

This chapter explores the similarities between portraiture and cosmetics, as mediated by a growing awareness of the possibilities of self and artistic expression. The previous chapter explored the relationship of cosmetics to medicine in the middle ages, highlighting the narrowing role of women as medical practitioners but also suggesting that access to healthcare and beauty may have continued through small scale manufacture of cosmetic and other healthcare products. This chapter builds upon the last as it examines criticisms of and motivations for cosmetic application; it focuses on a variety of literary texts from the medieval and early modern period that locate a health or social rationale for cosmetic use found in medicinal and moral treatises, but also endeavors to show a more personal motivation for cosmetic use through its the artistic form of portraiture. When the cosmetic image is represented in narrative, it may be likened to artistic ekphrasis. The subjectivity of a painterly author may be found within the rendition of visual narrative representations, which exposes subtle attitudes towards women and cosmetic use.