



Brainwaves

I Am Not a Lookalike

Concept A collection of strangers with eerily similar faces

Creator François Brunelle

For François Brunelle, life hasn't been the same since he discovered that he looks like Mr Bean. His friends often mentioned it but Brunelle, a French-Canadian photographer living in Montreal, had never come across the character and thought little of it. His image of himself was closer to James Dean than to Rowan Atkinson. Then, one night, he stumbled across his lookalike while channel-surfing.

"It looked like somebody else had made a movie out of me," he says. "I thought, 'My God, that's what I look like? This funny face, and so awkward?' I fantasised about meeting this character and having my photograph taken with him, but it seemed like such a remote idea."

Startled by the strength of his reaction, Brunelle began instead to seek out and photograph other lookalikes, a project that, over the course of five years, has become an obsession. His pictures – simple, elegantly composed, usually black-and-white portraits – capture that peculiar frisson of *deja vu* that comes from "recognising" a stranger.

Few of the couples are identical; in fact, some appear at first glance to have little in common, until you catch the perfect duplication of a nose, or the tilt of an eyelid. Brunelle's only criteria are that his subjects should not be blood-related and that it should be possible to mistake one for the other.

"After a little while, people always say the photos remind them of someone that they look like themselves," he says. "Most people experience this lookalike thing at least once in their lives."

Brunelle has collected around 140 pairs so far. When that figure reaches 200 he plans to publish them in a book, to be called *I Am Not a Lookalike*. Since beginning his project, he has cultivated a beard. "I no longer look like Mr Bean," he says, happily.

Paul Arendt

Do you have a lookalike? Register for Brunelle's project at youlookalike.com

Photograph: Bryan Mullenix/Alamy

