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Art

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## Buff and double bluff

Alison Jackson has fooled us before and will do it again, as this exclusive shot from her new TV show proves



▲ 'Really...? No, not really...' by Alison Jackson

**T**he diplomatic temperature may be rising hourly, but Bush and Blair can evidently take the heat. Seen here relaxing in the sauna at Camp David, the nature of their special relationship has never been so clear. Or has it? On closer inspection, the photograph is not what it seems.

The artist [Alison Jackson](#) has tricked us all before, and doubtless she will do it again. This exclusive new Jackson image is in fact pure artifice, a scene painstakingly faked to play upon the public appetite for voyeurism and sensation, even in the face of an international conflict. 'Photographic imagery in general is so beguiling and seductive,' says Jackson. 'It is always offering you a part truth.'

Jackson's controversial work first gained notoriety when she showed us a putative Diana, Dodi and child, living on happily in some parallel universe. The artist, who left art school in the late Nineties, deftly defended her work by explaining how she had been shocked by the scale of the public reaction to the death of the Princess of Wales, and had realised that the British people were mourning the death of an image, rather than that of a woman. 'The power of the image seemed to me to have become the important thing. I wondered if her image could go on after her death.'

A short film appearing to show Prince William trying on the Royal crown followed, and Jackson began to produce a series of images that aped blurred paparazzi photos or the grainy look of stolen footage. She went on to astound the suggestible viewer with a snatched shot of Camilla Parker Bowles and Prince Charles apparently choosing a ring in a bespoke jewellers. A provocative advertising campaign for Schweppes came next, featuring Jeffrey Archer caught off guard doing time in prison and a frisky Cherie Booth pinching her husband's bottom in the doorway of Number 10.

Each Jackson photograph is constructed carefully, with the aim of convincing while at the same time confounding all probability. 'I like to have ambiguities in each image. I like to suggest something, to tease, so the viewer has to use their imagination,' she says.

Double Take, Jackson's upcoming BBC2 series of six half-hour programmes, will stretch her technique still further. 'The shows have a strong visual bias, although there is some dialogue,' Jackson explains. 'The work is about the perception of celebrity and celebrity culture, so I try not to exaggerate like a satirist would. I try not to ridicule.'

Her progression into moving television images has been natural, she says. It gives her more time to build tension and to use her lookalikes' choreographed movements as part of the deceit. 'I storyboard it all. The lighting, make-up and camera angles are very detailed, but I'm led by the lookalikes themselves. They often give me fresh things,' she says. Several of the undercover stars of her work come from specialist agencies. Others, however, are recruited after a chance encounter. 'The Bush in the picture I actually met in America when I was working with a Clinton lookalike, and the Blair I use is great. He is someone from an agency I've used for a few years.'

Occasionally Jackson even finds herself running down the street after a celebrity double she has spotted. 'I have to see quickly what I could do with a wig, some make-up and a bit of prosthetics,' she says.

• Double Take begins on 17 March on BBC2, 10pm