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Vogue Russia Features First Plus-Size Cover Model

By Samantha Berkhead

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Dutch model Jill Kortleve has become an advocate for body positivity and diversity in the fashion industry since becoming a plus-size model. **Vogue Russia / Instagram**

Vogue Russia has featured a plus-size model on its cover for the first time in its 23-year history, drawing equal celebration and condemnation.

The magazine's November issue, which focuses on the upsides and downsides of the modeling industry, features Dutch model Jill Kortleve wrapped in a black Gucci jacket with feather trim, her unretouched backside visible to the camera.

Embed:

Посмотреть эту публикацию в Instagram

Публикация от Vogue Russia (@voguerussia)

Kortleve “proves that beauty does not and cannot have a size,” the magazine wrote in its Instagram post unveiling the cover on Tuesday.

“Plus-size models are a global trend, and Jill's story looks positive from all angles,” Vogue Russia editor-in-chief Ksenia Solovyeva wrote in her letter from the editor. “Yes, the industry has many problems. But things are moving fast.”

The cover has garnered mixed reactions, with some hailing it as a step forward in embracing so-called “real” bodies — and others arguing that presenting a conventionally beautiful model only slightly larger than the industry norm as “plus-size” could do more harm than good.

“God, what a thrill to look at a real body without retouching,” one Instagram user commented.

“Very cool! I hope this will help a 10-year-old girl to not start dieting in order to stay in the fashion world,” another wrote.

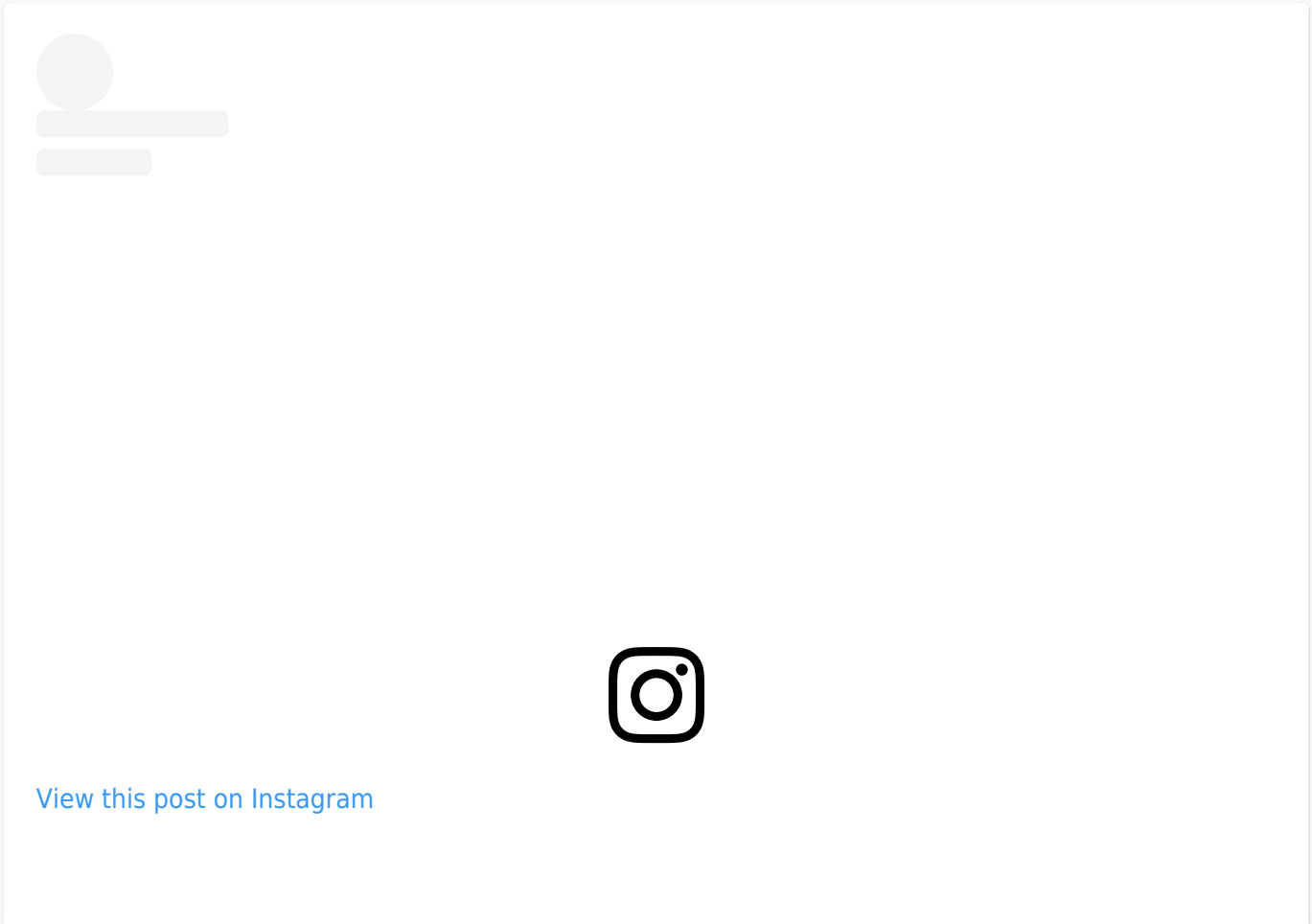
But in a country where activists say women feel acute pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards in order to appeal to men — and where body positivity is still a fairly novel concept — the cover does little to challenge existing paradigms, critics say.

“The saddest, most hysterical thing is that even this girl gets called a ‘cow’ and ‘fat’ by men on the internet,” St. Petersburg-based artist and body-positive activist Miliyollie wrote in an Instagram Story.

“I initially liked [the cover] until I started reading into the message,” Asya Lunegova, a blogger and activist who writes about body confidence, told The Moscow Times. “In this new type of ethics, a supposedly plus-size girl must be shown naked so that these notorious three [waist] folds, which supposedly distinguish her from ordinary models, can be seen. Vogue constantly flirts with the theme of inclusion.

“This girl is thinner than me ... and she has already been credited as plus-size, although she’s about a size medium. It’s rather the norm, especially for Russia, where there are a lot of bigger girls in general — and I'm not just talking about weight, but also height,” Lunegova said.

Embed:



At the start of her modeling career, Kortleve, 27, strove to fit into the industry's strict size limits with rigid dieting, but eventually made a conscious decision to stop restricting herself.

Since then, she has walked runways for Versace, Michael Kors, Kate Spade, Valentino, Mugler and more while advocating for body positivity and diversity in the fashion industry.

The Vogue Russia cover is not the first time Kortleve has broken barriers in the fashion world. In 2020, she became the first plus-size model to walk the runway for Chanel in a decade. She was also the first non-sample-size model to ever walk for Fendi and Versace.

"In the past, the standard for models has always been slim and I think that the most important thing is to be healthy, whether that's being skinny or a size 16. As long as you're healthy, that's what's important," Kortleve said in a 2020 interview with i-D magazine.

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