

Jillian Mercado



Jillian Mercado is a disabled Latin model, who not only succeeded in breaking the stereotype, but with her success in the world of fashion, also started an unstoppable movement to ensure that disability *was* portrayed as an essential part of the mainstream. Her success has opened the doors for many more physically challenged people, who would otherwise not even consider Modeling an option.

Born on 30 April 1987 to a family of Dominican ancestry, Jillian spent her childhood in New York. Diagnosed with spastic muscular dystrophy as a child. Jillian was drawn towards fashion very early in her life, primarily because her mother, a dressmaker, would bring her work home and Jillian would spend hours with her, discussing fabric, design and colour combinations of dresses her mother made.

Growing up, Jillian pursued fashion merchandising at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology from 2006 to 2010. She completed her internships at Veranda and Allure magazine. Her interest in fashion, made her attend Fashion Week for years as a volunteer which ultimately gave her the opportunity to cover events for society photographer Patrick McMullan's PMC Magazine.

However, a career in Modeling was still a far cry for wheelchair-bound Jillian, who could only satisfy her cravings by occasionally modeling for fellow students' projects while at FIT. The almost complete absence of representation of people with disabilities in the fashion industry bothered Jillian, who would spend hours in trying to figure out ways to change the scenario.

The opportunity finally knocked at Jillian's door when in 2014, she featured in her first campaign for designer denim brand Diesel. The campaign opened the world of fashion industry for Jillian for she was noticed by IMG Models President Ivan Bart, who offered her a contract with the company. Jillian has since achieved exceptional success for herself, starring in several campaigns for Nordstrom, as well as in CR Fashion Book.

Jillian was one of the three models to appear in a campaign for Beyoncé's official website, promoting merchandise for the singer's new single and 2016 Formation world tour. Later she featured in editorials for *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *CR Fashion Book*. In 2018, Jillian became the first disabled cover star of *Teen Vogue*, featuring in the magazine's digital September issue.

Jillian continues to use her platform to push for greater representation for the physically challenged in the industry. Her activism, which focuses on the intersection of gender and disability, has included working with UN Secretary-General AntónioGuterres in 2018 to reduce inequality, one of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

