Mirage maker: Lego Porsche 911 RSR in the desert

02/12/2020 Meet Tomek Makolski: the photographer changing perceptions with Lego and a lens.

Tomek Makolski is on a mission to slow us all down. In our hard-charging digital world, where most images are only appreciated for a few seconds, the Polish photographer wants his creations to give us pause.

You might well remember one of Makolski's earlier works. In 2017 the successful commercial photographer took a series of atmospheric night shots of his native Warsaw before superimposing an apparently life size Lego 911 GT3 RS onto the images. The idea caught the public imagination, its mixture of skilful camera work and ingenious post-production techniques creating striking and playful pictures that stood apart from the more familiar tropes of automotive social media.

Makolski is passionate about his subject. A keen driver himself, he attends regular trackdays and is not averse to driving ten hours to revisit his favourite alpine passes. He also loves Porsche. “As a car enthusiast I think Porsche is a special brand,” the 29-year-old says. “I was born in Poland in 1990 and we didn't see many in the streets growing up, so it's always been a dream car. I've had a few opportunities to drive different models thanks to my work and Porsche is definitely my favourite sports car brand. I really like the whole community.”

Amid a busy professional schedule that covers portraiture, fashion, food and lifestyle photography, the automotive sector still has a special place and when Makolski is not working with Formula 1 teams and major car manufacturers, he remains keen to experiment.

When Porsche and Lego revealed the new 911 RSR, Makolski jumped at the chance to try something new. He travelled to Dubai and shot numerous locations that would serve to both contrast and enhance the RSR, the desert's dramatic light and arid landscapes a far cry from the familiar surroundings of Porsche's championship-winning GT racer.

The results are an eye-catching collection of static and action images, complete with motion blur and even the occasional flicker of unburnt fuel. But the defining characteristic of all the images, amid the dry dust and the hot black asphalt, is the authentic light that Makolski was at such pains to accurately replicate.

“I shot the car in the studio in Warsaw,” he explains, “and applied all the light there. It was essential to reproduce it exactly as it was on location before going into post-production. There, with the help of Kamil Karpiski at adspringer.com, we put everything together, including the additional blur and flames.”

Today, the RSR sits behind him on a shelf in his apartment. He built it during lockdown and found the process strangely cathartic. “It took three evenings and was actually a great experience. I just poured myself a glass of wine and turned on some music. There is so much disturbance these days and this exercise allowed me to focus on one thing, which is so healthy for the mind.”

Following a second successful project, Makolski is determined to pursue this avenue of photography, where the real and imaginary meet almost seamlessly, and is currently exploring the possibilities of introducing CGI to extend the idea still further.

“Images today only exist for a few seconds before they're forgotten, so I want to really capture the viewer's attention and make them think for a while, to analyse the picture as if it was in a gallery or museum. We produce so much content these days that it is hard to do something that makes a bigger impact. So I love the idea of playing with people's perception.”

Info

Photos by Tomek Makolski.

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