Das Rossferatu Experiment

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Nosferatu is an extremely terrifying and wonderful icon of German Expressionism, let alone the entirety of horror cinema. The film, which dates back to 1922, is technically the first cinematic interpretation of Dracula, and, quite frankly, it is my favorite representation to date (with Gary Oldman’s coming in second). From the beginning of the semester I had ambitions to recreate/interpret something very classic, something that would require the usage of something other than just makeup on the face. A project, perhaps, where I would gain more experience with materials not directly covered in class. Nosferatu, I decided, would be an excellent choice for an honors project – it would require a complete transformation from human to creature. While a little intimidated by what I knew would be involved to create a Nosferatu-like being – a bald cap, a lot of white makeup, and prosthetic ears – I gathered the courage, and challenged myself.

**Part 1: The Materials Needed**

- Spirit gum and spirit gum remover (removed for taking the gum off when finished)
- Castor sealer
- 1 bald cap
- 1 set of prosthetic ear tips (looks like elf ears)
- Ben Nye white base makeup
- Ben Nye black makeup
- Sponges/cotton balls
- Makeup brush(es)
- Scissors
- Comb
- Hairgel
- Hair Dryer
- Colored pencil/make up pencil – red or taupe
- Flesh latex – did not have
- Rubbing Alcohol
- Optional: vampire teeth (I did not have the money for these)
- 1 Ross Henry
Part 2: The Preparation and Application of the Bald Cap

a. The first thing that one needs to do in preparation for the bald cap is to slick back the hair – this is so, when the bald cap is stretched over the head, there are no issues with bangs sticking out here and there, and the surface of the faux scalp is not bumpy/lumpy. Ross stuck his head under the faucet in the bathtub.

b. I then applied a lot of hair gel and began slicking it back with a comb. Ross’ hair was being stubborn – the product that I used was not the best. Ideally, I would recommend something like “brlycreem” (a specific hair product for men that serves many purposes – pompadours, Mohawks, and bald cap hair-slick). Companies that make bald caps usually have some sort of specific product, as well.

c. I then worked his hair back as much as I could with a hair dryer. Be careful not to burn the back of the subject’s neck. After finishing all of the hair-slicking, Ross looked a little like Dash, from The Incredibles.

d. Now, for the bald cap. The type that I purchased was the “most expensive” at Dallas and Co., meaning also that it would be the most professional with the best fit. Using a “swimming cap” approach, flip the bald cap inside out and have the subject grip the front of it, then pull it backwards over the head (It seemed to fit best all over when the front rested around 1 ½ inches from Ross’ eyebrows).

e. Now, the front and back of the bald cap need to be secure. Take a cotton ball and some rubbing alcohol and dab it on the forehead where the bald cap will “stick,” as well as the back of the neck.

f. Take the spirit gum and dab some (not too much) across the forehead. It is best to wait a little while for it to become tacky. After waiting, carefully pull down the bald cap and press. It should stick pretty well. For the back of the neck, the instructions I was given for the bald cap said to paint a broad strip of spirit gum across the back of the neck that is also about an inch thick. Ask the subject to lean their head back slightly – then pull the bald cap down and secure it. By leaning the head back slightly, then sticking the bald cap down, when the head is brought back to an upright position, the bald cap is pulled a little tighter and appears to have a better fit. The first time I tried this, it did not work; make sure you paint a large enough strip and wait for it to become tacky.

g. Next, it is cutting out little spots for the ears. In order to do this, one needs to pull down the sides of the bald cap to see where it fits the best. Starting with either side, take that taupe/brown/red makeup pencil (I had to use a colored pencil because I couldn’t find any makeup pencils besides black) and draw a line about ½ of an inch in from the top of the ear (the line will be mostly horizontal, slightly diagonal). From the ends of this line, continue drawing down so that the end result looks like an upside-down U, or perhaps a giant staple. It is best to use brown or taupe or a reddish color, because black is too dark, and it might not be able to be covered up by makeup.
h. When finished with both sides, take the pair of scissors and cut out the U on both sides. Please, whatever you do, don’t cut off the subject’s ear. I learned this the hard way. Ross was bleeding for about an hour.

i. Just kidding.

j. After cutting out the spaces for the ears, pop them through.

k. At this point, it is time to secure the remainder of the bald cap. Again, using spirit gum, one will secure the temples and the rest of the neck and THEN around the ears. The best way for me was to glue the ears last. You will paint all around the ear – behind it, even, to get every corner attached. A reminder: do your best to smooth out all of the wrinkles in the bald cap. I ended up with a few, but there were not too noticeable.

l. What needs to be done at this point is applying flesh latex around the edges of the bald cap in order for it to be better blend-worthy of with the skin. Not having flesh latex, I experimented with what it would look like with liquid latex. BAD IDEA. Do not use liquid latex to “blend.” It just makes the skin look really rough. If you were going for a burn victim, or someone with a lot of scars, this would be a good idea, but NOT for something like this.

m. When finished, I became very excited because I was a bald-cap virgin. I was actually doing “cool makeup!”
Part 3: Applying the Ears

a. With the ear tip, the same sort of technique for applying the bald cap will be used – this time, however, application will not take quite as long. The ear tips that I used had a little bit of a thin latex flap, which is to be applied the closest to the temple. Take the rubbing alcohol again and “clean” the ears.

b. Take a moment to fit the tips over the ears – check to see what looks the best, feels the most comfortable.

c. As for applying them, there are two ways to do this: 1) you can either apply spirit gum to the ear, then fit the tip over it, or 2) apply it to the inside of the tip, then fit it down over the ear. I found the best way, for me, was to apply it to the ear, then fit the tip down over it. You can always use a little bit of extra spirit gum to create a more snug fit, tucking the “loose flap” of latex even inside the ear.

Part 4: Time for the makeup – Describing the Process

a. In preparation for the makeup on the bald cap, something called “castor sealer” must be used, if you want to use the regular Ben Nye makeup you put on your face. This allows this “normal” makeup to stick. If you don’t have castor sealer, you’re out of luck because I’ve only done it this way, and I don’t know how else to advise you. Castor sealer comes in tiny bottles, and it costs anywhere from 2-4 dollars.

b. Lather up a sponge with some castor sealer and apply it lightly all over the bald cap. Applying it to the ear tips, I did not do, but you can if you feel like it. Not using it did not make a difference to the easiness of the application of makeup to the tips. **NOW IT IS TIME FOR A TRUE TRANSFORMATION!**

c. After applying the castor sealer, let it dry (it actually dries quite quickly).

d. Now, I decided to only use black and white makeup because I wanted it to look as much like a silent film as it could – other colors could be used, like a corpse grey or something else pale, then the folds of the skin painted on with violent, red, and brown, but not for me. This time, at least.

e. Take a second sponge and begin to apply the white makeup!
f. Now, being an art student, I have developed my own way of painting, and I ended up carrying it over to makeup. I do something that I like to call an “additive process,” where I put pieces here and there and here and there, and they gradually blend together. For the bald cap, I pretty much started with that first, but then got a little crazy. And it looks like Ross did, as well.

g. To the left, at the first photo, most of the white has been applied. Because his face has a lot of natural pinkness to it, more layers of white were needed to balance out the two tones to the best of my ability. Obviously, depending on each subject, the amount of color applied will vary. A comment – after using the castor sealer, the bald cap took the makeup very well! I was surprised as to how well it worked. It was a 14.00 bald cap, though....but if you want it to look the best, you’ve got to get the best.

h. Ross’ rage escalated as the application of the makeup ensued. I think he was upset because he was trying to read book four of *A Series of Unfortunate Events,* and he kept getting interrupted for a photo. You can see, though, that there is some progress being made.

i. There he is in the third photo, with most of the white applied. This is before a second layer of white was added to the face, so he still looks a little pink. And so, the additive process continues.

j. From this point forward, the process becomes a little more “additive.” I am not sure if there is a better way to do it, but I really feel as though I can get the best detail if I add here, then there, and so on. At this point, take a brush and begin to use the black makeup – you can mix it with white, because there need to be more values than just black and white.

k. Nosferatu’s nose is thinner than Ross’, so in order to thin it out, I shadowed either side with a light grey and drew a very straight line on both sides of the bridge of his nose and added extra white to the center to exaggerate the thinness. I then extended that shadow up to the eyes and began to “hollow” them out and darken them, by applying makeup to the inside ridge of the eye sockets. I continued this line to just underneath the eyebrows – the eyebrows had been basically blocked out by the white! Hurray for blondes! I then took that line from the nose and continued it down, exaggerating the nasolabial folds – for Nosferatu, these are quite defined.
l. The “additive process” continues with first, adding more to the eyes. Nosferatu’s eyes are encircled with black, so load up the paint brush with black and pretty much do “raccoon eyes.” In the black and white film, his eyes really stick out because of this. Start to add a second line on the outside of the nasolabial fold – one that extends downward from the inside corner of the eye and pretty much “cuts” the cheek – this begins to make the cheeks look less full. Also, exaggerate the chin. Something interesting that I just noticed: there is a perfect rainbow of origami stars on my wall that is over Ross’ head. Can you see it?

m. There is not a photo of the ears being “made up” in the process, but I can at least describe it – you basically extend the lines from the natural ear up to the tip, and you shade them. Looking at a photo of an already-finished elf-ear really helps – this is what I did.

n. Also, the other thin for the top right photo – you can see that one eyebrow has started being drawn. The white space is where the “true” eyebrow used to be – by moving the brow higher up and extending the blackness and shadow around the eyes, it makes the face look a bit longer and the eyes more hollow – it worked this way for me, at least.

o. In the middle photo, the additive process is almost finished. Here, I have added a third line to the face on the outside of the second line. You cannot see it, but by this point, the ears are finished (a note: I did not paint the inside of the ears because I did not think it would feel very cool to have a paintbrush wriggling next to your eardrum). The second eyebrow has been drawn in and given a “hairy” look. Nosferatu had very hair eyebrows, and sometimes, crepe hair can be used, but I decided to try to get a cooler affected with just using makeup.

p. In regards to shading: the lines on the face, neck, and chin have been darkened, and light grey shadow has been added around them to increase their life-likeness and make it as though they appear to be deeper. Notice I have not paint the lips yet. This is a technique that I have been doing since my coloring-book days in preschool – I used to pretend that, when coloring the picture, the image was “coming to life,” and the last thing to do was color the lips, so then, the image could talk. In this sense, Nosferatu (or rather, ROSS –feratu, as I decided he would be called) is about to take a breath.

q. At this point I became too excited to take photos before the finished product. But here are the things that I did – there was a continuation of darkening around the eyes and the eyebrows, as well as adding a deep line to the cheekbones to make them look hollowed. The shadowing of his neck also was finished, and all of the shadows were again deepened, and I highlighted them for addition contrast. I also shadowed the back of the neck, and
shadowed the scalp, creating the illusion of a thinner head. I took some artistic liberty and made his head look a little more skull-like. The best photos of Nosferatu are very blurry, one’s interpretation of the character can be vast. Finally, I painted the lips a solid black. As my projects usually go, I had a specific idea in my head that comes to life as I am executing it, and things begin to change. When he was finished, we put some dark clothing on him, and what I once thought was Nosferatu suddenly became some sort of pyromaniac punk daemon, and Ross wasn’t in the room anymore. Here is the finished product, five minutes of life, and already with a mugshot:
Some of the challenges that I encountered along the way were as follows: Firstly, as I said, I had never applied a bald cap to anyone before, so there were a couple of wrinkles I could not get out – I was able to hide them a little, with makeup. I also had some issues with the cheekbones, in the sense that I decided to re-do them entirely, because I was not satisfied with them. Also, sometimes creating the shadows proved to be hard because everything was mixing. The Ben Nye makeup was sweating off a little bit, and I didn’t have white powder, which I need to get. Other than that, I was very proud of my first attempt, and I have received a lot of positive input from others I have shown it to.

If I could do a few things differently, I would have decided to paint the inside of the ears. Also, I would have done more to the teeth – Nosferatu, instead of having pointed canines like the other vampires, had pointed front teeth. I would have added this. Also, I considered painting the hands, but that would have taken an extra 30 minutes for me, and I decided against it. If I had a bigger budget, I would have, yes, bought the teeth and also purchased color contacts that were either white out or entirely black, depending on what kind of effect I wanted. I would have also purchased some long, curled fake nails to apply to the painted hands – but, again, money was an issue. I will definitely be doing this project again and since completing it, I have become so much more inspired and ambitious in the ways of makeup, and Ross and I are already planning to do another project in the near future – probably an interpretation of Jim Carrey as *The Mask*. Rossferatu was a challenging project, but I believe I tackled it!