

Alison Jackson, photographer-provocateur: 'That Diana photo got me in serious trouble'


[Follow](#)

 By **Angela Wintle**

17 FEBRUARY 2019 • 9:04PM

Alison Jackson, 48, is an award-winning photographer, film-maker and artist best known for her satirical pictures depicting the imagined private lives of celebrities, staged with lookalikes.

She first came to public attention in 1997 when she exhibited spoof photographs of Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Fayed cradling their mixed-race love child. She went on to win a Bafta for the BBC 2 series *Doubletake*. She lives in London.

How would you describe your childhood?

I was a very outdoorsy child and could ride almost before I could walk. I had a very bad education, but a fantastic upbringing.

My father [wealthy landowner George Hulbert Mowbray-Jackson] owned 25 vintage Rolls-Royces and Bentleys, which he kept in centrally heated garages. He even had his own petrol pump. It was a world of glamorous parties and swimming pools. It was very Downton Abbey because we had staff. At the time I thought everyone lived like that.

This rural idyll was shattered in 1972 when my father received a compulsory purchase order and a motorway was built right through the estate. Everything he had inherited was suddenly a horrible eyesore with a road going straight through the garden. He was devastated because he had grown up there.

I now realise that he was a very clever guy because, despite the motorway, lots of developers wanted to buy the land and he turned down repeated offers. As a result, the price kept going up and up.

Eventually, he agreed a fantastic deal [rumoured to have been £18m in today's money] which enabled him to upgrade to a wonderful estate in Gloucestershire.

Did you inherit any of that wealth?

Unfortunately, my father was very pro-primogeniture. My brother is phenomenally wealthy. I inherited five things, including a piano, the family dogs and my mother's horses. It's the most extraordinary situation. Money distorts people's judgment.



Photographs by Alison Jackson are sold for between £2,500 and £20,000 CREDIT: JEFF GILBERT

What was your very first job?

I was supposed to marry the son of my father's best friend who lived in the neighbouring big house. He was considerably older, but that didn't seem to matter. We were paired up.

My intended was good looking and nice, but I remember waiting for him to come home one evening, taking his meal in and out of the oven, and thinking this isn't the life for me.

Rashly, I got a job, aged 18, as a receptionist for a London-based film company. I can't remember what I was paid, but it wouldn't have been much.

My goal was to become a film director. I wrote a script in my spare time which won the New Directors' Award for Channel 4, but the company I was working for wanted one of their directors to direct it rather than me. That sort of thing has dogged my career.

What has been your biggest financial risk?

I was producing TV adverts for major companies, including British Airways. Nevertheless, I still wanted to direct, specifically Hollywood blockbusters, and because as a woman I wasn't being taken seriously, I thought I'd step back and educate myself.

I quit my job to do a BA in sculpture at the Chelsea College of Art, before moving to the Royal College of Art to study an MA in photography. After enjoying a regular income for eight years, I lived off my student grant and shared a house with lots of other people.

Was there an obvious financial turning point in your career?

In my final term I created staged photographs that apparently showed Diana and Dodi Fayed holding their mixed-race baby. I wanted to examine how Diana had been manufactured by the media and the racial prejudice surrounding their relationship.

That picture got me into serious trouble. The Royal College of Art was up in arms and wouldn't allow me to show it until the day I left. Prince Philip was due to open the graduates' leaving exhibition, but was ushered down a side corridor. It generated huge publicity and undoubtedly enhanced my career.

Lots of people came to see the work and even laid flowers beneath it. Out of that came *Doubletake*. I also did a very big advertising campaign with Schweppes, went on to work more for Channel 4, and was offered a book deal and all sorts of exhibitions.



Alison Jackson says her Queen Elizabeth lookalike is her role model CREDIT: JEFF GILBERT

What prices do your photographs fetch?

They range from £2,500 to £20,000. Quite a lot of my subjects buy my work, unless they're really annoyed with me.

I also do straight portraits [previous subjects have included actors Benedict Cumberbatch, Eddie Redmayne and Rosamund Pike] and I'm planning a new series.

Are your lookalikes well paid?

Yes, and some are very rich. My David Beckham lookalike drives a Porsche and bought a six-bedroom house with his earnings.

My Queen lookalike is well into her 80s and does her own negotiating. She's seriously tough and you can't budge her on money. She's my role model.

My most successful lookalike is Donald Trump, who I photographed in a fake Oval Office surrounded by scantily clad beauty contestants. When I took him to Trump Tower in the run up to the 2016 presidential election, we were flash-mobbed.

I'm hoping to make a documentary about Trump, but it's difficult to make a film about a serving president in America.

No broadcaster wants to be shut down. I'll probably have to make it independently.