



# PHOTOSHOP & THE FEMALE FIGURE

**The most  
common  
victim of the  
Photoshop  
disaster**

*Post-production is a polarizing topic in the photography business. There are those who embrace the infinite possibilities promised by digital manipulation programs. Others believe the simplicity of sliders makes it far too easy for dishonesty slip into an otherwise factual medium. Shawn Daniel McLeod, a Calgary-based photographer with a flair for dark subject matter, falls into the former camp.*



McLeod first experimented with photography back in the film days. Sick of butting heads with the technology of the time, McLeod moved into graphic design where he felt the tools of the trade gave him more creative control. Years later, photo-manipulation software caught up to his artistic ambitions. McLeod now specializes in female fashion photography. His shots are painstakingly staged and heavily polished. While most people associate Photoshop with a post-production catchall for any mistakes on set, McLeod considers it a fundamental component of his work.

Photoshop Disasters spoke to McLeod about the role of post-production in his craft. We were particularly interested in the way he handled the female figure—one of the most frequent

victims of the Photoshop disaster.

### **How would you describe your niche in the photography world?**

Creative fashion for alternative girls. Fashion and beauty is my forte. I like to offer my professionalism to girls with tattoos, piercings, pink hair and that kind of stuff. I find they haven't received enough publicity in the big fashion market.

### **How much of your photography involves post-production?**

All of my work.



### **To what extent?**

I mainly use Photoshop for cleaning things up and moving things around. I do dabble in adding extra effects or things in the background, but right now I mostly use it for cleaning up clothing or taking things out of the picture that change the composition. Say someone's arm is in the wrong position—I might move the arm. Or I'll change the lighting on a particular part of the body in order to change the focus of the image.

### **How comfortable are you with manipulating a model's body?**

Personally, I don't go too far. I don't like to make the skin look too photoshopped or too smooth. I remove blemishes, but I tend to leave some of the scars that really set the personality of the person. I don't even go over

[those manipulations] with the model.

When I do a shoot, I'll sit down with the model immediately after and go through all the photos then and there. They might see a picture and be like: "Oh my god, I look crazy" or "My arm looks fat. Can you do something about that?"

Of course I can.

### **Has a model asked you to do something that you've had to refuse?**

Nope. If they want something, it's totally up to them. It's as much their picture as it is mine. I want to create something that we're both going to be really proud of.



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**How would you define a Photoshop Disaster in your line of work?**

Over cloning. If the clone tool is used improperly it can remove texture. You can see smooth dots all over the face where there were blemishes. Also, manipulating the shape of the body itself with the liquefy tool. I've seen people overdo the waist. There are instance out there were people just don't see it right.

**Do you think that has to do with the amount of heavily altered imagery we see in magazines and advertisements? Even when Photoshop isn't the main culprit, we're constantly subjected to unrealistic body images? Are we becoming desensitized to the natural human form?**

It very well could be. In many cases [the mistakes] come out as someone trying to create their idea of beauty. The tabloids and media have tainted a lot of people's idea of what that it.

In the runway industry, they use 14- or 15-year old girls as the perfect image of beauty. You have to be 90 pounds in order to be on the runway. Other girls see this. When they do a shoot with a photographer sometimes they're the ones asking for the crazy manipulations.

**What's your idea of beauty?**

The type of girls I shoot are very creative and individual. I like girls with alternative style because they're more comfortable with their personal appearance. There's something that I find inherently attractive about that.

**Who are some Photoshop artists that you admire?**

There's a group on Facebook called Dark Beauty Magazine. The work that people do on there is insane. The way they use Photoshop for manipulating backgrounds, light, texture, and skin tone makes me want to just grab someone out of the hallway and start taking pictures of them and make art.

images and interview courtesy of

# SEAN DANIEL MCLEOD