

Posers and Fakers

Portrait photography traverses fact and fancy

There is no such thing as inaccuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth. —Richard Avedon (1923–2004)

Portraiture as an art form strives to capture its subject's innermost nature. Therefore, a successful portrait may be more veridical, or truthful, than casual observation of the individual depicted. Although accurate representation is intrinsic to photography, the illusions fea-



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LOOK-ALIKE SOLUTION: The first photograph from the left on the bottom row features the real twin pair.

THE LOOK-ALIKE PROJECT

Susana's grandmother used to say that every person has a doppelgänger, a genetically unrelated twin living elsewhere on the planet, whom most people never get to meet. Canadian photographer François Brunelle has set out to immortalize such accidental pairings in an international exhibit featuring 200 unconnected couples. When Susana learned about Brunelle's project, entitled *I'm Not a Look-Alike!*, she thought immediately of her graduate student Francisco Costela and his buddy Joshua Corrigan, pictured in the photograph on the top row, at the far left. Fran (left) and Josh (right) met at St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center in Phoenix, where they still cross paths, and became fast friends. They are not related—Fran is a Spaniard, and Josh is an American—but the similarities are uncanny. Even their glasses are identical (entirely coincidental, they say). Fran and Josh's stunning resemblance produces double takes among their friends and colleagues on an almost daily basis.

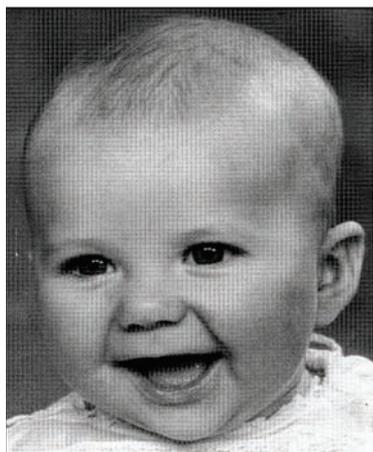
We encouraged Fran and Josh to contact Brunelle and were tickled to learn that the photographer was not only excited to feature the two of them in his project, but he had also selected the pair to participate in an *Inside Edition* TV special about Brunelle's look-alikes. Here we have lined up five sets of Brunelle's accidental "twins," including Fran and Josh, with a true set of twins. See if you can spot the genuine identical pair.

ured in this article circumvent limitations that are skin deep. They dive for the heart of the matter. In that sense, these portraits are "the most magical of mirrors," as Oscar Wilde described the supernatural painting in his 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Dorian Gray remains young and untouched while his portrait in his attic degrades to depict the character's true age and moral depravity. In Wilde's words, as the picture "had revealed to him his own body,

so it would reveal to him his own soul."

The subjects portrayed in the following images are Dorian Gray's heirs. They are not merely likenesses but instead tell deeper stories about how easily looks can deceive. Some of these images present duplicitous doubles; others morph two beings into one. The only magic required here, however, is locked within your brain's visual and cognitive systems. Can you decide who the original is and who is the reflection? **M**

BABY FACES

**Changes from photo to sketch:**

- Ear and head outlines are broader
- Baby's eyes are set farther apart
- Nostrils appear slightly angled

Could an artist's portrait, like Wilde's fictional painting, capture a resemblance more accurately than a photograph? Canadian artist Heather Spears, who resides in Denmark, thinks so. Spears has spent many years sketching premature and other threatened babies in neonatal intensive care units.

While creating portraits of these and other infants, Spears identified a curious phenomenon. She found that when she strove to copy the photograph (*left*) of a child exactly, she was unsatisfied with the results. "When I instinctively broadened it—trying to 'get' a likeness—it did [resemble the infant]," Spears says. Parents generally agree that the enhanced depictions (*right*) seem most correct.

Spears attributes the success of these portraits to envisioning the baby as though she were looking at the child with two eyes and at very close range rather than through a camera lens. Another reason might be that viewers approach photographs and line drawings differently. Our perception readily adjusts for illumination and shadow when looking at a photograph but not when observing the crisp boundaries in contour drawings. Spears's distortion approximates the outcome of our neuronal processes when we view someone in person. In addition, the final depiction softens features in a flattering way that may feel more true to the parents' memories than the original picture.

THE REAL MACAW

This picture of a parrot is more than it initially appears to be. Italian artist Johannes Stötter enjoys transforming his human models into unexpected natural subjects, such as autumn leaves and tree frogs.

For this colorful metamorphosis, he spent four hours covering a woman with breathable paint to transform her into a scarlet macaw. The quirky fusion of painting and photography produces a kind of double portrait, first of the bird and second of the model. The effect is an ambiguous illusion, in which neuronal responses in our visual system flip back and forth between the two interpretations of the same physical stimulus.

In the preface to *Dorian Gray*, Wilde writes: "All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril." Perhaps spotting the hidden image in this photograph is not perilous, but Wilde may still have enjoyed the way this piece playfully leads the viewer to identify a human figure, challenging quick or superficial assessments.



HEATHER SPEARS (babies); JOHANNES STÖTTER (parrot)

THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE

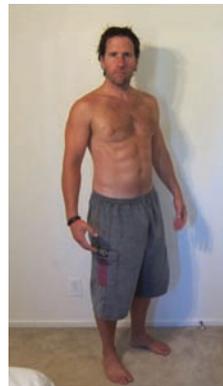
Unlike Dorian Gray, the subjects in Quebec-based photographer Ulric Collette's *Portraits Génétiques* (*Genetic Portraits*) cannot escape the aging process or their biological destiny. The series explores the genetic similarities of family members by stitching together half-face composites of a parent and child or other family pairs, such as this mother, Julie, then age 61, and her daughter, Isabelle, then 32.

The resulting amalgam is a remarkable study of genetic fate. Known as good continuation, this perceptual phenomenon, in which we tend to perceive contiguous lines as one smooth contour, causes some viewers to see the joined portraits as one individual at two different points in his or her life span.



BEFORE AND AFTER

Personal trainer Andrew Dixon had been irritated by the unrealistic promises of the before and after images featured in many weight-loss marketing campaigns. So he decided to take his own pictures and see what he could accomplish with “just a few easy tweaks.” In a post on the Huffington Post, Dixon explained that he chose a day when he felt especially bloated for his photo shoot. “I then shaved my head, face and chest,” he wrote. “I did a few push-ups and chin-ups, tweaked my bedroom lighting, sucked in, tightened my abs and BOOM! We got our after shot.” The photographs here document his full conversion from couch potato (*far left*) to totally toned (*far right*). The transformation took just one hour. Dixon’s posturing brings to mind Wilde’s quip in *Dorian Gray*: “Being natural is simply a pose.” It is all too easy to manufacture the perfect portrait.



FURTHER READING

- **Face: The New Photographic Portrait.** William A. Ewing. Thames and Hudson, 2008.
- **Faces: Photography and the Art of Portraiture.** Steven Biver and Paul Fuqua. Focal Press, 2010.
- **The Creative Eye.** Heather Spears. Marion Heather Spears, 2013.
- **Portraits Génétiques.** Ulric Collette: <http://genetic.ulriccollette.com>