

RETOUCHED

R E T O U C H I N G E D U C A T I O N

BEAUTIFUL SKIN

FROM START TO FINISH

INDUSTRY INSIDERS ON SKIN RETOUCHING / FIXING SATURATION ISSUES / NEWS

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Michal Karcz's compelling and oftentimes haunting work is instantly recognizable by his army of fans. Discover the sources of his inspiration and some tips for your own photo manipulations in this exclusive interview.



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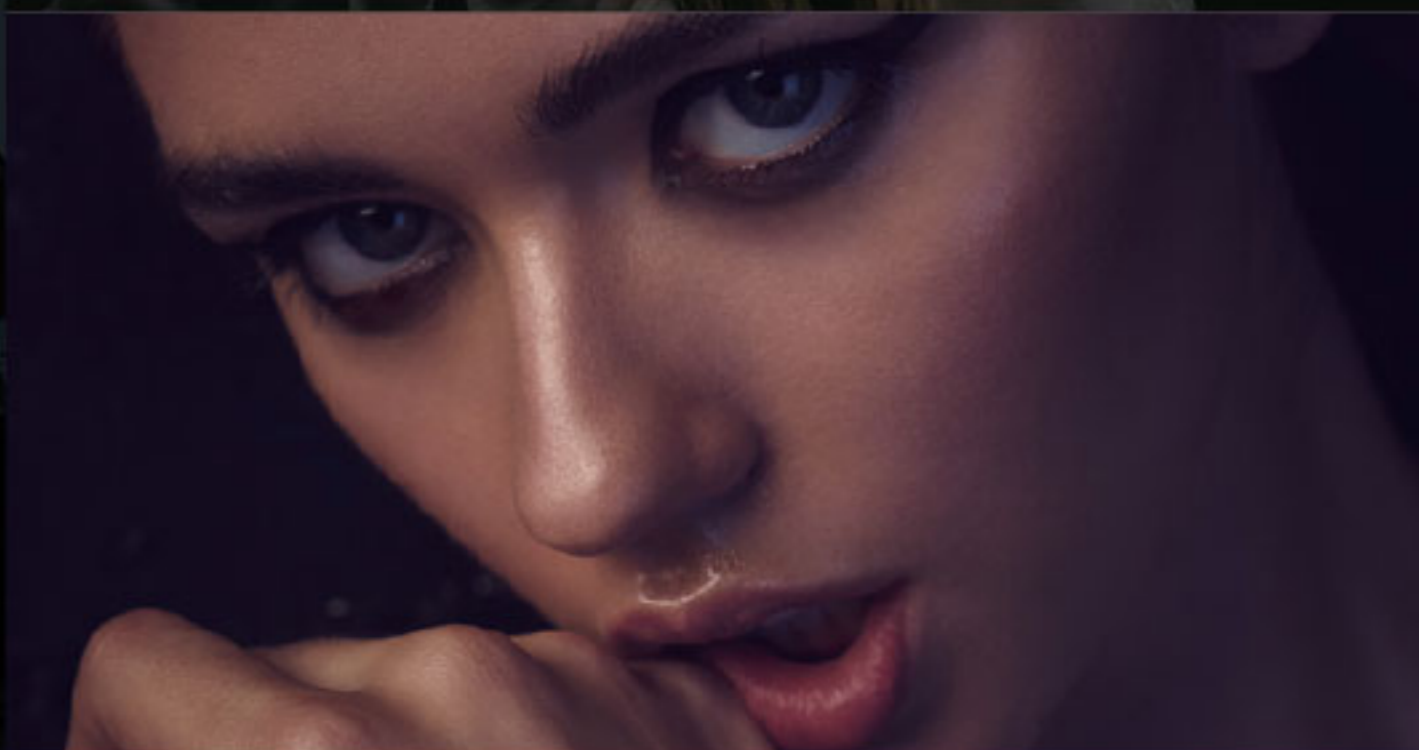
INDUSTRY INSIDER: BEAUTIFUL SKIN

In this month's Industry Insider, four top industry pros share their perspective on the latest trends in



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Daniel Meadows



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Pratik Naik



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FEATURING

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MICHAŁ KAR CZ

Michał Karcz is a Warsaw, Poland-based artist who graduated from the High School of Art and the School of Commercial Advertising in Warsaw. He has worked as a freelancer in his own studio since 2007.

michalkarcz.com



PRATIK NAIK

Pratik is a fashion and commercial high-end retoucher with more than 10 years experience in the industry. His Fine Art background has influenced his vision and has helped him develop a very natural style. Aside from retouching, Pratik also teaches retouching workshops around the world.

solsticeretouch.com





INTERVIEW WITH
**MICHAŁ
KARCZ**

BY PHILIP SYDOW

Michał Karcz is known for his haunting, desolate vistas and eerie, post-apocalyptic scenes. We had a chance to connect with Michał and learn more about what distinguishes his compelling work from other digital artists.

How did your journey as an artist begin?

Ever since I can remember, this kind of activity has been my way of expressing myself, to move my ideas into the real world. I became more serious about it when I started painting. It was before I went to the School of Art in 1992. During the five years of my studies, I had created some oil paintings inspired by my dreams and visions, but I was not so happy with the final effect. They were not so polished and lacked dynamism and realism so I just left them and took up photography, which started to fascinate me.

At that time, photography was still analog (materials and developing chemicals, machines and techniques). It was very complicated, especially when it came to mountain trekking and photo shooting. Gear was heavy and bulky because I used medium format cameras and 6x6 film, but each frame was created with more patience and heart. After the big revolution that brought about digital photography and more advanced editing software, I found that I could create one piece by using both tools. In the beginning, it was quite hard. I worked at it for years, exploring the creative possibilities to do what was important to me.

Now, I choose my clients and projects carefully, selecting only those that are interesting and inspiring. Those that could fully use my skills and



imagination. I set the bar high for myself and don't want to lower it. Without doing those things, I could feel unrealized, dull, my life pointless. I can tell that I feel almost complete in this field, but I know that there are still many things to do. Everything flows and I'm going with it. With thoughts, time, life. I'm still searching for more. New and different ways of making artistic statements are waiting and I'm starting to discover them, but that's another subject and story for another time!

Everything I do is tailored to a specific mood that is inspired by the music I listen to mostly, but also my dreams, fears, feelings, and observations too

Having transitioned to being a digital composite artist, what aspects of your traditional painting education continue to help you now or influence your techniques?

My inspirations regarding theme, mood, composition, and use of colors come from painters, especially from [Zdzisław Beksiński](#), [John Martin](#), [Caspar David Friedrich](#) and some futuristic visionaries like [Mœbius](#) and [Syd Mead](#). The dramatics, frame composition, coloring, and main theme captured in my artwork is often based on my fascination with the work of these painters and they are always somewhere around me, circling, their spirits noticeable in my artworks.



Although I don't think about my paintings now as I create my digital work, they do still have a major influence on my approach. This is because my workflow is based on the same scheme I used with my paintings regarding preparations, background, and pasting of layers. I care almost obsessively about composition, details, and colors and try to make an image as close to the first vision I have of it.

You mentioned painters whose work still influences you. Are there contemporary photographers or other digital artists whose work has a similar influence?

No, I don't have any photographer role models or digital artists who influence my techniques at the moment, but I do have some favorites I like to follow and whose skills I admire; I just don't base my inspiration on their works.

One of the things we really appreciate about your work is its unique style. Does it work for you when it comes to commercial assignments also?

Thank you very much. It's not easy to be unique these days. Thousands of great, self-taught artists and visionaries publish their work around the globe. Internet-based artistic portals are a very good place to present to the world. In one moment, you can be famous if you're good and original.

That's a great point. How do you achieve such originality in your work?

Everything I do is tailored to a specific mood that is inspired by the music I listen to mostly, but also my dreams, fears, feelings, and observations too. I think that approach isn't as popular and not everyone can find something for him or herself in my work. Although I receive many words and signs of admiration, my work is not so broadly appealing or as easily interpreted as traditional landscape photography is, for example.



This also affects commissioned work. When someone comes to me with an assignment, he already knows that my style will fit his vision and medium, whether that is a book, music, or a movie. On the one hand, this is good because such a client isn't asking me to create something outside my style and mood, which I love and I stick to strictly.

For example, with music cover artwork, I always ask for sound samples or whole music to get the feel of it, to make sure it is appropriate and to build images in my head inspired by the material. I do not accept projects that do not interest me in any way. I couldn't produce music covers like a factory. It's a pleasure and job, but it's also about self-realization for me too.

I dream each night. Very vivid and realistic, lucid dreams. Full of places I don't know... people, and dramatic and beautiful moments

On the other hand, I miss doing something different and original, something less complicated and unique in terms of searching for new means of expression. If someone asks me for my art, he knows my achievements and as a result, his vision is properly focused, but that excludes any new challenges in creation.

So your clients generally know what they want when they approach you since they're familiar with your style. Do they typically purchase your existing work or hire you to create something original just for them?

Client work tends to be split 40/60 between already made artworks that labels, musicians, or publishers want to use and commissioned work I create from scratch, influenced by the materials I receive from the client to serve as inspiration.

You mentioned that your work has many influences, from dreams to music to certain emotions. Can you tell us a bit about that and which influences in particular shape your work today?

Mostly what shapes and influences my work is the music, which is my second passion. I listen to music almost the entire day, every day. I even go to sleep listening to it. It's something like an addition to my course of life, the background by which I see world in a different way. Since 2004, most of my artwork titles are the same as the tracks that inspired them. Based on e-mails and comments I have received, titling my work in this way helps many people find and explore new musical genres and areas. By paying tribute to the original music artists, I help them find new fans, which is something I really love to do.

My second important inspirational source is my dreams. I dream each night. Very vivid and realistic, lucid dreams. Full of places I don't know (or don't remember from my past lives), people, and dramatic and beautiful moments. It's almost like watching a movie with a clear screenplay, locations, and characters. It all stays in my head, the imagined places and events. I remember the dreams from many years ago, and sometimes I come back to these places again. They're all influenced by fears that we struggle with in real life, the news, the whole condition of humanity and our planet. Everything that moves and disturbs me. You can see so many of these places, fears, and feelings in my pictures. They're more emotional than any others. My goal is to stop the viewer and have him experience the same things.



Obviously, having such dreams contributes to the uniqueness of your work. Can you describe the technical challenges you encounter and how you overcome them?

I think it's a different process than a normal photo shooting session. Many people think that it's easier to shoot pictures and stitch them together later. I think it's obviously more difficult to create a photo montage if you care about the quality because you still have to shoot good pictures and that's only the beginning of the whole creative process. Normally, photographers just post-process their Raw files and they're done. For me, that's where the journey starts.

Everywhere I go, I take my camera with me because I never know when I will be somewhere and experience a moment that I will want to let through my imagination filter. A place, a time, a memory – I see all of reality through the lens. I see frames, possible pictures, scenes, and compositions. In most cases, I know right away how I could affect the reality. This is like starting a creative machine right after first sight.

Do you have a particular workflow you follow that you can share with our readers?

First comes the initial picture. Then I create a mood in the existing photograph with the help of some lighting effects, colors, or curves or with a deeper intervention using photo manipulation, creating a collage with different elements, after which it becomes a completed work. I try to do my best, involving my best skills to create a picture that will be as close as possible to my first vision and primal inspiration.

Each work processes existing places, so any observant person can find among them familiar parts of the landscape. In my creative process, thought and idea come first. After that, I search for appropriate elements of composition, places, or moments. Very often, this takes a long time.



I still have many projects that haven't been realized because of lack of materials. I'm mixing my pictures in one piece from individual pieces, taking care when it comes to the composition to retain a natural looking final effect. I want everything to be done so that no one can distinguish what is real and what is montage. Appropriate coloring, shadows, lighting, precise cutting, and pasting.

Of course, whether I make a photo manipulation or shoot clean photography, light is the creator of mood and can make a picture seem three-dimensional. Many artists who use similar techniques forget about this, but lighting is the most important thing. I try to use it quite properly in my work. Doing so helps create the perfect environment for my visions and makes my photomontages appear natural.

**I see all of reality through the lens.
I see frames, possible pictures, scenes,
and compositions.**

I catch the best light during the morning and late afternoon “golden hours”. During the golden hour, more blue light is scattered, so if the sun is present, its light appears more reddish. In addition, the sun's shallow angle with the horizon produces longer shadows. The picture is richer in details and moodier, with contrast and warmth. I also like the very nice, cinematography-like effects that can be made during the blue hour too. The blue hour is the period of twilight each morning and evening when the sun is at a significant distance below the horizon and the residual, indirect sunlight takes on a predominantly blue hue.

I don't shoot in the middle of the day because light is straight overhead and produces short shadows that flatten the view and the pale sunlight makes natural colors unattractive. Before a trip or special photo shoot, when the final effect depends on lighting, I must plan at which hour I need to be in a particular place to achieve great light and shadows. No matter where I go, I always pack full gear into my photo backpack, plus a tripod, of course. The locations where I shoot depend on accessibility and form because I need to be able to shoot photographs as close as possible to my original idea.

What advice can you offer readers interested in creating their own surreal yet believable composites?

In matters of creation, you should always strive to match your output to your imagination. Find your own treatment and feeling that defines your kind of style. Don't be afraid to use digital tools to make your vision more fantastic, closer to your imagination, and how you see things through your own eyes. They are no different than any other tool. Modern photographers use them to increase the possibilities and lower any limitations imposed by their gear or the moments they experience. Remember that the final effect should be stunning, whether it involves photography, music, sculpture, or photomontage.

Use all possible ways to fulfill your dreams and ideas. Be patient climbing the ladder of excellence. Don't seek shortcuts.

Be precise and keep in mind a clear composition, collecting elements of the picture in such a way as to fit them together to form a believable environment. Pay particular attention to shadows, the direction of the light and its effect on objects and structures, and the ambient light in a natural environment.

Observe.



Don't be afraid to imitate others while improving, but try to create your own style, ultimately. Only this will help you to have a better chance to achieve success and break through as an artist. Plan the whole composition and remember the principle of the [golden ratio](#). It matters in each visual technique.

Buy a graphics tablet. It can be a cheap one in the beginning. Learn to use it. Soon you will feel that you cannot do without it and precise cutting and processing will make your artworks better and better, and make your workflow and possibilities absolutely better than using a standard mouse.

Even if it's composing, try to start your work on a large enough canvas so that you can print it later in high quality or sell for multiple needs. If you have a powerful enough computer, develop your Raw base pictures as 16-bit TIFF files using the [AdobeRGB color space](#). Those two things will greatly enhance your processing capabilities and influence your ability to achieve better final results.

Try to use stock pictures only in special cases or only when you lack other options. Of course, it's up to you how you treat this work and what you want to do with it in the future, but when you want to sell your work and it includes too much stock imagery, that could be a barrier, not to mention it could make you a little bit lazy! It's more fun and satisfying when you earn admiration for work that is completely yours.

And one last thing that should be obvious: Don't give up. Do what you have to do, pay attention, and follow constructive critiques. **RE**