

How do I look?

Alison Jackson

Photographic artist, 37

A life in brief

Alison Jackson was born in Hampshire in 1970. She studied sculpture at Chelsea College of Arts before gaining an MA in Fine Art Photography from the Royal College of Art in London.

Best known for her photographs of lookalike celebrities in compromising and controversial situations, she won a Bafta for her BBC2 series 'Double Take' and produced a satirical film for Channel 4, 'Blaired Vision'.

Her new book, 'Alison Jackson: Confidential,' published by Taschen, (£24.99) is out now (www.taschen.com)



'I'd stick safety pins through my ears'

I deal so much with fantasy and reality that I have a good sense of what I look like. Identity and image-making is something that's always fascinated me. It's amazing how much you can manipulate your body. For one thing, the six-hour days I spent riding a horse as a child, growing up, certainly channelled the way my figure would develop as I became an adult. People often mistake me for a dancer as I'm slight and toned, which I'm sure is a result of so much time spent in the saddle.

How much the models resemble the celebrities they imitate in my work is largely dependent on their hair, so designing this properly is really important. You have to be a stickler for detail, like Prince William always reveals the whites of his eyes, as did his mother. One of my models didn't have the right lips for his part - they didn't stick out enough - so he had to practise his expression and develop the muscles to change the shape of his face.

This makes me wonder whether you could change the shape of your body without resorting to surgery. Though I'm not in any way against cosmetic procedures, I'd be too terrified to participate. I can certainly appreciate it when women look well put-together as they get older.

Most people are very much aware that they have a public image as soon as they go out their front door, that others will judge them by how they look. I was aware of this from quite an early age, and aware of having to change clothes for different occasions. When staying with my grandparents, I'd know to change my outfit before dinner.

As I reached my teens I became very interested in clothes. I made my own and used to spray my boots different shades of gold and constantly changed my hair colour to all sorts of luminous shades. My parents, no doubt, thought it was "just a phase" I was going through, as I don't

recall them commenting on it. Then again, I was away at school most of the time. At that stage I was in the early phase of my punk days, when I'd stick safety pins through my ears.

Growing older, I really wanted one outfit that would do for all occasions, something I could wear to work - at that time I was in my twenties and producing television commercials - and I could then jazz up for a cocktail party in the evening. I started designing my own clothes and was interested in structured suits, particularly tailored jackets and shirts. In fact, I made four collections for shops around London.

I need to be prepared for many different situations, so I tend to favour black and neutral styles. Sometimes I'm introduced to celebrities and they look at me out of the side of their eyes and say, "Yes, I know who you are." For this reason, I try not to attract too much attention. The nature of my work makes me a somewhat controversial figure.