

# "Go Where It's Warm"

An interview with Ariana Mouyiaris, creative director of MAKE makeup.



BY LAIA GARCIA DEC 6, 2016



Every woman has a different relationship to beauty and makeup. I go through phases of wearing bold lipstick and eye shadows and phases where I embrace a minimal look. (Well, as minimal as a Puerto Rican can ever get with makeup, so my version of minimal is just a bold eyebrow and ... lots of shimmer and shine. OK, glitter. Lots of glitter.)

A few years ago, during a particularly difficult time with my personal relationships, I developed an obsession with tiny squares of flashy eye shadow given to me by a friend: a bright turquoise blue, a deep shade of rose pink, and a champagne-tinged glitter that I took to brushing all over my face (which I still do to this day). On the top of the small eye-shadow compacts were the words MAKE in a thin, almost handwritten type. I had never heard of the brand, so I did some [sleuthing on its website](#). I felt like I was looking at art supplies rather than makeup, and it was hard to not go on a crazy buying spree. I also found out that MAKE was based right here in New York, and that the company donated 10 percent of all sales to its [We See Beauty foundation](#), which works to empower women-owned businesses and cooperatives. I had found a new favorite.

Not only does MAKE actively support women entrepreneurs, but its own creative director, Ariana Mouyiaris, is an incredibly smart woman who I immediately felt a kinship to. After studying international relations and working in various design fields, she joined the family business — her dad Nikos started manufacturing high-end cosmetics in the 1970s — when they decided to launch their own brand. She agreed to show Lenny around the MAKE factory in Long Island City, Queens. (Of course we brought a camera along; you can check out all the glorious behind-the-scenes action below!) Afterward, we talked on Skype about starting a beauty company that approaches makeup more like art than "fix your wrongs," joining the family business, and why it's important to follow your instincts, in life and in the workplace.



**Laia Garcia:** What is your earliest beauty memory?

**Ariana Mouyiaris:** I remember my father coming home from work and his hand would be covered in color swatches, because he would be trying different shades of makeup. I always felt like beauty was a really tactile thing, and something that could be played with. My mother was this very stunning woman. She had this beauty dresser, and each main drawer just had all of these shadows and blushes all stacked together. I used to sit there and look through it all and play. I remember she gave me these really thick, fat pencils, which I guess were probably beauty pencils, but I got to use them for drawing.

**LG:** You didn't think you would go into the family business when you became an adult, right? What changed your mind?

**AM:** Not at all, it was the last thing I wanted to do. I had other interests, and I was always really interested in and inspired by art and design, and that's the world I gravitated toward after I finished my undergraduate degree. I'd studied international relations, but then I started working with a branding agency. Then I did my master's in curating contemporary design, and I continued in that world, working in London with a really talented creative director and designer.

When my father wanted to start a new beauty brand, a new business that would be a social enterprise, which is something really close to his heart, I felt like, *Well, if I can come onboard and consult more, work more in the creative side and help make it more culturally relevant, then that's something I would like to do for him.* That was how I got hooked in.

**LG:** So tell me a bit more about We See Beauty. Did it launch simultaneously with MAKE?

**AM:** Yeah, they were established around the same time. It was always part of MAKE's mission to work synergistically with the foundation. From the beginning we were donating a percentage of sales. We now donate 10 percent of sales, whether it's wholesale dollars or sales through our website, to the foundation to help support and incubate women-led businesses. We started focusing first in the United States, and we've also done partnerships across the Americas. That element was definitely part of MAKE's reason for coming into existence, which goes back to my father's real interest in cooperatives. He grew up in a small town in Cyprus and his family was part of a cooperative. When he was a child, he would sell eggs to the cooperative, and that's how he was able to buy his first bicycle. He saw the impact of cooperative business, which benefitted not only his family but the community in general. That's something that he wanted to see if he could bring to the business world in a new way in America.

**LG:** What are some of the businesses that We See Beauty is currently working with?

**AM:** Since the foundation launched, they've given grants to a small, work-owned cooperative in North Carolina called [Opportunity Threads](#), which is a "cut and sew" cooperative. They work with fashion and accessories businesses. When we first began working with them, there were, I believe, four workers, led by a brilliant woman named Molly, and now I believe they are up to 40 employees. We gave them a small grant to buy machinery and other things they needed for their business. Then we also wound up partnering with [Mercado Global](#) to create bags with fabric sourced in Guatemala, which we sold through Birchbox as well as our own website. We also got Opportunity Threads involved in doing some of that work. So we were looking at different ways of being involved with a local or American cooperative, and then it expanded, since Mercado Global works with cooperatives in the Americas, particularly in Guatemala.

We've done a mix of grants, and then tried to find ways to also do business partnerships. The foundation also has worked with [Working Worlds](#). They're a very well-respected 501(c)(3) that works on cooperative development in the Americas as well. As a small independent brand, obviously there's only so much that you can do, but as we get bigger the amount that would go toward the foundation and be going toward these types of projects will also grow. Being committed to small, grassroots, incremental change is part of our bottom line. It's not a token thing, it's not 10

percent of after-sale profits or 10 percent on after-sale profit of one lipstick for one month during the year. It's a consistent donation.

**LG:** What is a piece of advice that you would give someone who is afraid to explore their creative interests, or is going down a career path that no longer feels right for them?

**AM:** As much as possible, try to stay with your intuition. I love the phrase "Go where it's warm." Try to stick with the things that actually bring you joy and light you up in a certain way. For me, going into beauty, it definitely wasn't part of my game plan, but sometimes I think having really fixed ideas of what your life is going to look like can be detrimental.

Try to find your own kind of chart and constellation. It might not be visible or make sense, but it probably wouldn't until the end anyway, so you just have to stick with what feels right. Develop those things on the side that nurture you on the side, and see how those conversations progress and where they lead you. The more that we do that, the more you tap into that, and put yourself out there, the more you can grow, and find encouragement and support and nurturing on your authentic life path.

*This interview has been condensed and edited.*

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