

Scream Queens

by Silvia Bombardini

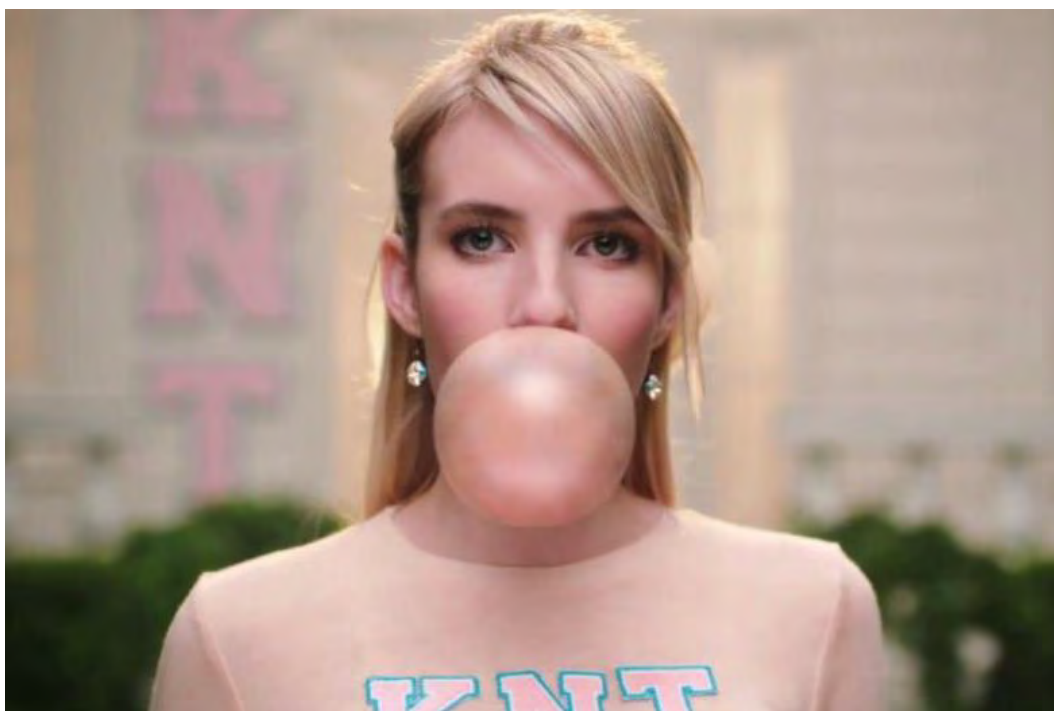


Cheyenne Keuben at Simone Rocha, Marques'Almeida, SS16

On the wake of *American Horror Story*, *Hannibal* or *Bates Motel* season one of *Scream Queens* draws to a close, and new parameters are set for the contemporary horror serial. A fluency in classical tropes, such as the final girl voiceover and her traditional high-pitch, combines with a healthy dose of self-irony and the social media magic that both anchors it in our time and earns the series its devoted fan base. On days when goth vloggers are sharing Vampire Tears makeup tutorials on YouTube, it's a necessary evolution of the slasher movie – what it forgoes in mystery and myth, it gains in traction, accessibility and views. Recently released, the latest film of Chloë Sevigny actually has a hashtag in its title. If not the genre's finest example, the fact that *#Horror* is directed by former *Imitation of Christ* designer Tara Subkoff goes also to prove that the time-honoured ties between horror and fashion, cue in themes of envy and madness, femmes fatales or witches, are on the verge of tightening further.

As if *the devil* was not just a metaphor in *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Scream Queens* appeals to the masses but openly courts a fashion-savvy audience. They distributed blood-coloured drinks at New York Fashion Week

last season, nevermind that HBO had brewed something very similar for *True Blood* fans back in 2009. *Rookie*'s Tavi Gevinson even plays a part, as Jamie Lee Curtis' nemesis in episode seven – and yes that's Jamie Lee Curtis, the real deal: daughter of *Psycho* actress Janet Leigh whose film debut was in the 1978 indie gem *Halloween*, her performance as Dean Munsch in *Scream Queens* got her a nomination to the 2016 Golden Globes. But at a time when elitism is under threat, the series also taps into the cultural shift that has teenagers' awareness of high-end fashion almost involuntarily heightened by media and web. We're living the onset of mass sophistication: anthropomorphic manatees in Netflix' animated sitcom *BoJack Horseman* wear versions of Miu Miu and Balenciaga outfits. Luxury becomes pop, meme. When *Scream Queens*' main character Chanel Oberlin mentions "uncle Karl", few won't know who she's talking about. That the season sees her exclusive sorority kingdom targeted both by costumed serial killers and geeky new pledges, until Chanel herself ends up in a mental asylum and only subsequently goes a bit mad, might almost read as an unintentional metaphor.



Emma Roberts as Chanel Oberlin

Still, the *Scream Queens* wardrobe is full: powdery and plumose, frothy and fuzzy in slushy sweet sugary shades. Cloying, really, but that's half the point. Consumption can be icky. Chanel's dad, she swears, is "super gross rich", and her closet so precious "it's like a second vagina" to her. There's something vaguely indecent about too much Moschino, even or perhaps especially interspersed as it is with high-street surrogates from Topshop or Zara. But the show owns up to it, with some oddly liberating if-you-can't-fight-it-flaunt-it verve. Without giving them too much credit, fashion-wise, Chanel and her minions are the extreme opposite of Supreme customers who queue for hours to purchase clothing crafted and branded with anti-capitalist ideals. *Scream Queens* brims with indulgence, honest and wicked. Like co-creator Ryan

Murphy, who's also behind *Glee* and *American Horror Story* – "the current overlord of camp horror" according to [The Independent](#), his wish was to reclaim it "from the tawdry torture porn that was clogging up the big screen, heading back instead to the genre's 1970s heyday".

Off-screen, predictably, it trickles down to a more temperate aesthetic, and yet designers are drawn to humour fashion's renewed fancy for the macabre, by looking back to the genre's classics and cults as well as the shows that pay them homage today. Think of Dario Argento's *Suspiria*, inspiring Thomas Tait FW15 collection. Shot in 1977 and one of the last feature films to be processed in Technicolor, *Suspiria* itself is both glossy and rich in pastels, and its relevance nearly 40 years since its release proves that the style of *Scream Queens* isn't quite as off the mark, nor quite as dated as one may think. It echoes the Color of the Year 2016 according to Pantone, two shades for the first time, [Serenity](#) and [Rose Quartz](#), as well as the signature rosy hair dye of some models of the moment – take Fernanda Ly or Cheyenne Keuben, Charlotte Free, even Final Fantasy's Lightning in those Louis Vuitton ads. It also matches the watercolour hues of many SS16 collections, salmon and blush, seafoam and mint, watermelon, all those feathery trims and chiffon shreds, either carefully arranged in millefeuille waves like at Roksanda, or more violently frayed, like at Marques'Almeida. If the airiness of this palette should hint to a lack of substance in one [critic's](#) eyes, there's no doubt that come spring it will do well at retail, as much as a gory crowd-pleaser always does at the box office. Of course, pastels satisfy the most when they register as the calm before the storm, and channel some of that same spookiness that Murphy favours. This was the case at the Marques'Almeida show, also thanks to styling and makeup worth of George A. Romero's best work, or at Maison Margiela's, that [Tim Blanks](#) best describes as a "parade of soft-core society Walking Dead-ed". Erdem's delicate, lace-light collection was inspired by prairie madness: a mental illness known to affect the single women and widows who left Europe for America following Abraham Lincoln's promise to gift them land if they proved able to farm it for five years at least, in conditions of extreme isolation that would lead some to suicide. It was 1862 and the Homestead Act, but the setting and timeframe may call to mind the Cut-Wife of Ballentree Moor in *Penny Dreadful*, who didn't fare much better this side of the pond, and some of the darker looks would fit perfectly Eva Green's Vanessa in the upcoming third season. Still on the darker side, were Comme des Garçons' blue witches – not quite as candied, but plush and furry in their blood-moon wigs, they took their cue from Isabella Rossellini as Miss Dorothy Vallens, in David Lynch's quintessential blend of horror and noir, *Blue Velvet*.