

FAME AND FORTUNE ALISON JACKSON

'I used to fly to LA just to get my hair done. The cost was outrageous'

The artist famous for parody photos of celebrities may have lost out on the family fortune because she's a woman, but still has a designer-clothing habit and a worn out Amex card, she tells *Nick McGrath*

The artist Alison Jackson, grew up on a country estate in Hampshire inherited from the Hulbert family by her father, George, then moved to another grand home in Gloucestershire. She went to Croft House boarding school then worked as a receptionist at a Soho film production company until being accepted for a BA in sculpture at the Chelsea College of Art then an MA in photography at the Royal College of Art. In 1999 her photographs of a lookalike Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed with a mixed-race child caused a storm and in 2003 she made *Doubletake*, a BBC2 series that won a Bafta. In November 2016 she staged a rally featuring a Donald Trump doppelganger and women bearing slogans such as "Don't snatch my pussy". Her show *Double Fake* was at the Leicester Square Theatre in 2019. She lives in Chelsea.

How much is in your wallet?
I never had money in my wallet. I'm a bit like the Queen. I only have cards. Whether it's a pandemic or recession I never use cash. I might have some small change in my pockets for parking meters and rough sleepers, but that's it.

What credit cards do you use?
I have an American Express card that is so worn it looks like I've stolen it. It's always a terrible shock when the monthly bill comes.

Are you a saver or a spender?
A spender, although I wish I was a saver. I have to spend money on my work, so that's where my money goes. I might have to pay for a horse-drawn carriage to take the fake royal family down Piccadilly – the Queen, William, Charles, Harry, Kate, Meghan, the lot of them. It costs a lot to set those photos up. The single priciest item was Donald Trump's wig, which cost £15,000-£20,000. I went through about 20 stylists and none could do it properly. It's very, very difficult to get exactly right and now the only stylist that can do it is in New York, so I have to fly him everywhere I go with the Trump lookalike, just to repair the thing.

How much did you earn last year?
It was not too bad. When the chips are down people actually want my work because it stands out from the crowd. My exhibitions are all around the world. I've not been raking it in, but I'm not doing too badly and I still make money from collectors buying my photography.

DAVID M. BENETT/GETTY IMAGES



They range from about £7,000 each to £40,000 and the celebrities themselves sometimes buy the ones of them. Elton John bought a collection, so did a few others in LA.

Have you ever been really hard up?
It's kind of all the time because I do so much spending. I'm constantly trying to scabble to make more money, but the hardest was when I was a receptionist and busy writing scripts underneath the desk, and it was very, very tough. I lived in a horrible gloomy basement. I had no money to go out and have drinks. It was a pretty depressing kind of life.

Do you own a property?
I live in a lovely flat in Chelsea that is airy and sunny. I can't remember how much I paid for it or what it's worth, but I'm not planning on selling as it's so hard to find such nice properties in London.

Are you better off than your parents?
No. My parents were extremely wealthy. I was brought up in big houses, with Bentleys, Rolls-Royces, staff. My father inherited a huge house with lots of land from his mother and then went on to do an amazing deal with the land and made even more money. So he upgraded to an amazing house in Gloucestershire, with thousands of acres and further development opportunity with water parks and a few farms. My mother bred and trained horses, but when they died I didn't inherit my parents' wealth. Sadly my family believed in primogeniture, so my brother inherited everything. I got a tiny amount and some went on death duties. What is so great about men? Why do they want to give all the money to the



Alison Jackson at the Saatchi Gallery last year and her pictures of a lookalike royal family and Elton John

much energy. I feel that I haven't even started the voice that I've begun, but it is exhausting. I exhaust myself, but it really is fun. I do think property is important. I'd eventually like a house on a Greek island overlooking the sea.

What has been your best investment?
My education. I went to the Chelsea College of Art and then the Royal College of Art and I worked really hard to be accepted and they changed my life from uneducated, unaware receptionist to thoughtful, creative, focused, hard-working artist. Everything stemmed from that incredible education.

And the worst?
My last boyfriend. I wasted ten years of my life on him. And I hope he reads this. That was a complete waste of time.

Your most extravagant purchase?
Pre-Covid I flew to Los Angeles every two months to have my hair done by my stylist. In Europe nobody knows how to do California blonde, but she does California blonde absolutely perfectly. (I'm currently sporting this DIY crazy-rock-chick look.) I couldn't even tell you how much the whole exercise costs. I'm only there for a weekend but the cost is outrageous. I know I'd be better off saving that money and buying a diamond necklace. Ridiculous, isn't it?

What's your money weakness?
I love designer clothes. Given any opportunity I pop into Alexander McQueen and buy a jacket or something like that. I also love Balmain and Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik.

What is your financial priority?
To keep investing in my own work. My next big project is making a sculpture of the Queen on the loo, which I'll be exhibiting in the future. Will she have wrinkled stockings around her ankles? Something like that. Some Marks and Sparks knickers maybe. But I want to make other sculptures, but they're very expensive because they're so realistic, including the Donald Trump one I made, which I may try to sell to him. I had a show in Palm Beach, next door to Mar-a-Lago, that caused a lot of trouble. Gallery curators were really reluctant to display some Trump-related pieces, but the public – on both sides of the political fence – has absolutely loved them.

Do you support any charities?
I'm ambassador to the Spinal Injuries Association as my mother broke her neck riding a horse when she was younger and spent the rest of her life in a wheelchair. I also support Macmillan and Marie Curie.

What is the most important lesson you've learnt about money?
Don't worry about money. Do something that you like, make yourself really good at it, and then make money from that. I don't think you can really do something you don't like, because then you'll never be passionate about waking up in the morning.
@alisonjacksonartist

Do you invest in shares?
Funnily enough I've recently been dabbling and, I have to say, I'm pretty good at it. I saw that Tesla and Elon Musk have just been streets ahead of everyone else's thinking, so back in March I spent some savings on Tesla and I'll never look back. The other one I've invested in is Amazon. When I look at stocks and shares, that's what I'm looking for; somebody with a mind to the future.

What's better for retirement – property or pension?
I'll never retire because I've just got too

men? I just don't get it. When I found out about the inheritance it was a massive, cruel cold shock. I've witnessed the heartache and the viciousness of inherited wealth and it's revolting the way it makes people behave. I find people who have made their own money from nothing to be exhilarating, entrepreneurial and full of great ideas and I love them to bits.