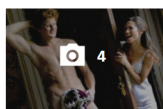
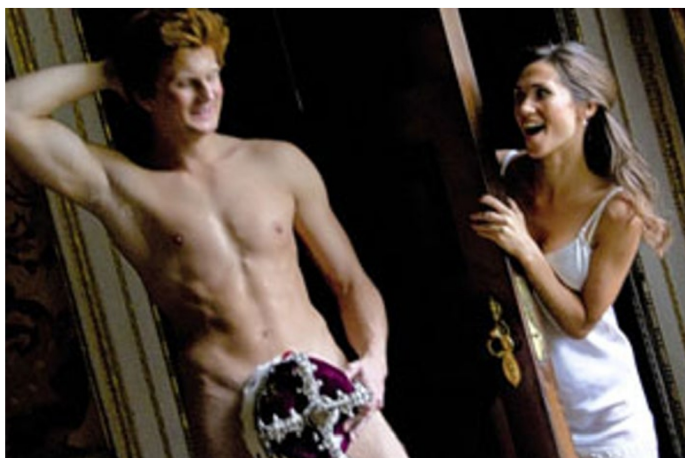


LIFESTYLE

Fake that! Meet Alison Jackson, the spoof-celebrity photographer



28 October 2011



Are there any subjects that are taboo for Alison Jackson, the spoof-celebrity photographer best known for her voyeuristic snapshots posed by lookalikes of Wills and Kate romping in private just before their wedding? What, for example, was her response to seeing the recent shocking footage of Gaddafi, bloodied and suffering, and later dead? Does that now make him out of bounds?

"I didn't do anything on him this week. There was nothing funny about that. What would have been more interesting, if I'd been going to do a piece on it, would have been, where was Tony Blair at that moment? What was he doing? Taking down his pictures of Gaddafi? Gaddafi influenced badly and in a glamorous way; all the leaders had a cosy time with him." She also wonders why he didn't have cosmetic surgery to change his appearance.

Appearances are important to Jackson since she has built an extremely successful career on blurring the boundaries between what is real and what appears to be real, by creating pictures of world leaders, politicians, royalty or celebs doing funny things in private. Except of course they are all posed by lookalikes. Grainy and slightly out-of-focus, they appear to have been snapped in secret, and are often framed through a window to enhance their peephole nature.

We have met to talk about her latest collection, *Exposed! 2011*, packaged as a trashy tabloid annual, showing Simon Cowell having his testicles waxed, Kate Moss drunk at her wedding, Russell Brand shagging in the garden shed, Galliano leading a kinky Nazi costume fashion show, Clegg tying Cameron's tie for him and Pippa undergoing anti-cellulite treatment on her bottom.

Some are funnier than others, some are more realistic than others, and Jackson is nothing if not self-critical. The Cowell lookalike had to be told to scream out loud while being waxed, the Brand double didn't look at all like him but was brilliant at styling himself with the wig, the Harry actor turned out to have "the most fabulous" body and the search for Pippa's bum-alike required a casting all of its own.

"They're definitely the rudest pictures I've ever taken and I only did them because the whole world wanted to know what kind of bottom Pippa had. We had to imagine it and casting took a long time. It was a committee decision with a cruel panel," says Jackson, who shoots everything herself on an iPad but employs large creative, production and post-production teams.

It took six years to find a convincing Gordon Brown and then two came along, just as he left office, she says. She's keen to do more political satire but needs better actors, especially for Cameron, as the current one is too tall, and she is looking for a new Nick Clegg, too. Camilla and Charles, she says, are "gone", whereas Kate and Wills are "so young and fresh, they're not old and fat, they're the future". Occasionally she accosts people in the street - she says she tries not to - and had a nasty row with a man after she told him he looked like Jeffrey Archer. "It's always difficult if they look like unattractive people."

Jackson insists she is not interested in the real celebrities and generally tries to avoid them. "I think it makes it more difficult for me to do my work so I don't want to be friends with them." But as her reputation and wealth have grown - the asking price for a large limited-edition print (one of five) at Hamilton's Gallery is £15,000 and there's a memorabilia shop on her website - she finds herself occasionally rubbing shoulders with them. She was recently at a charity event with Pippa Middleton. "But no, we didn't meet or talk. I was there for five minutes, donating a piece of work."

But while her work is shown in galleries and museums around the world, the pictures from this new book are getting their biggest exposure next week in *The Sun* and *Heat* magazine, no less. I suggest to Jackson this might confuse readers.

"I'm meant to be critiquing it, but suddenly it gets into something where I'm really creating the images the press can't get but everyone wants to see." So isn't she simply feeding the insatiable voyeuristic machine? "Well I like blurring the boundaries, that's the whole point for me. It wouldn't necessarily be my choice to do it that way, because I'd like to critique it, but suddenly I find I'm in it," she replies.

Paradoxically, Jackson dislikes talking about her own private life, even suggesting it is boring. "I think privacy is important, and it's important you don't bore people with your own boring self."

In fact, she was born in Hampshire to wealthy parents and had a reasonably conventional upbringing, going to the same boarding school in Sussex as the Duchess of York and attending Chelsea School of Art. Recently out of a relationship, she has never married or had children, has a reputation for being a perfectionist, as you would expect, and lives in Chelsea.

There is one subject however that makes her recoil, and that is her age. "Do I have to talk about it? I thought it was a woman's prerogative not to," she says. I point out the number of articles in the press stating she was born in 1960, making her 50 or 51, which to judge from her well-groomed appearance, would seem about right. But according to Wikipedia and two more recent pieces, she was born in 1970, which means 10 years have somehow been lopped off.

"It all gets completely changed, but do I have to say? It's not a criterion. It depends on what you're trying to do with your career."

So it turns out that in Alison Jackson's world of blurred boundaries and unreal appearances, there is a taboo subject after all.

Exposed! 2011 is published by Canongate, £12.99