

Alison Jackson

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Artist publishes spoof photos despite fear of being sued by Trump

Alison Jackson says 'litigious' president could have chilling effect on artistic freedom as she publishes book featuring Trump lookalike



▲ An image from Alison Jackson's book showing a Trump character with members of the Ku Klux Klan. Photograph: Alison Jackson

Artist Alison Jackson has said that she chose to self-publish spoof photographs of Donald Trump as part of a protest against the potentially chilling effect a "litigious" president could have on artistic freedom.

The celebrity lookalike specialist said she was warned by her lawyers against publishing the images, some of which feature a Trump lookalike in compromising situations, and that no book publisher was prepared to release a collection of the Trump images.

Vanity Fair and the Mail Online have published some of the images. However, no publisher has shown some of the most politically sensitive pictures she has produced, including one in which a Trump character is depicted with members of the Ku Klux Klan and another where he is shown holding a rifle.

"It is a little frightening. Nobody wants to end up in litigation with the president. But I find it outrageous that artists should be under threat from a president in the US," Jackson said.

"I wanted to publish photos that I wanted to shoot but it's very difficult to get other publishers to publish a work if they feel any type of threat or if they are worried in any shape or form. I don't even think it's a question of taste ... It's legal."

Jackson self-published her book, *Private*, which was released at the end of October. Previously Penguin has published coffee table editions of her work featuring apparently intimate spoof pictures of the Royal family, Tony Blair

According to newspaper analysis during the election, Trump and his businesses had been involved in at least 3,500 legal actions over the past three decades. Since his election, Trump has spoken warmly of British libel laws. His wife, Melania, is currently suing the Daily Mail and a blogger for \$150m (£119m) over allegations about her modelling career.



▲ The picture of 'Trump' holding a rifle - one of the more politically sensitive pictures. Photograph: Alison Jackson

Earlier this year, artist Ilma Gore received thousands of death threats after her images of a naked Trump with a small penis went viral. The LA-based artist asked a London-based gallery to manage the sale of the painting but was threatened with legal action from an anonymous filing under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in the US if she sold the painting.

Jackson was outraged by the case, comparing Gore to Ai Weiwei, the Chinese dissident artist arrested at Beijing airport in 2011 and held for 81 days without charge. "Of course I'm worried about being sued," said Jackson. "It is horrifying to find out that you could be sued by a president," she said. "But that is better than not being able to work."

Some of Jackson's images of Trump are explicit - one depicts the US president-elect having sex with Miss Mexico in the Oval Office. "If we start compromising artistic freedom, that's not a happy place," said Jackson. "Whether it's artists or cartoonists or satirists, there has to be free and radical thinking. Without that we get into the realms of dictatorship."

The British artist said she has never faced legal threats before. "This is a whole new arena," she said, pointing out that increased scrutiny was part of being in the public domain. "Isn't it unprecedented to think that a president would take legal action?"

As part of her preparations, Jackson staged a fake presidential cavalcade in New York with the fake Trump and scantily clad "first ladies" ahead of his election. The exercise quickly created a scene, she added.

Jackson said: "The 'Trump' in NY was extraordinary and I nearly didn't do it at all as everyone was so frightened of what might happen." Despite being stopped several times by the police, members of the public formed "flash mobs", which meant that the police "ended up escorting us to the Trump Tower."



▲ 'Donald Trump' in the Oval Office. Photograph: Alison Jackson

All kinds of artistic endeavour, from the cast of the *Hamilton* musical to *Saturday Night Live* have also come under fire from Trump directly. Most recently the *Saturday Night Live* sketch starring Alec Baldwin which implicated the president elect constantly tweeting unknown teenagers and possible bigots while in the middle of a security briefing provoked Trump who tweeted:

Just tried watching Saturday Night Live - unwatchable! Totally biased, not funny and the Baldwin impersonation just can't get any worse. Sad

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) December 4, 2016

Forced to consider the threat of legal action by her lawyers, who have never given such warnings before, Jackson said she had to fight against self-censorship. "It makes you frightened, it makes you put the brakes on and that is very worrying."

She admits that she will probably "think very carefully" about future work. "I don't want to be sued and I really don't want to be sued by the next US president."

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