



BEAUTY

Rebel WITH A CAUSE

Top tattoo artist and reality TV star, Kat Von D is now a global beauty phenomenon thanks to her animal friendly, cutting edge make-up range. As she launches the line in the UK, we quiz her about building an empire – and breaking boundaries

Kat Von D is a cult figure in the world of TV and tattooing – fans will recognise her from US reality series *Miami Ink* and *LA Ink*, in which she stole the show with her Gothic glamour and incredible artistry. But as the creator of one of America's fastest-selling beauty brands, the 34-year-old Hollywood tattooist is also gaining a following among those who have never gone under the needle. We find out why the range – which is now available in the UK exclusively at Debenhams – has been creating such a buzz.

You have created one of America's fastest-growing make-up ranges. Do you ever have to pinch yourself in disbelief?

"Yes, absolutely. Even today, launching into the UK, I'm thinking to myself, 'Is this real?'" It has been quite a journey. I originally launched with four lipsticks [for Sephora in 2008], and created the four most perfect shades of red. Fast forward to now and we have 30 lipstick shades, palettes, best-selling liners, brushes..."

How did you get to this point?

"I think the success of *Miami Ink* and *LA Ink* brought my style to the attention of a lot of people, so when Sephora approached me about creating products I think they were more curious than anything else! Then when we met they realised that, for me, make-up is part of my art, like painting and drawing and tattooing, and that I'm a huge make-up fan and a beauty junkie. I have collected make-up over the years and I realised that make-up had become boring and that there was a need for something new."

How would you sum up your style?

"I love the Hollywood glamour era of the 1940s and 1950s, but also the Victorian Gothic aesthetic. My style icon is Beethoven. If I could dress like him every day, I would. But I would be made fun of. And my beauty inspiration is Edith Piaf. Not that she was a conventional beauty, but just her demeanour, the way she sang and expressed herself with her hands; it is so inspiring and powerful."

Describe your signature make-up look...

"Pale skin, lots of cat-eyeliner and a red lip. My Tattoo Liner [liquid eyeliner] has 300 bristles in the brush because, as an artist, I wanted it to feel like the perfect artist's paintbrush. You can go as thin as a hair or press and build up to my look. A lot of people are intimidated by red lipstick and eyeliner, so I want to make things as easy as possible to use."

Do you ever feel judged because of the way you look?

"Sometimes, yes. I think because I have a pretty dark image, people might think my make-up is just for Goths who like spooky stuff. But I'm proud of the versatility of my colours and formulations. My mum uses it, and when I meet my fans on-counter they are every age, every style, every skin colour, and that is really rewarding."

How do you react when people are shocked by your tattoos?

"It's okay. I like it when people don't have tattoos, and each to their own. When I started tattooing it was seen as quite rebellious, but now I think a third of all women have tattoos. So, in some ways, if you don't have a tattoo you are the rebel."

Your make-up reflects your rock'n'roll style.

"I hope so. I want to create something that's cool and unique, and it has to be animal-friendly – vegan wherever possible. I name every shade, design every piece of packaging, help choose the colours and textures, the finishes and formulations. There isn't a font used on my packaging – I personally design and draw every letter on it. I even curate the content for our Instagram. I poured myself 100 per cent into this and I know that my customers appreciate that."

The packaging has certainly broken the mould.

"Yes, sometimes the manufacturers think I'm crazy, but they also get excited to create something new. They are bored with creating the same look over and over."

As a committed vegan and animal activist, did you insist that your products weren't tested on animals?

"Yes, absolutely. That was, and is, a deal breaker for me. I am proud that my entire range is cruelty-free. We live in a time where there are much better alternatives to animal testing, and mine is not the only brand out there creating great cruelty-free, vegan-friendly products. There is really no excuse and the power lies with the consumer – every time you buy a product that tests on animals, it's a vote. If you remember that, you have the power to make things change. There are millions of people out there who care as much as I do."

There is a lot of controversy in the beauty business right now about the fact that the Chinese government insists that any range sold in China must undergo animal testing. What is your take on that?

"I was approached to sell in China and the numbers were huge –"

I mean, huge. Many brands have gone back on their animal testing policy in pursuit of profit, but for me it is an absolute no. But things are slowly changing and, hopefully soon, China will catch up with the rest of the world and realise that there is absolutely no point testing on animals any more. My goal is not to shut down brands that test on animals; my goal is to stop them testing on animals."

Your make-up range is affordable, why was that so important to you?

"I grew up with not a lot of money; I know what it's like to want that lipstick or lip liner so badly and to not be able to afford it. I didn't want to create that sort of product. I get upset when I see one of my sold-out colours on eBay for ten times what it is worth. I hate that."

Have you noticed any changes in your skin since becoming vegan?

"Yes, massively. When I cut out dairy my skin improved, more so than when I quit smoking and drinking. There is increasing evidence that dairy can inflame certain skin conditions and I'm a firm believer in the idea that we are what we eat."

Have you ever regretted any of your body art?

"Oh yes, and I've had laser tattoo removal – which really hurts, by the way, and takes so much time to really work. When I was young I was more careless about my tattoos. I had an entire arm of tattoos done underage by unskilled artists and so I had it lasered off. But then I got new beautiful work done over it, of course."

Do you have a favourite?

"Yes, the tattoo of my dad on my arm; he is my best friend. If I'm travelling and miss him, it means that I always have him with me."

Where's do you shop when you are in London?

"[Soho jeweller] The Great Frog – they made that original skull ring that Keith Richards wore. I always pick up a piece of their jewellery when I'm here in the UK."

What is next for you?

"I would love to source vegan-friendly materials and start designing shoes, clothes, bags and belts. There is such a need for them. My philosophy is that we only have so many heartbeats in a lifetime, and how we invest them and what we do with them is crucial. I'm not interested in wasting a single one of my heartbeats." ❏



KAT'S KIT

1. Lush Cup o' Coffee Face and Body Mask, £6.75, visit uk.lush.com. "Made from recycled coffee beans; it really works" 2. Kat Von D Shade Plus Light Eye Contour Palette, £36, from debenhams.com. "I wanted this to be 100 per cent matt, with cool neutrals and natural shades for contouring the eye, creating a perfect base, and shading and lining if wanted. Make-up artists love this palette" 3. Too Faced Better Than Sex Mascara, £19, from Debenhams 4. Kat Von D Shade + Light Face Contour Palette, £36. "Gives me the illusion of cheekbones [laughs]" 5. Kat Von D Lock It Liquid Foundation in L33 and L44, £27 each. "This foundation is matt but never flat. These two shades are my personal go-tos, but I was keen to go right through to the deepest and darkest shades for every skin tone" 6. Ole Henriksen Walnut Complexion Scrub, £26, from feelunique.com "Really makes my skin glow" 7. Kat Von D Studded Kiss Lipstick in Lolita, £16. "My fastest-selling nude; I cannot keep up with the demand for it" 8. Lush Noir Henna hair colour, £9.25. "I have to do this more often – it's not only vegan, it's better for your hair, too. I love this brand and we have done a collaboration, coming later this year" 9. Kat Von D Everlasting Lipstick Santa Sangre, £16. "This is my signature look; the perfect red lip" 10. Kat Von D Tattoo Liner in Trouper, £16. "I've tried going without my signature cat-eye, but I'm addicted. I have tried to make this dummy-proof"

