

GORDON ESPINET

Senior Vice President of Global Artist Training, Development and Makeup Artistry

A mesmerizing storyteller who speaks with his hands, eyes and Lip Pencils, Gordon Espinet has a generous cadence that invites, radiates, empowers. Leadership comes naturally to Mr. Espinet, a benevolent force in his role as Senior Vice President of Global Artist Training, Development and Makeup Artistry at M·A·C, whose cultural dynamo springs first and foremost from the Zeitgeist of community. Raised in a kaleidoscopic home in Trinidad, Mr. Espinet was the youngest of 13 children – a lucky rank, indeed, for a creative man who would relish his role as family art director only to grow up and helm a jubilant network of makeup artists around the world.

“I was always fascinated and very opinionated about makeup, and always had the last word on most of my sisters’ get-ups. I often compare M·A·C with the world I grew up in – my family. It’s a beautiful sort of chaos that functions well. I was always fascinated with the idea of adornment in any way, shape or form.”

Mr. Espinet used to watch his mother saturate silk with thousands of hand-sewn beads for clients commissioning custom-made wedding dresses. A talented seamstress, she readily outfitted her brood with similarly expressive outfits and encouraged individuality in every child. He often took to doodling – his favourite language – while his brothers deconstructed radios and gadgets. “What I love about M·A·C is that it’s very much how I grew up. If you have a strong belief in something, it’s supported. You are allowed to be yourself.”

After moving to Canada at 14, Mr. Espinet exploited his natural gifts post-graduation into a vibrant career in makeup artistry. He was part of the early team that groomed M·A·C into a creative powerhouse. “The product was special and unique for its time. A lot of it also had to do with the renegade thinking and the types of people that represented M·A·C.”

Beyond spearheading Artist Training & Development, where he educates and inspires both global curriculums and Masterclasses, much of what Mr. Espinet is called to do is maintain M·A·C’s core – the unbridled creativity, shock and pioneering element of inclusiveness. “One of the roles that I need to hold onto is to keep M·A·C unique, play devil’s advocate and beg the question, ‘What would M·A·C have done 20 years ago?’ And I can answer that question – I was there!”

In a fit of inspiration, Mr. Espinet looks to model Alek Wek as both a powerful example and a great icon. “The first time I met her, I think I stared at her for hours on end. She bucks the system and breaks from convention. Every time I see her, I think ‘Oh, my God. Look at how beautiful you are.’” Constantly probing beauty maxims the world over, Mr. Espinet tirelessly champions products for All Ages, All Races, All Sexes. “Making a foundation for Alek Wek was not about creating a best-seller. It’s the idea that the first time she tried a shade that didn’t make her look grey, her eyes welled up. She was so amazed that it matched.”

Whether it’s training a fleet of new talent or overseeing makeup artistry for over 800 fashion shows a year, Mr. Espinet’s top priority is keeping M·A·C special. “It’s about letting creativity flourish, building visuals and creating a dialogue with our artists, globally. Listening to what our artists are seeing in China, Russia, Brazil, India and beyond. My dream is to go to places and understand their beliefs and culture, and learn to speak their language so that I can teach them to speak ours – beauty.”

“Makeup is not something that you hide behind or something that’s going to turn back the clock. It’s an art form – and it’s my job to help our teams express themselves, educate them to use the right tools, products and learn how to experiment.”

Though he is still the baby in his family, Mr. Espinet is a high-energy visionary commandeering with kindness – and a twinkle of humour. “I’m one of five people who have been with the company the longest. In meetings, everybody goes around introducing themselves and their role, and I just clearly say, ‘Gordon Espinet, Dinosaur.’”