

THE HANDS HAVE IT

Written by LYNN FURGE

Photography by ALESSANDRO ZUEK SIMONETTI

M.I.A. strutted the red carpet at the Met's Costume Institute Gala in May clad in Alexander Wang for Gap, but all eyes were on her hands, delicately jewel-encrusted from her knuckles to her fingertips. M.I.A. made sure it had an encore appearance in her Rolling Stone shoot the following week.

*The artist behind that trendsetting moment:
Tracylee Percival.*



Nail Design: TRACYLEE.
Jewelry: BIJULES BY JULES KIM.
Vintage lace bodysuit.



Nail Design: TRACYLEE.
Jewelry: BIJULES BY JULES KIM.

Makeup: SARAH JANE SHEEHY.
Styling: JUSTIN MIN.
Art Direction: LYNN FURGE.
Production Assistant: ELIZABETH HOUSTON.
Location: ACE HOTEL, New York City.

Much ado about the state of the fashion business lately has experts buzzing “niche”, “imaging”, “branding” and “marketing” to the core. Know thyself and success will come. Tracylee Percival has this *nailed*.

Quite fond of doing her own nails as a form of self-expression, she started doing manicures for others about 15 years ago. Long acrylics were the style back then, and a neighbor across the street was going to beauty school to master that art form. Percival followed suit, and eight months after graduation opened up her own salon. After 10 years she sold her business, deciding to take on new challenges.

She explains, “I applied to be on the show *10 Years Younger* and got [the job]. On set I got along so well with a celebrity hairstylist on set that I was asked to work together. That is where my freelance career took off. I now work in Manhattan and Beverly Hills and am represented by Vue Management.”

Her enthusiasm is palpable, even if she’s bouncing in and out of cell signal in the Lincoln Tunnel. It’s this vivacious, happy-go-lucky attitude that editors and celebrity clients adore about her. Being passionate about her work truly keeps her “niche.” She researches her field day after day, subscribing to every trade publication imaginable, and goes to numerous salon trade shows.

“I am always on top of trends and what is happening. I read every little ad in the trade publications, ask them for samples and to try stuff out. You have to be open to the new things,” she adds.

Being both innovative and a risk-taker have firmly placed Percival at the top of her field. She was the first in Manhattan to be licensed to perform Minx manicures—a heat-activated process that lasts for up to two weeks. A trend that has touched the fingertips of everyone from Beyoncé to Lauren Santo Domingo.

What makes Minx the cat’s meow? Percival explains: “[Minx] brought a different genre to nails. It is a different form of nail art. Gel nails are going to take over that sector. Minx and Trendy Nails; they offer gorgeous metallics that you cannot get out of polish. There is no drying time [because] they are never wet. Color gels are super hot right now. I am using OPI colored gels that are the colors of their popular nail polish selection. It is put on like nail polish, but then it is cured under a UV light—since it is cured, it keeps from chipping for two to three weeks. The gels also have a high shine. You soak it off in acetone; [there’s] no damage to natural nails, no primers, no acrylics. [It] slides right off your nails. CND just came out with a product called Shellac, which comes in actual nail polish bottles. These are easier to bring to a set, so I am playing with those as well.”

It’s all perfect proof why industry bloggers love Percival and continue to quote her, cover her, and ask her advice. She has contributed to blogs such as Beauty of Life, Social Diva, and Beautyschooled.

“For me, I have always felt that you weren’t complete until your nails were done. I have been

trying to bring more awareness about bringing nail design/art into the entire fashion world for editorial. Back in the 90s I used to do the holes in the nails with the dangling charms... now people are bringing that back, as well as gold tips. The celebrities help with that because they are on the pulse of fashion.”

According to Percival, the general consumer needs to feel comfortable taking more nail risks, color being the number one risk people avoid but should try—after all, if you don’t like it, you can easily take it off. People also need not be afraid to try new technology. The gels are not even close to being as damaging as the old acrylics used to be.

Percival has become a crusader on the topic of intricate but functional nails, which will most likely be visible over the next six to nine months. “Colored gels 100%!” she says. “Everyone I have done them on has absolutely loved them. I think

groups, lots of bi-coastal fans, tons of designers and people that work in fashion. We really want to concentrate on doing events there and a custom design for them through Minx.”

Think of Tracylee Percival as an architect of fingers, drawing, sketching and sometimes even sculpting (like the custom key made exclusively for the accompanying shoot). She has the technology and connections to put anything on the Minx product. All that she needs is a picture.

“I just did one through Trendy Nail Design for Roca Wear for their Rock 4 Life event. It was a custom logo. Half the fun is brainstorming with the client to see what they want and if I can make it come to life.”

Brainstorming with the client is just one aspect of Percival’s hard work that has paid off, bringing us back to that Costume Institute moment where M.I.A. hit the red carpet wearing Alexander Wang and Tracylee, two names that, back in her *10 Years*

“Half the fun is brainstorming with the client to see what they want and if I can make it come to life.”

we still have a lot of time with nail art... I am hoping for some new products as far as tools and equipment, but who knows?”

It would only make sense that the woman with cool at her fingertips would join up with one of New York’s most cutting-edge boutiques—Opening Ceremony. Their boutique in the Ace Hotel is where she does special appearances. It fits in perfectly with their fashion-forward clientele.

“I met them at an event in Brooklyn. The owner called to have me work on their lookbook. It’s been a love affair ever since. Every time I come in the room it’s filled with all different age

Younger days, she probably never thought she would hear in the same sentence.

“There are only a few of us that are skilled enough to do the layering technique and get it to stay,” she explains humbly. “So I was chosen. Those were [M.I.A.’s] natural nails with gold on the bottom and a design that she had created with a clock. Her name and wording all in black print—that was sheer and layered, and worn with gold rings to her knuckles.”

The traffic has started to move and Tracylee is off to her next booking. She’s ready to rock someone else’s world, one digit at a time.