

TRUE BEAUTY

by Benjamin P. Gallagher



“Tell me what you think about when you see these photos,” my friend said. He ordered me to admit that these photos inspired me to write about the meaning of True Beauty. The task loomed over me for several days before I called my mom.

“True Beauty comes from within,” mom said. A cool summer wind blew down the street. I sat outside Timucua Arts Foundation in South Downtown

Orlando, Florida. People cheered from inside the venue. My heart pounded along to the beat of drums from the concert hall. I wondered how to interpret her words as an artist.

People like Frida Kahlo and Andy Warhol created portraits that positioned themselves as icons in the present day. People recognized Kahlo by the long eyebrow painted across her face. Shops always sold Andy Warhol costumes around Halloween. However, his performance relied on a monotone voice and quick quips. Both artists defied the meaning of True Beauty.



In high school, I found the Marilyn Monroe portraits in a book about Warhol. Her bright gold hair made me smile. The artwork inspired me to take a drawing class, trying to recreate some sort of magic in my own pieces. I wanted to become iconic.

I didn't want people to recognize me as someone other than the quiet brown kid that wore the same blue sweater every day. I didn't want them to think of me as the insecure gay kid that listened to Avril Lavigne. I hoped that they would remember me as the person who walked around school dressed as a zombie for several hours before being summoned to the dean's office.

"We can't recognize you with that make-up on," the dean said. I sat across from her with a plastic chain around my neck. "We need to be able to see your face at all times. You really do look great though." She ordered me to the bathroom where the makeup came off. I went back to class as a normal teenager.

Since then, I've often wondered what makes some people so iconic and how they think about others. Frida painted a unibrow on her self-portraits. The brow defied normal beauty standards for women. She recognized the flaws in herself as a defining factor of Frida Kahlo.

Meanwhile, Warhol recorded himself eating a hamburger. I loved to hate him. I loved that he played a part in the reputation of Studio 54 and that whole party era. However, I hated him for being a chaotic cloud of emotions for so many other people. I felt conflicted about two deceased artists in the 21st century. Frida and Warhol inspired me to think about the meaning of True Beauty.

True Beauty comes from within, yes. True Beauty inspires us to think about how we inspire others to feel about ourselves. We create art about it. We conspire about what makes each of us unique, recklessly normal, and also a miracle. We write about it, because we hope others will remember us as one of them, and someone I'm honored to call a friend.

"I know," I said to my mother. A cold wind returned to the world. The sound of drums stopped playing. People clapped as a voice thanked everyone for coming to the show. I said goodnight and hung up the phone.

Thank you, David Matteson and Nikki Fragala Barnes for offering me this opportunity to create art. Thank you Enrique Wiedemann for being an amazing artist that took these photos. I'm grateful to all of you.

Write 500 words about the meaning of True Beauty. If you need help, pick one of the two inspiring ideas below:

Pick two people that you admire, like Warhol and Frida. Then write about what they have in common. Write about what makes them different.

Or, take three different photos and write about what you like about them. What makes you seem you right now. Is it your eyeshadow or your favorite pair of sunglasses? Is it a facemask? Explore your identity with words.