

# Mike Ruiz

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Photos provided by Project Publicity

Hailing from Montréal and now based in New York, Mike Ruiz is best known for his high-impact, colourful celebrity photography. He shoots them all: Justin Timberlake, 50 Cent, Beyonce Knowles, Kathy Griffin and, of course, his good friend RuPaul. Ruiz, however, is more than your average Chelsea muscle boy. The model turned actor, turned photographer, director, songwriter and television personality is showing that his strength goes way beyond what's bulging under his shirt.

Oddly enough, the man who has made a career out of glorifying beauty grew up as a self-described ugly duckling, before losing his baby fat and pursuing a modelling career. At nineteen, he flew to Paris and landed campaigns with Versace and International Male. Acting soon followed, and Ruiz found a role in "Latin Boys go to Hell." But neither modelling nor acting inspired him. It wasn't until he picked up a camera at age 28 that he found true inspiration and began making a name for himself in fashion's inner circles.

Ruiz just finished judging a season of *Canada's Next Top Model* (which just premiered on CTV on May 26) is getting ready to help with the new season of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and is developing his own show, the *10-10's*. With all this, Ruiz hasn't had time to decorate his new Chelsea flat; but he did take the time to talk to *Outlooks* about model catfights, being a "10" and where he plans on spending pride this summer.

**Outlooks:** You proudly claim to be born and raised in Montréal. Where do you call home now?

**Ruiz:** Yes, I was born and raised off East Island Montreal and I've moved around a lot; but I'm back in New York. I'm here for only about 10-12 days a month but I'm always happy to come back to New York, I've always felt at home here.

**Outlooks:** How often do you make it back to your "Home and Native Land?"

**Ruiz:** Not a tonne; but I will be back a lot more. I just signed a three-year gig with *Canada's Next Top Model*, and am pitching other shows to Canadian television, so I'll be visiting much more frequently.

**Outlooks:** How do Canada's Next Top Models compare to America's?

**Ruiz:** The Canadian girls are awesome! Out of the gate, I was astounded by how many of them could walk straight into the modelling industry and start working with no problem. They are legitimate talents and not just characters for television.

**Outlooks:** Any model drama?

**Ruiz:** Every day there was jaw-dropping drama. You just can't make that stuff up! Aside from a few tears on the runway, I didn't witness it first-hand; but, after the judging, all hell would break loose.

**Outlooks:** How did you get into the fashion industry?

**Ruiz:** I've always been interested in fashion, ever since I was a chubby little kid shopping with my mom. I would pick out her clothes, but she wouldn't go for it, which is probably why she was such a wreck. She could have been fierce! I used to make my own clothes, read GQ, buy things, alter them, and make them my own. I always loved fashion and then started modelling when I was seventeen.

**Outlooks:** Was it a natural progression into photography or did you get tired of the business?

**Ruiz:** I did the whole circuit. Trying to make it as an "ethnic" looking model at that time in Montreal it wasn't easy. I did a little better in Europe, and then found success in Los Angeles. The money from that enabled me to start funding my photography.

**Outlooks:** What were some of your first photography jobs? Who was your first celebrity shoot?

**Ruiz:** I was lucky because I was working almost straightaway. Long before Photo-shop, I used to hand-paint the shots that I took. It was new and different and I worked with some European magazines and shot ad campaigns. But it wasn't until I started being true to myself, shooting really fantasy-driven, over-the-top stuff, that photography paid off. As for the first celebrity, it was Karina Lombard from the *L Word* and I was so nervous I thought I was going to die.

**Outlooks:** Which shoots stand out as some of your favourites?

**Ruiz:** People with great energy inspire me. I loved shooting Jenna Jameson. Her energy is incredible. I also loved working with Dita Von Teese and Kathy Griffin. Kathy's unbelievable in front of the camera and a really kind and generous person. I think she's fantastic.

**Outlooks:** Are you one of her "gays?"

**Ruiz:** I am!

**Outlooks:** Who are you gagging to shoot?  
**Ruiz:** Madonna. There's something so enigmatic about her, and I see her as a driving force of pop culture.

**Outlooks:** What's next for you?

**Ruiz:** I'm going to be busy promoting *Canada's Next Top Model* and then I'm working on a lot of different stuff. I've got a show called the *10-10's* that I'm pitching, based on a group of models that I used to run with. People are pretty interested in it, it's dark, like *Nip/Tuck* meets *Gossip Girl*, meets *Queer as Folk*. I'm also co-writing a song with Traci Lords and will direct her music video.

**Outlooks:** Will you have time to take in any pride events this summer?

**Ruiz:** I'm actually heading to Toronto with RuPaul. She'll be performing, so I thought I'd go with her.

**Outlooks:** What makes you proud?

**Ruiz:** I'm proud of the circle I've created around myself and happy that I am able to see the world through rose-coloured glasses. I'm proud of where I've come as an openly gay man in this world, and that I don't need to monitor myself anymore.



Mike and Katy Perry

**Outlooks:** How many models try to sleep with you in a given week?

**Ruiz:** Not nearly as many as I try to sleep with [he laughs]. No, actually, what inspires me visually and what inspires me sexually are two different things. The models I shoot are scrawny and quirky; but I go for hunky. What can I say... I'm a Chelsea boy from the 80s.



Mike and Kathy Griffin

on the set of 'Style Her Famous'



Want to get a little closer to Mike? Join his Facebook fan page: <http://tinyurl.com/mikeruizfb> or check out his home page: [www.mikeruiz.com](http://www.mikeruiz.com)