

# Alison Jackson, Leicester Square Theatre, review: an appealing encounter with the doyenne of fake news



You've heard of The Jackson Five. Meet the Jackson Eight. At the launch of her convivial, engaging but somewhat slipshod stage-show, Alison Jackson – the queen of celebrity lookalike photography – doesn't make her appearance until seven replica versions of herself have already introduced themselves. The flash-mob army kitted out in identical blonde hair, black leather jackets, tight black trousers and stilettos makes such a sight, you're tempted to whip out your phone to take a snap until you remember that it's best to leave it to the pros.

Although Jackson does interviews – hardly maintaining Banksy-style reclusivity – this is the first big (albeit brief) opportunity for the public to put a face to the photo byline and get the inside scoop on a career built on visual fabrication.

Jackson, now 48, was the well-spoken bad-girl of the Royal College of Art – the authorities so scandalised by her interest in presenting creatively vandalised images of Princess Diana (after her death) that she was banned from exhibiting and kept confined to her studio, where she hatched her plans to use models.

She got the last laugh – in 1999, her mock-up black-and-white portrait of Di and Dodi with a mixed-race baby made her the new enfant terrible on the block. The rest is fake-history: images of the Queen on the loo or taking the corgis into a betting-shop, Wills and Kate reclining in the bath, George W Bush mounting a horse by stepping on the back of Tony Blair; her faux-furtive, “through the key-hole” illusions are so loved by the media that when pictures from Harry's wild weekend in Las Vegas leaked out in 2012, it was assumed to be her handiwork.

If you're enticed to drop into the cavernous Leicester Square Theatre (not nearly up-market enough, in my view; ideally this would happen inside the Groucho Club with spectators pressing their noses against the windows), be warned that the evening is light on theoretical insights. “I try to replace the real, not just create a fake,” she proffers, choosing soundbites over sustained argument – and later: “We live in a world of fake news, fake personalities, you cannot tell what's real anymore, the fake is more real than anything else – truth really is dead.” She anticipated the age of Kardashian and the “me, my selfie and I” phase that humanity seems to be sinking into, but the old adage that a picture says a thousand words rings truer than ever as you listen to her scattershot patter.

Rory Bremner – who else? – was located in the first-night audience and popped on-stage to give his penny-worth, extemporising on the weird voodoo that unites their differing embodiments of the famous; but his presence inadvertently reminded us that aside from her Bafta-winning TV series Doubletake, Jackson's stock in trade seldom enters the realm of full-on impersonation. Indeed, it's a bit of a let-down when she brings “Trump” up on stage – he looks the fake-tanned, bouffant part, but when he opens his mouth he's just an ordinary American bloke (a professional musician, we're told) given to slightly off-colour anecdotes (“Some women will walk up to me, give me their phone-number and let me grab them in the crotch”); the photo-op is eclipsed by Bremner's spot-on impression.



Fake Theresa May

Pluses? Well, ever on the look-out for lookalikes (the toughest part of the job, aside from dodging the police when organising public shoots and media circuses), she turns the venue into a celebrity cattle-market – with various contenders declaring themselves in the audience.

On Tuesday, there's a trio of Kim Ks (two of whom she gets made-over, complete with strap-on buttocks), a dead-ringer for Ricky Gervais (alas left in the stalls along with the spitting-image of Al-Fayed, Kate Moss and James Corden) and a Welshman uncannily like Prince Harry. She gets him up, along with a passable (fake pregnancy-bump assisted) Meghan, for a video-grab, then rounds things off with a Brexit boxing-bout between a very plausible audience-recruited BoJo, May and Corbyn. It put me in mind of that 1984 Two Tribes video in which Reagan and Chernenko slug it out as the world implodes. It's been done before, then, but few have created such a lengthy or lucrative stir as Jackson. In crazed times, her bonkers behind-the-scenes antics tell it like it is.

Until Thurs. Tickets: 020 7734 2222; [leicestersquaretheatre.com](http://leicestersquaretheatre.com)