

ALBERT REVELS IN SOME HOME TOWN EXPOSURE

GARETH EDWARDS

PHOTOGRAPHERS, it is fair to say, do not like being told what to do.

They can become infuriated by their subjects making suggestions about how they should stand, what they should do, or how the picture should look.

But when Evening News photographer Rob McDougall's latest model makes a suggestion, it is no surprise that he takes it all on-board with the greatest of pleasure.

That's because his subject is Albert Watson, the Edinburgh-born photographer who has taken some of the most iconic images of the world's most famous people.

When a man who has snapped royalty, and taken the cover pictures for more than 250 editions of Vogue tells you that the flash might be a bit too bright, any photographer would listen.

"That's a good shot," the multi-millionaire informs Rob in his distinctive voice, which still has the clipped Scottish accent mixed in with a touch of American drawl. "But maybe if you moved me a bit further forward it would look better." The end result is the shot you see – and it comes complete with the Watson seal of approval.

Dressed in a simple black shirt, black trousers and the type of black Kangol hat beloved of Hollywood superstar Samuel L Jack-



SAY CHEESE: Albert at work

son, the 63-year-old is overseeing the finishing touches to Frozen, his first ever solo UK show, which opened at the City Arts Centre on Saturday.

With just hours to go before the official launch he is still busy making sure the giant pictures are hung correctly and that the lighting is in the right place.

"It's not so bad," he says. "When I did a show in Morocco, the Queen of Morocco arrived at 7pm sharp, and just ten minutes earlier the cleaners had been running around hoovering the gallery, so I'm not worried."

Tonight there will be, for Wat-

son at least, a more important guest of honour – his mother. Gladys, 84, still lives in Penicuik and it will be the first time she has ever seen a show by her son. His father, Albert senior, died eight years ago aged 81.

"She's really looking forward to it, and I've got a lot of family coming along, but I'm not nervous, I'm quite happy with it," he says. "If people don't like it, well, I'll have tried my best. But I think it's the best lit show I've ever done."

This is probably in no small part to his own dedication. He has spent months choosing the 200 photographs on display from his enormous catalogue of work. And he has been at the centre every day helping to hang and light the shots, making sure everything is just right.

In a career spanning more than 30 years – he got his first break working for Max Factor in LA in 1970 and has never looked back – he has taken pictures of just about everybody who is anybody.

Included in the show are shots of Mick Jagger, famously transformed into a leopard, Mike Tyson's bull-like neck, a young Johnny Depp, Jack Nicholson blowing smoke rings and dozens of other famous faces.

There are examples of his fashion photography, stunning shots of standing stones on Orkney and

portraits of the neon-lit Las Vegas hotels and sun-drenched landscapes which will feature in his next book.

Also included is one of his earliest photographs, and one of the shots he is most fond of – a portrait of Alfred Hitchcock holding a turkey.

"He was the first famous person I ever photographed," he says. "I was 27, I was not long out of film school and yes, I was nervous. I was more nervous the four days before the shoot, when I knew I had to do it. Once I got there and got the camera in my hand, though, I was actually quite relaxed."

One notable omission, however, are the first photographs ever taken by Watson, shots of his younger sisters Louise and Julie in Princes Street and on Calton Hill taken with his father's box camera when he was just ten years old.

"They still have them," he says. "I've seen them recently and I have to say I thought they were pretty good, I definitely had something in mind when I was taking them. But they were taken for my sisters, so they keep them."

While those simple shots of city monuments were the starting point for Watson, now regarded as one of the world's greatest pho-

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tographers, it would be more than a decade later that he began to really work on his craft.

"When I took my first photographs I definitely picked up an interest in photography," he says. "But I never continued it, and for about eight years I never really took a photograph."

"Then when I was 21 my wife gave me a camera and as soon as I started taking pictures it just felt comfortable. I don't mean to make it sound that photography was easy for me, because it wasn't, but from the moment I started it felt right."

Born in Edinburgh in 1942, he admits his early days at Edinburgh's Rudolph Steiner School, where he first met his future wife Elizabeth, encouraged his artistic abilities.

"They were very good at that, and every lesson had a bit of art in it," he says. "So having that kind of background was a great help."

He and Elizabeth married at 18, and by the time he was 21 they had two children, Norman and Aaron. They left Edinburgh for London in 1966, when he was 24, and he currently lives with his wife in New York, above a 26,000 square foot studio.

This is the base for his empire, from where he and Elizabeth, along with son Aaron – "a really great photographer" – run his photo studio as well as a business producing television commercials and films, Cyclops Productions, which makes trailers for shows such as The Shield.

The name, which was also the title of a book published in 1994 celebrating more than 20 years of his work, comes from the fact that he was born blind in his right eye, something which he does not believe has ever affected, or influenced, his work.

In fact, he admits growing up in Edinburgh, surrounded by the city's striking architecture, could have been more important in developing his style.

"I think growing up here did have an influence on my work, definitely, because it is such a beautiful city," he says.

"I come back to Scotland all the time, I just love it here. There are so many things I miss, it would be impossible to know where to start. But I just had a great sausage roll, and that would definitely be up there."

"I think maybe it's a good thing I moved to America because if I

lived here I'd probably be about 350lbs by now!"

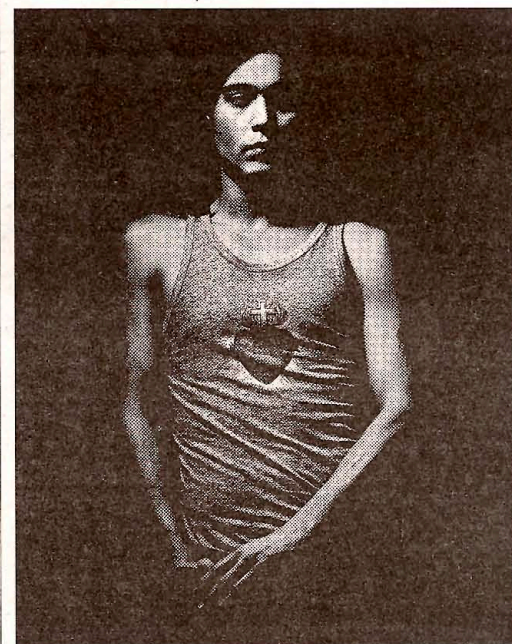
As he checks another spotlight for one of his portraits, it's clear that he is excited at having his first UK show in his home city.

He was offered the chance of a show in Edinburgh two years ago, but had a particularly nostalgic reason for waiting.

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■ Frozen is on at the City Arts Centre until October 22.



YOUNG ACTOR: A youthful Johnny Depp



BOXING CLEVER: A disembodied David Bowie