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Alison Jackson



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Interview

Alison Jackson: 'I'd love to do Piers Morgan. I'd just use Susan Boyle. They're identical'

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Queen of the mock-doc Alison Jackson isn't short of material - just lookalikes



▲ Alison Jackson at Hamilton's gallery, London. Photograph: Antonio Olmos for the Observer

I have yet to meet anyone more excited about the royal wedding than photographer Alison Jackson. "Of course I'm excited," she laughs, over coffee at Hamilton's gallery in London's Mayfair. "It's A, if not THE, story of our time: royal line marries air hostess line," she giggles. "How utterly brilliant."

Spotting the potential of "lookalikes for satirical means" while a photography student in the 1990s, Jackson turned a seemingly gossamer concept into portraits and mock-docs, winning a Bafta in 2002 for *Doubletake*. Focusing on compromising fake footage of the Beckhams and the Blair/Bush "special relationship", the TV series cemented her role as a post-Warhol, post-*Spitting Image* celebrity voyeur.

It's this deep-rooted obsession with TMZ celebrities that has now led her to *Review of 2010*, "a satirical mixture of reality takes with real news, intercut seamlessly so that you can't tell what's real and fake".

Expressive and Kylie-tiny with a wave of blonde hair, Jackson does not look unlike Princess Diana. This is unnerving for two reasons: one, were Diana alive, they'd be the same age and two, Diana's death was precisely the moment Jackson became celebrity-mad.

"People mourned Diana's death more than their relatives. It was shocking. But Diana was the perfect celebrity and marked the birth of the celebrity magazine."

The royals - "a guarded, censored brand" - remain the meat of Jackson's most successful work and in timely fashion, she's now moved on to the royal wedding - "my main focus for 2011". Her latest shot, capturing the moment William and Kate stopped being virgins, will appear in *Royal Family* at the Hayward gallery in March.

Filming typically for Sky has been "taxing, tiring and solitary". She shoots at breakneck speed and achieves the grainy, peeping shots by using three phones - a BlackBerry, an Android and an iTouch - attached to a stick and filming simultaneously with everything turned around in about 12 hours.

But it's sourcing lookalikes that is trickiest: "Finding a Julian Assange has been a nightmare. And I've yet to find a good Charles. David [Beckham] can do everything, but Kate [Middleton] has about three versions - hair and body, face and the soundalike."

She found Barack Obama working in a shop in Thailand "but he can't speak English which is problematic" and she once, in desperation, ran up to Nicolas Cage to tell him what a wonderful lookalike he was ("His face!").

Is there anyone left? "I'd love to do Piers [Morgan]. Do you think he would mind?" He loves publicity, I reply. "He'd be easy then. I'd just use Susan Boyle. They're identical."