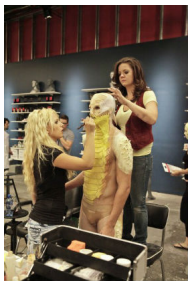
Ukraine native Athena Zhe was eliminated from Syfy's makeup competition series FACE OFF when her snake-plus-flower creature just didn't add up for the judges…

FANGORIA: Can you tell us a little about your background?

ATHENA ZHE: I was born and raised in Ukraine, formerly U.S.S.R. I came to the United States when I was fourteen years old. My dad was here for about five years, and one day he called me up and said, "Athena, do you want to come to the United States? You can check it out and if you like it, you can stay." And I checked it out and I liked it and I stayed [*laughs*]!

FANG: Do you go back often?

ZHE: Yeah, most of my family is there. My sisters, my cousins, my mom is there. I go once or twice a year to visit my mom.



FANG: Do they know that you're doing FX makeup?

ZHE: They do. I've been showing my mom photographs, and my mom loves it. My mom is very supportive of it. My dad is a little bit weird about it because he was in the military his whole life, so he's square when it comes to those things. The whole Ukrainian and Russian culture calls an artist a starving artist. They don't believe that makeup can actually make you money. And I've proven my dad wrong every single time!

FANG: What's the horror film industry like in Russia and Ukraine?

ZHE: Well, you know, they do some horror films, but [the genre] isn't that developed yet, and FX makeup artists don't really have experience in all the new products yet. Most of the time it's a low budget film, or a film that doesn't have as big of a budget as a Hollywood film. Because supplies can be very expensive, that's actually one of the reasons a lot of the artists aren't as qualified, not as experienced with the products as people in Hollywood.

FANG: Were you an artist before you moved to U.S.? Or is that something you decided to do after you moved here?

ZHE: I always knew how to paint. I actually went to art school back in Ukraine. I got bored of painting vegetables for two months, so I quit [*laughs*]. But I've always been painting. I painted my dad's walls, I painted the carpet and the floor and everything around me.

FANG: What do you miss the most about the Ukraine now that you live here?

ZHE: I definitely don't miss the weather, because it's freezing there. I definitely miss my family. That's one of the things I really miss.

FANG: Tell me about the work you were doing before you were cast on FACE OFF.

ZHE: I've been doing body painting since 2006? 2007 maybe? And I've done body painting for the Playboy Mansion. I'm still going to the Playboy Mansion. Twice, sometimes three times a year I go to there to do gigs. I've done music videos. I've done a lot of promotional body painting, for Jose Cuervo, for a lot of liquor companies. You name it. I actually painted for a lady that was running for Governor of New York.

FANG: What in the world did she need body painting for?

ZHE: She was very open minded. She wanted to legalize weed, so she kind of worked to promote that with the nude art and body painting at her events. [*Kristin Davis is an ex-Madam who ran for Governor against Andrew Cuomo in the 2010 election—Ed*]

FANG: So if you've done gigs at the Playboy Mansion, did you know fellow contestant Nix Herrera before the show?

ZHE: I've known him for so long. We always do gigs together. We go to Jamaica together two, or three times a year to do body painting on beautiful models there. We see each other at different conventions all the time.

FANG: So, is body painting the only thing you do for a living?

ZHE: Oh, no. I do FX, I do face painting, I paint murals. I paint clothing. I'm actually trying to develop my own clothing line right now. A lot of stuff I wore on the show is stuff I made myself. And I have my own event planning company. I book talent for weddings, big events, small events, you name it. And I also impersonate Britney Spears and Lady Gaga [*laughs*]. It's a lot of fun. It's a totally different industry. I travel the world doing that as well.

FANG: Then it must have been a thrill to meet judge Glenn Hetrick, since he works with Lady Gaga.

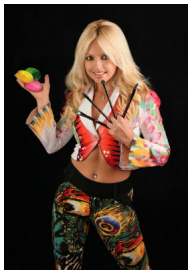
ZHE: I actually didn't realize it until after the show. I had no idea he was the one doing all the designs for her. He does all the piano stuff and all the accessories. And it's funny, because I was mimicking those accessories for my show. I had no idea the he was the one who sculpted them!

FANG: Ve Neill was pretty harsh on you and Tara Long on your last episode.

ZHE: I think they're amazing judges, they're very talented, and whatever they say I totally agree with them. When I hear from someone like Ve Neill constructive criticism about my work it makes me a better artist. So it's truly fine, I totally deserve it. I know I can do a better job. I've done better jobs. I've been doing better jobs since I started doing body painting. But sometimes stuff doesn't go the way you want it to go, and whatever she was telling me, I kind of knew myself as well. I knew I had it wrong.

FANG: Speaking of judges, what do you think of having two actors, Sam Huntington (BEING HUMAN) and Vivica A. Fox (KILL BILL), as judges on your last episode? I'm not sure I understand what they have to offer as judges for a makeup FX competition.

ZHE: Actually, I think it kind of did make sense, because the actor is always part of the makeup. No matter how good of a makeup you do, if an actor doesn't feel comfortable in that makeup, your makeup will never shine. Your makeup will never come out as good as you wished it would be. That's why it's very important for an actor to feel comfortable in their makeup, to feel beautiful, to feel confident, to feel fabulous in that makeup. No matter if it's a monster or a beautiful creature. You also have to consider that the actor has to feel comfortable in it. The prosthetic has to fit perfectly, all the accessories have to fit perfectly so it won't limit an actor in his moves, in his ability to act.



FANG: What was the hardest part about being on the show?

ZHE: Definitely not being in your comfort zone. Also, I'm a perfectionist, and I love to have my makeup super sharp and perfect. But because of the time limitations, I mean I understand it was a challenge, it wasn't something that I was able to do as much. I wish I would have had more time so I could perfect my art. Also, I love to research a lot. I love to look at different sketches and go on Google and find images of different animals, different prints, go to nature and get inspiration from there. And unfortunately we didn't get an opportunity to do it while on FACE OFF as much.

FANG: While you're on the show, do they take away your cell phones and computers and completely cut you off from the outside world?

ZHE: Yes, we're completely isolated. We're living in our own bubble [*laughs*]. We had a couple of people who were taking care of us, giving us all the food we needed. And we were transported from the house—a fabulous house—to the lab and to other places. We were basically in the bubble the whole time, and I totally understand why. It was done for the show, and I think it was the smart way to do it.

FANG: If you keep everyone isolated, and you only see each other, good or bad it's going to create some good TV.

ZHE: Exactly. I think at some point it actually helped us, because we weren't being distracted by the outside world, and we were able to concentrate on the makeup more.

FANG: What was the biggest surprise about being on a reality show?

ZHE: I didn't expect to see that many cameras on me that often. Also, I didn't expect some people to be more dramatic than they should have been, just because the saw the camera was on them.

FANG: So people were playing to the cameras.

ZHE: Certain people.

FANG: Do you want to name any names?

ZHE: No [*laughs*].

FANG: Do you have any favorite horror or FX films that inspire your work?

ZHE: The very first film I saw when I was back in Ukraine was LABYRINTH. And I saw it when I was a tiny, little girl, and I've been watching it over and over and over again. I'm still fascinated with that movie. I love it. I love all the creatures, I love all the fantasy characters. They're all very realistic.

FANG: What do you hope to get out of being on FACE OFF?

ZHE: Definitely publicity. Better jobs. Bigger jobs. I want to work on film. I'd love to work on a bigger scale. I'd love to get published more than I do now. Even though I've been published a lot, it's never enough. And I want to heal the world with art as well. To show the world that art can be very therapeutic. When I teach classes, I don't expect those makeup artists to go and just start doing makeup. A lot of these people who take my class take if for therapy. That's a

way to express yourself—in film makeup. And that's how I do it. I express my feelings and my emotions a lot of times in film makeup. I'm very enthusiastic, I'm a very happy person. I love color. I love vibrant creatures. So that's part of me in the art.

FANG: What's up next?

ZHE: Well, Playboy Mansion in two months. Transworld in a month. I've started working with different sponsors—Paasche (Airbrush Company) just started to sponsor me, which is an amazing opportunity. I'm just picking and choosing my jobs now. I'm definitely going to publish a book, and maybe a couple of calendars with my art in it. And hopefully launch my new clothing line. I'm working on it right now, so we'll see what happens.

FANG: You're very busy!

ZHE: [*Laughs*] I'm a New Yorker! You gotta stay busy!