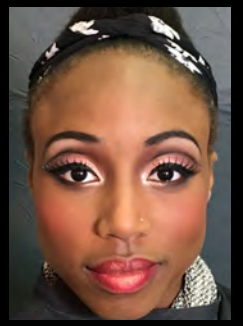




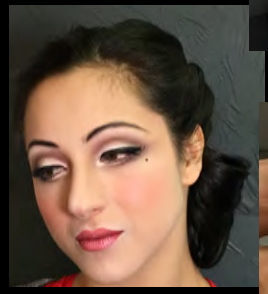


IRIS
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Philippe Guillotel

PARAMOUR
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Philippe Guillotel

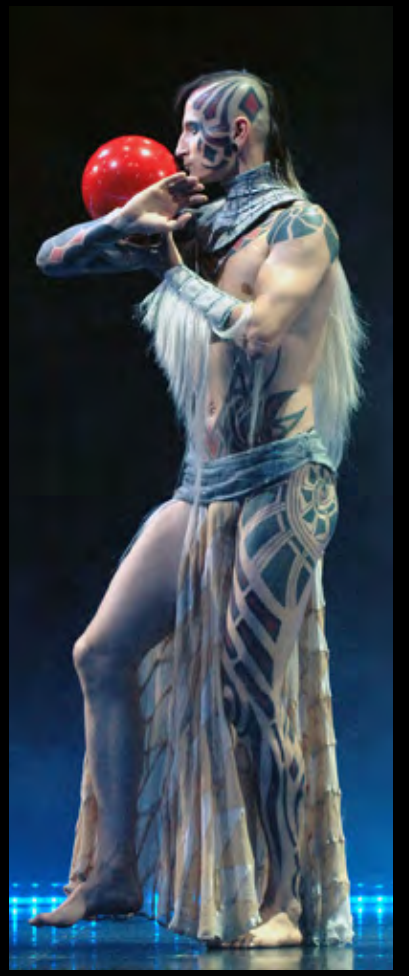





***Ka*, Las Vegas**
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Marie-Chantal Vaillancourt

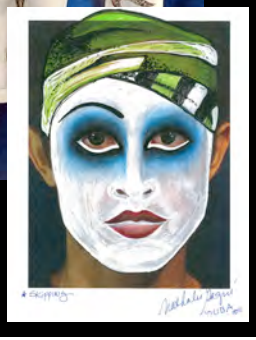
***Believe*, Las Vegas**
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Meredith Caron

DELIRIUM
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Michel Robidas



Corteo
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux

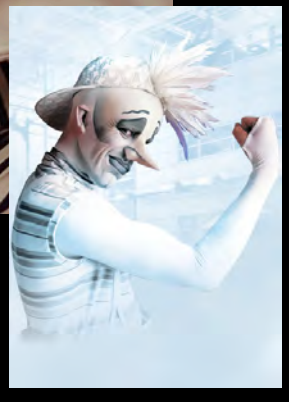
La Nouba
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux



Zaia
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux

Mystere, Las Vegas
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux

Saltimbanco
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux

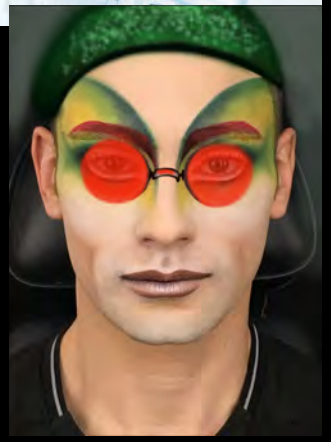


Alegria
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux

O, Las Vegas
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux

Quidam
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Dominique Lemieux

Varekai
Make-up design: Nathalie Gagné
Costume design: Eiko Ishioka

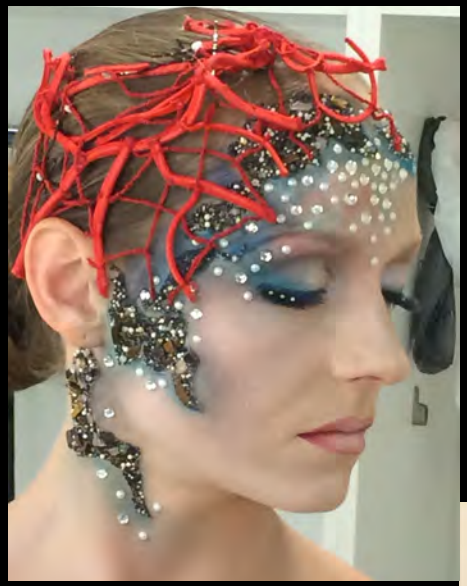


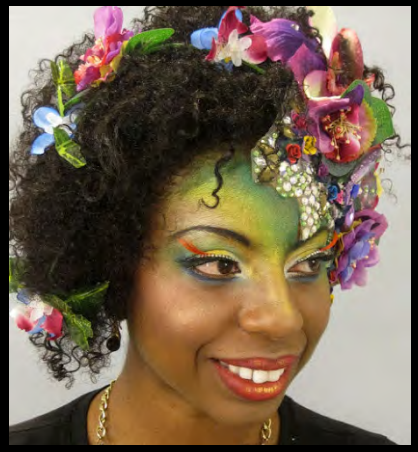
Nathalie Gagné

Make-up designer

Joya

Costume designer: James Lavoie

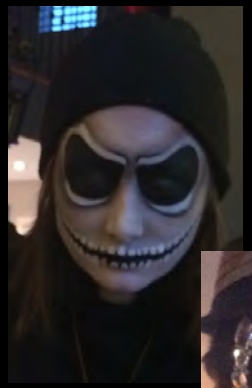


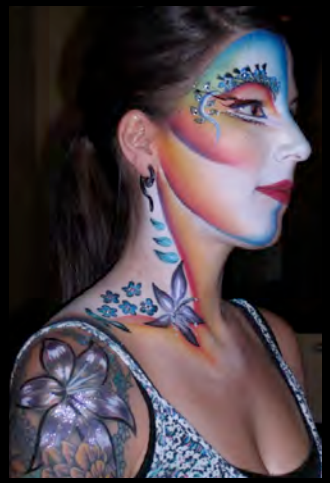
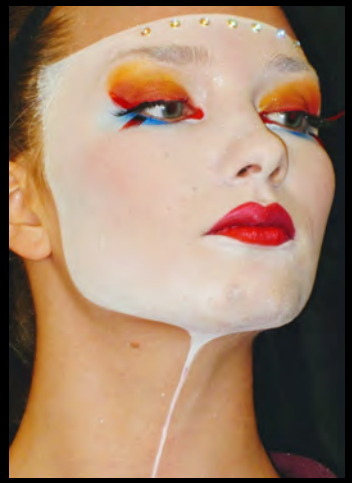
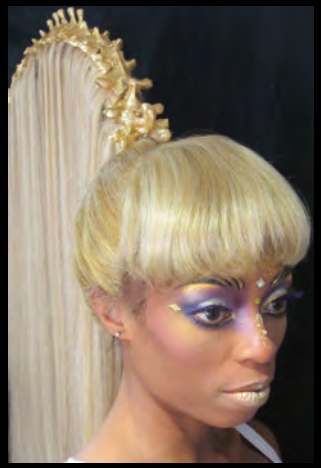


Nathalie Gagné

Make-up designer

Other projects.

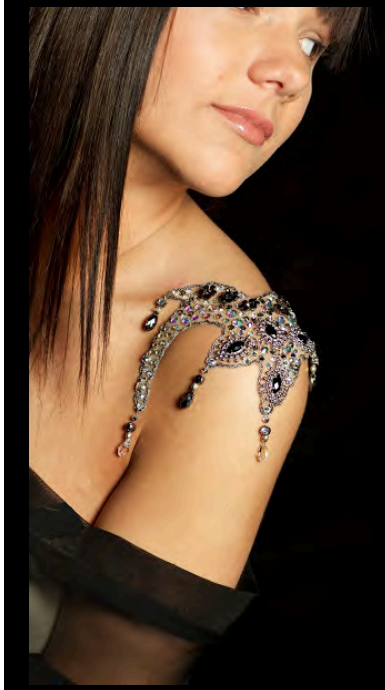


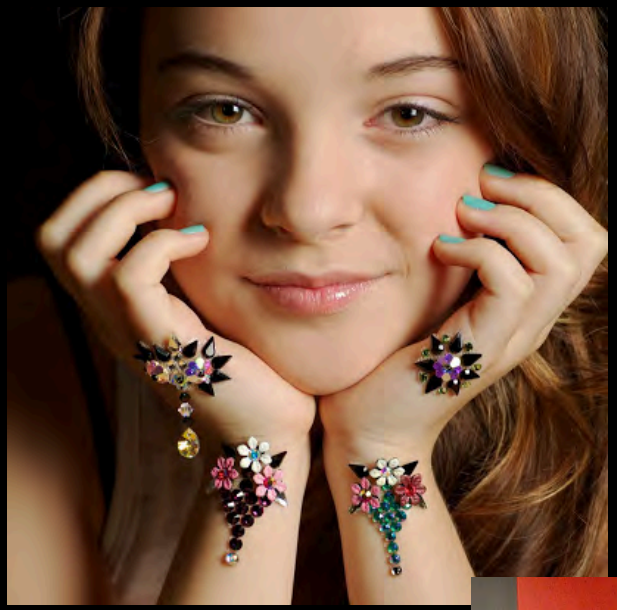




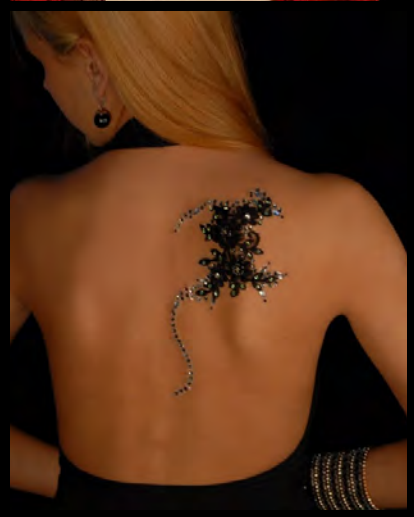
Nathalie Gagné

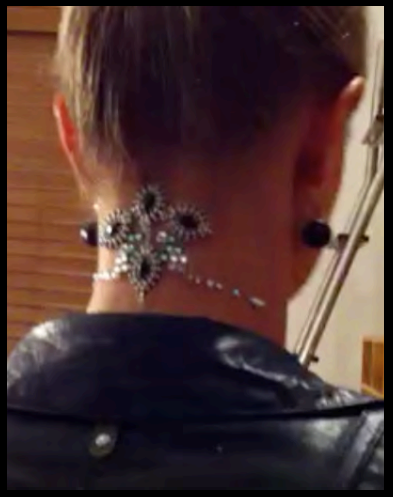
Other projects

Make-up designer and body jewel designer









LOVE, Las Vegas
Carachter:Warlus

MJ ONE, Las Vegas
Carachter: Muse

KA, Las Vegas
Carachter: Chef Archer

Australia
Carachter: Slipery surface

PART THREE of a six–part series on Design Excellence, brought to you by Infiniti.

At first glance, you'd think that Nathalie Gagné was a performer herself. A shock of blonde hair falls, Marilyn Monroe-ish over eyes. She smiles easily. As she works her movements are fluid and precise.

Over the course of an hour she transforms a muscled gymnast into an other-worldly character, a porcelain figure with bright eyes. When the process is over, he smiles awkwardly. Nathalie encourages him to really smile. The effect is incredible. A huge smile emerges. Nathalie laughs, transformation complete.

Nathalie has created make-up designs for over 250 Cirque characters in a dozen shows. Through Nathalie one can see how world class athletes and performers become Cirque du Soleil characters.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO WORK FOR A CIRQUE DU SOLEIL?

It's so creative here. It's amazing, all of the design, all of different nationalities, and all of the different kinds of people we work with. It opens your mind to the world.

HOW DO YOU WORK WITH PERFORMERS TO DEVELOP THEIR LOOK OR CHARACTER?

First, I like to see them when they train. It's important for me to see them move, when they walk, when they are training, they're always moving their face. I see what kind of expression they have.

I decide, 'Oh, he plays a lot with this eyebrow more than the other one.' I begin to see the expression already start on

So that's ... that's the basic line for me. After that I have to work with the costume designer because the make-up is a part of the costume. Make-up without costume, it's nothing.

When I'm doing make-up with the actors, we look at the mirror and I have to explain the muscles in their body. They don't realise they have muscle in the face too. So it's important to play with the make-up, the face. That gives them more possibilities to become their character, to make it alive.

NOW YOU DESIGN THE MAKE-UP, BUT THE PERFORMERS ACTUALLY APPLY THEIR OWN MAKE-UP. THAT MUST BE A CHALLENGE?

At the beginning, when they start to apply the make-up, they are really stressed. They say, "I will not be able to do that. That's impossible."

But the way then we build, we call that a step by step. I take a picture between each step and we build a document for them.

So they have the pictures and the products and brushes. We give two, three, four, make-up sessions until they feel more comfortable. We demystify all of the techniques, so they can sit in front of make-up, be relaxed and start to enjoy the process.

FROM A MAKE-UP PERSPECTIVE, WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE CHARACTER?

Oh, I can't say that. That's like if you have to… it's like asking a mother which child is the best. They are all nice, all good, all nice. They all have their own identities and their own emotions.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE EXCELLENCE?

How I will describe excellence? I think

Everything at Cirque du Soleil needs to be perfect. We are really perfectionists, each department, each creator. When we create something we always try to push the details and push the creativity to the maximum and discover something new, a new way to do it.

I've worked on thirteen creations here. We have to reinvent ourselves, be even better… that's the Cirque du Soleil.

IS THERE MAGIC HERE?

Yes, for sure, for sure. When you go to see Cirque du Soleil, I'm sure you feel like a little child. You have to stay open and when you watch, the magic always happens.

"You have to stay open and when you watch, the magic always happens."

For more design profiles and videos, go to: **globeandmail.com/excellence**

INFINITI.

BACKSTAGE

Keith Loria

BIG-TOP BEAUTY

Nathalie Gagné designs eye-popping looks for Broadway Cirque show

The cast of *Paramour*

For more than 20 years, Nathalie Gagné has served as a make-up designer for Cirque du Soleil, crafting original looks for many of the company's high-flying, electrifying, one-of-a-kind shows.

"I have created more than 1,000 separate make-up designs for more than 30 shows, plus worked on some of their movies and specials, culled from over 5,000 sketches," she said. "Make-up is a reflection of the character's soul. It's also a magic wand that sweeps away inhibitions. Each show is really different and I work to match the style with whatever feel the show is going for."

Gagné is now working on Cirque du Soleil's newest offering, the Broadway show *Paramour*, which blends circus arts and musical theater. Set in the Golden Age of Hollywood, the show spins the tale of a beautiful young actress forced to choose between love and art.

"For this show, it has a 1920s-1940s look, sort of a cinema glamour with a little twist," Gagné said. "My goal was to reinvent the look of the time."

Gagné says teaching acrobats to apply their own make-up correctly can be tricky.

"One of my goals is to get them to learn, and help them find within themselves what I call 'lines of force' that will serve to build their characters," she said.

Gagné's main challenge for this show's male performers was to highlight their eyes enough that audiences could clearly see their expressions while they perform.

"I wanted to really work on their expressions by darkening the eyebrows and adding thin mustaches. The men don't like mascara or adding lashes, and when they finish the day, they want to wash their face really fast and leave the theater," she said. "I used M.A.C. Haute & Naughty Waterproof Lash for the eyebrows, M.A.C. Fluidline in Blacktrack for the mustache and eyes, and finished with Make Up For Ever Artist Shadow in Chalk."

Gagné aimed for a sophisticated period style for *Paramour*'s women.

"I like to see the person when they train, watching how they move and dance, so I can see the expressions on their faces," she said. "I'll use my notes after to create make-up design that will stay alive on their face; otherwise, the muscle may not follow the design and it will look like a mask."

Gagné accomplished this in part by highlighting shadows on the women's faces.

Nathalie Gagné at work backstage

"The women sweat a lot during the show, so I am using M.A.C.'s Pro Longwear Nourishing [Waterproof] Foundation, which just came out last year, and works really well," she said. "I redo everything around the eyes so they shine as much as possible. I always use mineral powder to catch light. To add a touch of shimmer on the eyelid, I use Make Up For Ever Star Powder in White With Pink Highlights and M.A.C. Reflects Transparent Pink over, adding a little touch in the middle of the eyelid." When she uses false lashes, she tends to apply them around the outer edge of the eyes, keeping the middle lashline a little more open so that stage lights don't cast too many shadows.

As for lips, Gagné favors Ben Nye Lip Colour Pencil in Currant, Ben Nye Lipstick in Marilyn Red, Ben Nye Neutral Set Powder, M.A.C. Eye Shadows in Plumage and Sushi Flower and Make Up For Ever Star Powder in White With Pink Highlights.

She admits that she likes to use products from various cosmetics brands the way a cook uses varied ingredients.

"M.A.C. is sponsoring the show, but while they have a very large product [selection], sometimes I may need something more theatrical, so I will work with Ben Nye or Make Up For Ever, which may have a little more richness on certain things," she said. "It's all about getting the best look you can create."

Gagné studied theater production at a community college in Quebec before moving on to the Montreal subsidiary of famed Paris-based make-up school Christian Chauveau. She worked on TV and film before finding a home with Cirque du Soleil.

"This is my life. I've been doing make-up for more than 40 years, ever since designing a show when I was 12 with my friends," she said. "Cirque has been an amazing experience for me. All of these performers coming from all over the world—it's a dream that I get to keep living." MA

Paramour runs at Broadway's Lyric Theater through February 2017. For more information, go to cirquedusoleil.com/paramour.

FROM LEFT: Ryan Vona, Ruby Lewis and Jeremy Kushnier

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MAKING FACES

Cirque du Soleil's make-up director does what women do in front of their mirror every day, writes fashion editor Janice Breen Burns.

GAUKHAR Akhmetova is a small, pretty woman with the kind of ramrod posture and lithe, sinewy figure perfect for the crisp flips and short flights of an acrobat. Right now, though, the Cirque du Soleil starlet sits still and quiet, breathing gently, watching her mirrored reflection amid the backstage chaos of the big top at Olympic Park.

It's a forest of costume racks and wig boxes, funky young wardrobe assistants bent over ironing boards or beavering on sewing machines, acrobats twisting in threes and fours on ropes overhead, and a litter of tiny children who swerve in and out of a labyrinth of travelling cases. Akhmetova tilts her little face up and forward towards the paintbrush wielded by Nathalie Gagne, the company's global make-up director, here on one of her regular visits to check the make-up skills of travelling troupes.

Today, the chic older woman, in tight-fitting black with low-slung hip belt, pointy swash-buckler boots and tousled mop of salt-blonde hair, moves like a sculptor around Akhmetova's chair, geisha-whitening her features with a small, moist block of latex. "On the face, we create shadow and light," she says in precise, French-accented English. "This is the light."

Akhmetova's high, smooth forehead and jutting cheek bones, classic almond eyes and cupid's bow lips virtually disappear into Gagne's blank white "canvas". Gagne pauses. Then, her work begins in earnest. A soft arc of yellow is patted across the hairline and down to a point level with the lower lashes. Akhmetova's forehead appears even higher. Gagne draws blue-to-pink arches from two centimetres beyond the outside edge of each eye, up and through the eyebrows, and down to the bridge of Akhmetova's nose. She flattens and runs the line, rising gently, beneath the lower lashes, to rejoin the launch points. Akhmetova's eyes appear larger.

Gagne works meticulously, picking thin and wet, then thick and dry, long-handled paint-brushes to perform each illusion. She feathers, thickens and smudges new lines, drawing from the ears and forward onto the cheeks, swinging her brushes up slightly from below each cheekbone, filling in a false hollow that "thins" and "lengthens" Akhmetova's face, lending it a lean, almost skeletal cast. (The effect of a cheek-sucking fish-pout, like little girls playing at catwalk models.) No illusion is necessary for Akhmetova's lips; already a flawless bow. Gagne outlines them in blue, and colours them in with pink.

In a laborious step to ensure her work is fixed, Gagne brushes on a pale setting powder that obscures Akhmetova's face in a fog, then drops like dandruff and dissolves almost completely, leaving a slightly blurred version of the make-up. Gagne then painstakingly replicates every brushstroke that has gone before, every smudge and feathered line, until a final, more intensely coloured version of Akhmetova's now arrestingly beautiful face appears.

The little acrobat smiles and squints to demonstrate how light, how natural, it feels on her skin. "It is nothing," Akhmetova says. "She is a lizard, she is a slithering creature of the forest and through every exquisitely physical performance of Varekai — Cirque du Soleil's show that opened at Olympic Park last night — she can be oblivious to the marks of transformation on her skin. "I don't feel it."

Were Akhmetova sitting for a lunchtime make-over at a Myer cosmetic counter, the techniques would be much the same — even the MAC products used would not be significantly different, except in their range of colours. They are from the brand's professional collection, but their task of widening eyes, accentuating bone structure, ramping up prettiness, character and beauty, are universal. Gagne could conjure comparable, lighter-handed results using current cosmetic fashion trends to deeply coloured eye shadows, dark, smoke-defined and black-lined eyes, and blood red lip colours.

She took 45 minutes, and 22 careful steps to create Akhmetova's amazing face. Each was photographed, then collected into an instruction folder enabling Akhmetova to learn, practice, and eventually apply it alone.

Cirque du Soleil troupes do not travel with a make-up artist; in a total of 10 to 12 instructive sessions with Gagne or one of her six assistants, they learn what they need to know.

Gagne periodically leaves her job at Cirque du Soleil headquarters in Montreal to fly around the world on a checking tour. Two of Varekai's 73 car-sized travelling cases constitute her "make-up kit" of heavenly or nightmarish proportions, depending on your perspective. In one case, half-a-metre taller than Gagne herself, MAC powder-based colours — bundles of sticks and pencils and rows of pots (blue, pink, green, black, white, purple) — are organised into a tower of drawers. In another case, a family-sized fridge keeps a system of drawers for wax-based colours safe from the tropical climates that this particular one of Cirque du Soleil's 13 worldwide troupes visits on tour.

As global make-up director, Gagne designed faces for 900 circus performers in permanent and big top travelling shows. She conceived Akhmetova's elegant lizard face, like those in a dozen other shows running at any time, at her base office in Canada. It took a typical six months, she says, to thrash out Varekai's vision in close harmony with its costume designer.

"To be close with the costume director is the most important thing," she says. It's a long and plodding closeness, but a thrilling one, too. "First, I make perhaps 500 designs," she says. These are whittled into one pure vision and, in Melbourne's case, about 30 faces to be worn by 55 Varekai performers. The show's fantasy of creatures slithering and bounding out of a magical forest was based on a notion of exotic humanity, so the faces are essentially naturalistic, albeit, intensely, fantastically coloured.

As she delicately draws Akhmetova's mouth in shimmering wet-blue and pink, Gagne laughs at the shared task women and 900 Cirque du Soleil performers around the world do in front of a mirror every day. "We bring the emotions forward in the make-up, don't we?"

Varekai opened last night and is on at Olympic Park until June 3. Tickets range from $29 to $109 through Ticketek.

LINK

▸ www.cirquedusoleil.com

Nathalie Gagne, left, and Gaukhar Akhmetova backstage at the Cirque du Soleil big top.

PICTURES: REU