

techniques of portrait-painting. Today we are urged to 'think of beauty as self-care, not vanity', but the prize remains the same: to render the subject more socially successful and easier on the eye.



Thomas Cross, *Virtue and Vice*, etching

## EXHIBITION COSTS

The fee includes:

- Over 40 prints, drawings and objects from the Ashmolean Museum.
- Transport from and return to Oxford, within a 120 mile radius
- Object labels and interpretation panels
- Object preparation and condition reporting
- Tour co-ordination by the Ashmolean Museum Registrar's Department
- The exhibition's curator would be available for a lecture
- A selection of 5 images for use in the venue's own press and publicity

The following items and costs will be covered by the venue, as they arise:

- 'Nail to Nail' insurance
- Crating for the works, as required
- Transport from and return to Oxford, outside a 120 mile radius
- Courier expenses

John Russell, *Lady Worsley*, pastel on paper

# ASHMOLEAN

# TOURING EXHIBITION

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## THE ART OF FLATTERY

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People have been perfecting faces since the very earliest times, and whether painting portraits or decorating the skin, they have used the same materials – from kohl in ancient Egypt to white lead in eighteenth-century Europe. Focusing on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this exhibition explores the long-standing relationship between cosmetics and portraiture.

A cosmetic palette for preparing green eye make-up from Predynastic Egypt shows the universality and ancient nature of this urge for self-fashioning. It is known that the ancient Egyptians –



◆ Toyohara Chikanobu, *Kan'ei Era* (1624-1630) *Beauty*, Nishiki-e woodblock print

both men and women – used malachite and kohl as beautifying agents. In seventeenth-century Europe books for artists included recipes for face paint alongside those for artists' materials, recommending their use to correct 'deformities' both on the face and on the canvas. In the same period similar practices are found in Japan, with paints used to achieve a white, mask-like skin surface, cochineal-red cheeks and repositioned eyebrows.

European apothecaries supplied women and artists with carmine, white lead, gamboge and Prussian blue (for streaking the veins). Similar brushes were sold for applying pigments both to the canvas and the skin. By the eighteenth century, portrait painters were flattering their sitters who hoped

◆ William Heath, 1812, *Regency à la Mode* (detail), hand-coloured etching

to emerge from the painter's hands 'smooth, rosy, round, [and] smiling'.

Often approved of as a mark of sophistication, particularly in France, face paint was nevertheless frequently criticized as morally dubious, a seductive mask associated with actresses and courtesans. 'Painted ladies' and 'macaroni' gentlemen could never quite be trusted, and artists were similarly associated with flattery and deceit. The miniature painter Richard Cosway, for example, was ridiculed as 'Sir Tiny Cosmetic', his work attacked for being 'sicklied over with a pound of vanity'.

As the Royal Academy exhibitions became crammed from floor to ceiling with canvases, artists began to rely on the same 'tricks' as fashionable women

◆ Thomas Rowlandson, *The Portrait Painter's Ante-room*, pen, brown ink and watercolour



to draw attention to their portraits – dark eyebrows, vermilioned cheeks and dazzling white skin. Increasingly, caricaturists poked fun at those who wore make-up, and a more natural style of beauty came to be valued in England, in contrast to what were seen as the artificially daubed surfaces of the French – although in reality this simply entailed a more subtle use of cosmetics.

In the early twentieth century, as Hollywood began to set the tone for women's appearance, cosmetics became almost universally acceptable and were applied quite openly. Comparing seventeenth-century recipe manuals with women's magazines of



◆ Richard Cosway, *Portrait of a Young Man*, watercolour on ivory

the 1950s, we find almost identical phrases; there is the same desire for facial smoothness, while the process of concealing and colouring closely mimics the