

LIFESTYLE / ARTICLE

Karlie Kloss's Ribs Were Photoshopped – But Airbrushing Isn't the Only Problem

BY SARAH KRICHEFF | SEPTEMBER 28, 2012



Greg Kadel's photograph of model Karlie Kloss, left, and the retouched image of Kloss printed in Numéro magazine.

Karlie Kloss is a beautiful girl. She's also a beautiful girl who is extraordinarily thin. Regardless of whether or not she is naturally built this way, she *appears* unhealthy by any reasonable standard.

So I'm baffled by the fashion bloggerati's reaction to the recent alteration of a photo of Kloss in the Japanese magazine *Numero*. The original image, released by photographer Greg Kadel's studio earlier this week, shows the skeletal model stretching her arms up and back, ribs and sternum sharply protruding. The image that will appear in *Numero*, released by the magazine Wednesday, has clearly been Photoshopped, with Kloss's bones and waist neatly smoothed over with an inch or so of digital flesh. (Note: Even in *Numero*'s image, Kloss looks too thin by *healthy* standards.)

Most writers used the incident as a springboard to discuss the objectionable practice of Photoshopping models in fashion magazines.

Some were annoyed that Numero airbrushed Kloss's ["banging body,"](#) and said that Kloss looked ["strong and sexy"](#) in the original shots. One journalist [delicately touched](#) on the subject of reverse Photoshopping and wondered what this particular incident means. In a [smart piece](#) for Jezebel, Jenna Sauers discussed the job requirements of being a model and the "veneer of unreality" that results from retouching. Even Kadel's studio responded with a statement, expressing the photographer's displeasure that his work had been manipulated.

The fact is, this story goes beyond Photoshop and the ethical implications of digitally altering images of women in magazines. Those are important issues that deserve attention and space in the media, but focusing on them here seems like a missed opportunity and an easy way to deflect the real issue.

The obvious problem is that standards imposed on models – that they must be stick-thin, at any cost – by the fashion industry are irresponsibly embraced and exulted on designers' runways, in the media, and by advertisers. Everyone knows that images of waif-like models cement unattainable ideals of perfection in the imaginations of girls and women around the world, and can lead to dangerous and tragic consequences. When pro-anorexia websites reappropriate and celebrate images from high-profile fashion magazines – as was [the case last year](#) when an equally jarring image of Kloss appeared in the pages of Vogue Italia – you know you have a problem.

The fashion industry seems to have created a sort of Catch-22: Its standards of attractiveness are ultimately deemed unattractive by the

people who hold the reins at the magazines that support the industry. The quick Photoshop fix is misleading and morally reprehensible. A shift in thinking and policy is the only appropriate and ethical solution – one hopes that would also lead to a more diverse, reality-based representation of women’s bodies in media.

For now, models will still wobble down the runways on boney knees, folding into themselves and weighted down by the garments they display. But if more journalists stopped acting like cheerleaders for the fashion industry, and more advertisers owned some sense of social responsibility, photo editors might not have to airbrush frighteningly prominent hip bones, ribs, clavicles, and sternums out of women’s bodies anymore and we could end this argument once and for all.

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