

BEAUTY

How This J-Pop Star Became the Queen of Kawaii Beauty

BY MONICA KIM
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Photo: Courtesy of KPP / @kyarykyary0129

"Is she even real?" I hear one girl whisper, peering closely at a life-size poster of Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. True: In a scarlet bloom of a dress, its petals unfurling over a pink tutu, the Japanese pop star's wide eyes and pin-straight hair conjure images of porcelain dolls and anime girls come alive. Yet, winding my way backstage at New York's PlayStation Theater, where the East Coast leg of her third world tour would take place, I find the 23-year-old in easy repose, popping Shake Shack's crinkle-cut fries in her mouth and sipping on a bottle of unsweetened green tea in a navy tee and *jeans* (a KPP first, she tells me).

How things change. When she first appeared five years ago with "PonPonPon," a surreal candy-colored tribute to Harajuku street fashion that immediately went viral, Kyary became the de facto queen of *kawaii*—pigtails, dripping in ribbons, and an endless array of Lolita dresses. Now, it's a quieter style that defines her—no less cute, but a little more "chic," as she puts it. "When I was a teenager, I was so flashy," she says, referencing the violet stretched monster mouth on her first album cover. "Of course, I still love what's *kawaii* and a little grotesque, but now, as I've grown up, I want to challenge myself and be a little more classic."

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Kyary Pamyu Pamyu Photo: Courtesy of KPP / @kyarykyary0129

There is a foundation that remains the same, however—namely, the idol's now-iconic look. Beneath the rotating lineup of off-kilter wigs—curling red ringlets and blunt blue lengths that she flits through each day ("I get bored sticking with just one")—you'll find a faded pink bob with her trademark fringe pushed to the side. "I've had bangs all my life, maybe since I was two," she says, laughing. The thick, rounded chop references Japanese *kokeshi* dolls and anime characters, according to Kyary, but, she adds, "in Japan, it's said that men don't like them, and yesterday, an aesthetician told me I look like I'm 15 years old!" Perhaps, I suggest, it was her perpetually dewy skin (which, apparently, requires little upkeep) that prompted the comment. "I don't even wash my face in the morning, but I do take care of it at night," she says, listing a lineup of cleansers and absorbent sheet masks from Fujifilm that rank among her favorites.

Above the bangs, Kyary counts her incredible, doll-like eyes as her true beauty signature, one that dates back to her high school days, when the American-influenced *gyaru* subculture was truly in vogue. "I learned from my *gyaru* friends how to make my eyes look bigger, and eventually, after many attempts, came up with my own techniques," she says. That means eschewing black liner for a slick of shimmering brown along the top, and pearly white shadow dotted in the inner corners and beneath the brow to define the lid. A single thick, false lash and cosmetic lenses complete the look—and yes, she wears it nearly 24/7.

Last, but not least, there's an outré gel manicure, changed once a month by Japanese nail artist Chieko Nakayama and designed specifically to flash beneath the stage lights as she lifts up her microphone. Right now, it's an array of glitter and cow-hide, with an eye ball appliqué that, she calls "a little random"—but still, equally important to her self-expression. "I consider myself to be like *sentai* Sailor Moon," she says. "It's only when I'm on the stage with my makeup, my mic, and my fashion that I can become Kyary Pamyu Pamyu." Watching her perform that night—in a soft, golden wig, amid a shower of Murakami-style blooms—it was clear that, for Kyary, the beauty lies in the art.

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