

Images that are not what they seem

John Lillie has recreated works by famous photographers with the collaboration of friends and family. Reportage by JV Bolta

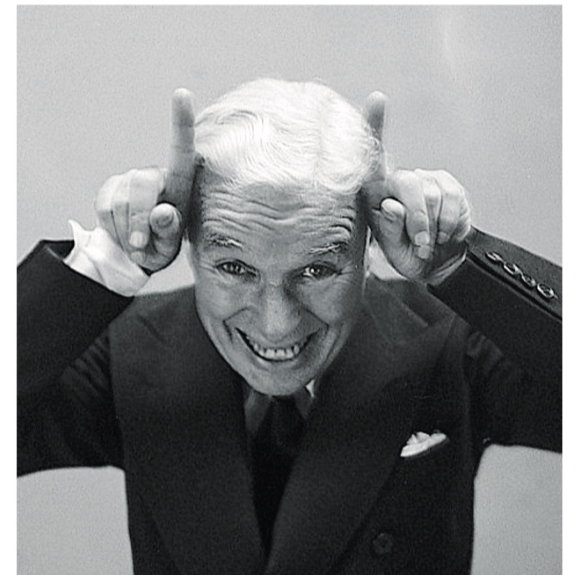
Behind each of the 67 photos exhibited in John Lillie's latest exhibition there is a story to be found. For instance, the artist Joan Castejón is in his studio, the restaurateur Bati Bordes is in a kitchen and the President of the Balearia Foundation, Ricard Pérez, is mounted on a bicycle. At first glance they look unremarkable; but actually Castejón is replacing Picasso, Bati is an anonymous German pastry chef and Ricard, now becomes the film director Alfred Hitchcock.

The work that John Lillie presents recreates photos taken by famous photographers, some over a 100 years old and others quite modern. It is the charm of the exhibition that what is seen at first sight then becomes an interesting story. Lillie doesn't make exact copies, but puts his personal stamp on each composition, many times with a great sense of humor. In his work, the differences are just as important as the coincidences, since they contribute a touch of originality and attractiveness.

Apparently Picasso's local baker had just delivered some fingers of bread so Picasso posed with them as if they were his hands. However, in two of the photos, taken in Bali, Lillie had to resort to using bananas because there was no bread readily available.

"Copying the ideas of the maestros of photography was a risk"

The exhibition, which can be visited at the Center d'Art L'Estació in Dénia until 27 August 2023, is a tribute to great masters of photography. Among them; Cartier-Bresson, Helmut Newton, Duane Michals, Alexander Rodchenko, Cecil Beaton, August Sander, Philippe Halsman, Mary Ellen Mark, Irving Penn, Helmut Newton and Hassan Hajjaj.



Michelin star chef Miquel Ruiz emulates Charlie Chaplin, when he was photographed, in 1952, before embarking on an ocean liner bound for Europe. He was forced to leave the United States quickly, having been accused of membership of the Communist Party. Chef Ruiz poses with two alficoques (a Valencian vegetable) instead of his fingers.



Beside each of Lillie's works the original is reproduced (in a reduced size) together with a text description explaining the origin of the image, who were the protagonists and sometimes an interesting anecdote.

In the case of the famous image of Picasso, wearing a striped Breton shirt (taken in 1952 by Robert Doisneau), Lillie invited his models to take the part of the painter and sit in the same pose.

During the opening ceremony John Lillie recognized that "copying the ideas of the great masters of photography was a risk". However he was satisfied that "all the models, friends, victims, who shared their time to pose had a good time".

"They all took a risk - they really didn't know what they were letting themselves in for" and he added that "I'm proud of this joint creation".

The photographer took advantage, in his opening speech, to thank the kindness with which he had been treated when he arrived in Dénia two decades ago. And he confessed that he was surprised that "so many people have given their time to an old Englishman who speaks very basic Spanish".

For example, he mentioned Pepa Cervera, who gave him his first opportunity to exhibit his work in Al Forn Restaurant. He also thanked Federico Cervera and Luis Cañizares from Els Magazines, and Maribel Font and her team from Dénia's Casa Cultura. And he did not want to forget his wife, Sally, and their children, Jay, Tom and Carrie,

who also participated in the venture.

Lillie even dared to copy a self portrait painted by David Hockney. He dressed almost like the famous artist and the result was amazing.

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