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The Age of Instagram Face

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THIS PAST SUMMER, I booked a plane ticket to Los Angeles with the hope of investigating what seems likely to be one of the oddest legacies of our rapidly expiring decade: the gradual emergence, among professionally beautiful women, of a single, cyborgian face. It's a young face, of course, with poreless skin and plump, high cheekbones. It has catlike eyes and long, cartoonish lashes; it has a small, neat nose and full, lush lips. It looks at you coyly but blankly, as if its owner has taken half a Klonopin and is considering asking you for a private-jet ride to Coachella. The face is distinctly white but ambiguously ethnic—it suggests a *National Geographic* composite illustrating [what Americans will look like in 2050](#), if every American of the future were to be a direct descendant of Kim Kardashian West, Bella Hadid, Emily Ratajkowski, and Kendall Jenner (who looks exactly like Emily Ratajkowski). “It’s like a sexy . . . baby . . . tiger,” Cara Craig, a high-end New York colorist, observed to me recently. The celebrity makeup artist Colby Smith told me, “It’s Instagram Face, duh. It’s like an unrealistic sculpture. Volume on volume. A face that looks like it’s made out of clay.”

Instagram, which launched as the decade was just beginning, in October, 2010, has its own aesthetic language: the ideal image is always the one that instantly pops on a phone screen. The aesthetic is also marked by a familiar human aspiration, previously best documented in wedding photography, toward a generic sameness. Accounts such as [Insta Repeat](#) illustrate the platform’s monotony by posting grids of indistinguishable photos posted by different users—a person in a yellow raincoat standing at the base of a waterfall, or a hand holding up a bright fall leaf. Some things just perform well....

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[“The Age of Instagram Face”](#) (Jia Tolentino, *The New Yorker*, December 12, 2019)

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