

Andrea Benoit, *Viva M·A·C: Aids, Fashion, and the Philanthropic Practices of M·A·C Cosmetics*, Toronto: [University of Toronto Press](#), 2019. x + 278pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth; ISBN /9781487500405, \$82.00, Paper; ISBN 9781487520281, \$31.05.

In *VIVA M·A·C*, Andrea Benoit has provided an intriguing corporate history of an innovative cosmetics company, which from its earliest days associated itself with gay culture and supported AIDS charities. For readers not familiar with M·A·C Cosmetics, it burst on the scene in the 1980s with vibrant colour palettes and a cool underground vibe. Founded by the two Franks, Frank Toskan and Frank Angelo, who at the time were both life partners and business partners, the firm became an outstanding Canadian success story before being bought out by Estée Lauder in the 1990s. Benoit pays close attention to M·A·C's business philosophy, their charitable endeavours, and their emergence in the exciting Toronto fashion scene of the 1980s. The book makes important contributions to urban history, the history of queer life, the history of corporate social responsibility, Canadian business history and the history of beauty and fashion.

Angelo was clearly a remarkable businessman – by the time he was 21 years old, he had created Toronto's first chain of unisex hair salons The Haircutting Place, with 37 locations. When Angelo and Toskan met, Toskan was working as a photographer but he lost this job when the Eaton's catalogue folded in 1976. He started a laundromat that would wash the towels used by hairdressing salons like those owned by Angelo. He did photography and makeup in the space at night, often photographing strippers and drag queens. In the late 1970s, he began to experiment with product development, starting with a shampoo product for the Haircutting Place and later makeup. The products were geared towards make-up artists and drag queens who needed products could withstand the glare of harsh photographic lights. From the beginning, he also wanted items that would work on a wide variety of skin tones. Unfortunately, Benoit makes no mention of Cheryl Thompson's fine book on black beauty culture in Canada, *Beauty in a Box* (2019) which might have allowed her to make stronger arguments about race in the beauty and fashion industry in the late 20th century.

M·A·C was innovative in many respects – they were very early to adopt a recycling program for containers and unlike other makeup products, they listed all of their ingredients on their label. They never tested on animals. They did not advertise as Toskan believed that advertising was a tax on customers. They hired male staff including drag queens, which was highly unusual at makeup counters at the time period, and many of their staff had creative hairstyles, tattoos and piercing. The staff took the artistry of makeup seriously and Toskan encouraged them to have fun. He aimed to create a family-like atmosphere among his employees and fostered this by paying people with high base salaries rather than commissions. When Nordstrom fired a gender-fluid staffer in the American South, Toskan threatened to pull M·A·C's counter unless the staff person was re-hired.

One of the two partners, Frank Angelo, is strangely absent from this book, although it is clear that M·A·C was a joint effort with Angelo taking the lead on the business side and Toskan on the creative side. Both came from Italian families. Toskan immigrated to Canada as a child, growing up in Toronto, while Angelo was born to an Italian immigrant family in Montréal. Their history is part of the enormous Italian immigration that reshaped Canada in the post-World War II years,

but Benoit does not pick up on this aspect of their story. Benoit celebrates the growing fashion scene in Toronto as well as the increased dynamism of the city, but does not analyze what made this possible including the growing diversity of the city and the arrival of large numbers of American draft dodgers and thinkers like Jane Jacobs. She does mention the exodus from Montréal in the 60s and 70s but takes the view that this had a limited impact on Toronto's fashion scene even though Angelo himself was one of those who left Montréal in the 60s to open a business in Toronto.

As Benoit details in her acknowledgments, Toskan was very generous with his time. He introduced her to other people involved in the M·A·C story and shared photos and memorabilia. Angelo sadly passed away at the age of 49, long before Benoit started writing this book, and not long after Angelo and Toskan parted ways romantically. This likely accounts for the lopsided nature of the book. We learn a lot about the creative side of M·A·C, but much less about how the business grew so rapidly. We also learn very little about their relationship. I assume that Benoit wanted to protect Toskan's privacy, which is understandable, but as someone who teaches gay and lesbian history, I would have loved to know more how the couple navigated the complexities of gay life in Toronto in the 70s, 80s and 90s. Benoit briefly mentions that Angelo was never out to his family, despite running a business that openly embraced queer culture. When Angelo passed away, he had no will. His family descended on the apparently still shared Toskan-Angelo house and took many of the deceased's items. There is a great deal to unpack here, but Benoit shied away from this story.

I would have liked to have known more about the changing retail landscape of the time period. M·A·C started when downtown shopping malls were threatening department stores, and yet its business model was highly dependent on department stores. Is this because department stores were relying more heavily on beauty products as they combatted the growing challenge of chain clothing stores? The author's heavy focus on M·A·C's fundraising means that we learn less about how consumer and retail practices were changing during these pivotal years.

Benoit is aware that many theorists and shoppers are cynical about corporate philanthropy, but she persuasively argues that M·A·C's commitment to these causes was a logical and genuine outgrowth of the founders' philosophy, ethics, and approach to doing business. Benoit extensively covers the M·A·C's sponsorship of Fashion Cares, a fashion show that benefitted the AIDS Committee of Toronto, and the VIVA Glam lipstick which raised money for AIDS charities. Benoit describes how M·A·C covered all costs of production and the sales all went directly to charity. By contrast, most firms donate only a small portion of the profits to the charity that ostensibly benefits from the sale of the product. The book reads as a homily to M·A·C. Nonetheless, this reader, at least, was persuaded that the praise was deserved and not just a reflection of the author's close relationship with M·A·C's founder.

Catherine Carstairs
University of Guelph