A method for a directly applied burn makeup by Stuart Bray

Although an extensive burn makeup can be achieved with prosthetics, there is a great deal which can be done with directly applied effects materials and colour, removing the need to sculpt and make moulds.

This is great if you are doing it for a one-off such as a makeup test, building a portfolio or simply to create effective makeups without using a lot of expensive kit. This tutorial covers a simple approach to creating a burn injury using silk, gelatine and colour. As always, getting the right reference material will always be the most important first step.

From a makeup point of view, burns are a huge area as there are so many variables. Consider the extent of the burn as well as the type, whether clothing was involved, the age of the burn and whether healing has begun, or was complicated by infection. If the burn is serious enough, might it have been treated surgically with skin grafts—and what would that look like? Also the burn may cause other complications such as shock and swelling, which in turn can affect circulation and offer further opportunity to enhance your makeup design.

Get your materials
You will need:
Learn Prosthetic Makeup: A method for a directly applied burn makeup

- Gelatine (pre made or make your own)
- Gafquat (a thick, water soluble hair product which is used to flatten hair down. It is often used as a holding ingredient in many hair products) or similar strong hair gel-type product.
- China Silk nail strips or silk mouseline (from a nail/salon supplier or silk fabric stockist)
- Hairpins/section clips
- Spatula or wooden tongue depressor
- Strong silicone based or medical adhesive such as Telesis, Medical Spirit Gum or Snappy-G
- Charcoal powder
- Makeup colours (cream or alcohol based)
- Messed up brushes
- Orange stipple sponge and orangestick
- KY Jelly

There are many different kinds of burn. Exposure to heat is what most people think of but burns can result also from extreme cold, sunlight, chemicals, friction, radiation and scalds from hot liquids.

Here I have chosen to create a thermal burn on the side of the face. What often happens as the tissues of the body are subjected to extreme heat is that it contracts and distorts the undamaged skin around it. If you’ve ever seen a thin piece of meat in a hot pan, you’ll know what I mean. This is an interesting aspect from a makeup point of view, and one which we will use in the design.

Remember that heat rises, and fire loves to climb. Because of this, it is likely that the hair will have been affected along with the eyebrow, going up like a tinder box. I wanted to use this in the makeup, as the absence of hair on one side and the resulting asymmetry will enhance the effect.

Step 1
Clean and prepare the skin. Prepare the hair, and section off an area creating a parting where the burn is to stop. I use gafquat to keep hair up, smoothing it down firmly using the spatula.

Dry this with a hairdryer to achieve a flattened patch of hair. If it keeps springing up, use a section of wig lace or stocking net stretched over the hair to hold it down while you dry it.

Step 2
Cut silk strips from the nail silk or mouseline. I used three strips for this makeup, each approx 1 cm x 3cm (½ inch x 1½ inch). It doesn’t matter if the edges are neat, as everything will be glued flat.
What is important is that you follow the fabric direction, and avoid cutting across the silk at an angle. When you hold each end of the tab and pull, you should find the silk does not stretch.

**Step 3**

Apply glue behind the ear lobe, allowing it to dry thoroughly. Then add a little to the silk tab, allowing that to dry too. Press the dried, glued parts together firmly and stretch the ear across as far as is comfortable, ensuring there is plenty of silk available for both the ear and the cheek. Apply glue through the silk and onto the cheek. Peel the silk away from the cheek, and allow it to dry fully, before stretching the ear again and pressing the silk firmly into place. The ear should hold in place.

Silk is good for this process because it does not stretch, making the skin do all the stretching. This gives you a distortion onto which we can build. If glued correctly, the silk appears quite translucent, making it easy to hide.

Then do the same to the lip and the eye. Be careful when using adhesive around the eyes and lips. It’s always worth doing a small patch test to check sensitivity with adhesives, especially as you will be stressing the skin surface by pulling on it.
Step 4
Melt the gelatine and add a little water to the mixture to help lower the melting temperature. Heat up the gelatine again now mixed with the water, and allow it to cool sufficiently before applying to your model.

Be extremely careful when using molten gelatine! It is possible to cause serious (real) burns to skin if you apply hot, molten gelatine.

Try a small sample on the back of your own hand to test the gelatine for heat and usability. If it cools too much, it may need a little reheating.

Start to build up gelatine of the area where you want your burn to be, going over your flattened hair and covering your silk tabs.

Create smooth and rough areas, stretching and stringing the gelatine as it cools to create a variety of textures.

Blend some areas into the skin by dragging the gelatine firmly onto the face. In other areas, create ridges and hard edges where the texture suddenly stops.

This variety of textures on the surface will help create a natural, random look.

Keep building slowly, taking your time to ensure that the gelatine is always at a safe temperature.
Step 5
Once you have finished building up your three dimensional aspect, it’s time for the paint party. The key with burns is to choose the right colours and apply them in a fairly random fashion. It’s all too easy to place colour neatly and symmetrically, so in order to loosen up, there are a couple of things we can use to help.

The first thing is to get a cheap bristle brush from a hardware store, sometimes known as a chipwood or ‘chip’ brushes.

Cut the bristles shorter by about a third, and this will give you a stiffer brush which is excellent for flicking washes of colour on.

The density of colour can be affected by adding more solvent to the pigment (water for water based makeup, IPA for oil, crème or Skin Illustrator colours).

Round artists brushes can be bashed and curled to form these bushy brushes which apply colour in random specks. Stamping the brush down onto a hard surface helps fan the bristles out.

Backcomb the bristles using a pet-hair or wire brush. Scraping the hairs on a hard surface using a sharp blade such as a scalpel or razor blade will cause them to curl back on themselves. No need to use the finest or expensive brushes such as sable-any bristle material will work such as synthetic/acrylic brushes.

Red rubber stipple sponges also are great for applying colour in random specks. Also, you can apply lots of colour, and then remove some in a random fashion using clean water or IPA.

It also sometimes helps to jam a wooden handle into the sponge, such as an orangestick or a section of wooden kebab skewer. This allows you to use the sponge in the same fashion as a brush, dabbing in a random fashion while keeping your hands clean.
Step 6
Apply little washes of colour using brush and sponge to help the gelatine blend with the skin tones if the colour is too different. In places, pick out pinks and reds in little islands here and there. I also created a coastline of red on the neck, and mottled it with pinks and reds. I have included the neck where the heat could creep up under the under the jaw.

Flicking colours allows for gradual build up of translucent colours without disturbing the previous layers. You can of course use an airbrush for this instead, but I like the ease and cleanup of the brush method.

If you wanted, you could stop at this point for an older, healing burn. Keep the colours muted and semi-matte in places. I want to crank it up another notch, and turn it into a fresh burn.

Step 6
Beef up the reds in places, and add specks of red here and there around the face to reinforce the burn. The looser you are, the more natural it will appear.

Occasionally, you may create a funky little patch of colour unintentionally. When this happens, I like to go in and add detail, hardening up the edges and creating some real contrast for maximum effect.

Step 7
Using a large brush and your fingers, add some charcoal powder around the perimeter of the reddened burn area to give a matt, dry and powdery finish you would get from extreme heat.

Go all over, but ensure that there are still some reds and paler flesh tones visible, as if the surface has cracked and exposed the meaty surface underneath.
Step 7
Create a wet look on the exposed red areas by using KY jelly to simulate the serous fluid that often occurs on burns. You’re there!

The wetness makes the colours really show up, and create a stark contrast with the surrounding dry, powdery carbon look of the charcoal.

You could add to the effect by adding charcoal around the nostrils and mouth to create the appearance of inhaled smoke, as well as a little tooth enamel to stain the teeth.

Also, black food dye mixed with a little mouthwash can be used to darken the tongue to a suitably unhealthy shade to match. Finally, maybe finish off with a blow-torched costume (making sure that you do the scorching whilst it is not being worn, of course).

Many thanks to the ever patient Jessie Hope-Weston for modelling.

Happy sticking!

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Stuart

Questions or comments about this article?
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Take care whenever working with makeup materials. Familiarise yourself with the products and take appropriate health and safety measures. We suggest you obtain and consult the relevant MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) from your supplier whenever possible. This article is for your information only. We cannot accept any responsibility for your actions.

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