

I Am Martin Parr [12A]

2024 UK 68 mins

UK released **21 February 2025**

Director **Lee Shulman**

Screenplay **Lee Shulman**

Cinematography **Maxime Kathari**

Music **Erik Wedin**

Cast **Martin Parr; Mark Bedford; Bruce Gilden; Grayson Perry; David Walliams**

The beguiling work of English photographer Martin Parr is the subject of this brief, but thoroughly enjoyable study which sets out to introduce his extraordinary work, particularly the fierce brilliance of his colour images in the 70s and 80s celebrating the white working class on holiday.

Parr is an inspired combination of seaside-postcard artist Donald McGill and Alan Bennett, with a bit of American street photographer Vivian Maier, and a sliver of Diane Arbus, although the grotesques in which Arbus specialised are not what Parr has in mind. Everyone here is at pains to emphasise that Parr is never cruel or mocking, and, yes, it's quite true. But as a real artist, Parr naturally has what Graham Greene called the splinter of ice in his heart. He knows what makes a brilliant image and the person involved is unlikely to find it flattering.

Parr's pictures are very funny and often piercingly shrewd and sad. It's sometimes hard to believe that they existed in real life. In a way they didn't; Parr created them with his eye for an image, for angle and framing. His hard work and eternal vigilance allow him to grab the split-second moment, and his curatorial and editorial gift for sorting through the material is vitally important. The film shows that part of his skill is just looking like an ordinary bloke, going around in the crowd with his wheeled walking frame (after recent illness), smiling benignly, endlessly taking pictures. That normality is what artist Grayson Perry here insightfully calls his "camo".

Interestingly, the film also shows Parr repeatedly asking his subjects if he can take their picture (posed portraits that are different from the serendipitously snapped moments) but telling them not to smile, just to

present their “normal” face. Maybe it is this unsmiling “normal” face that is going to have that vital tragicomic quality.

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 19 February 2025 (abridged)

Martin Parr a biographical note:

One of the world’s leading documentary photographers, Martin Parr was born in 1952 in Surrey. It was Parr’s paternal grandfather George — a member of the Royal Photographic Society who lived in the Yorkshire Dales – who first put a camera in his hand when he was 11. ‘I just knew. This is what I wanted to do. It was intuitive, I can’t explain it. This is it. This is what I will do and sure enough: I’ve done it.’

Parr studied photography at Manchester Polytechnic and settled up north, first in Hebden Bridge and then in the Wirral

Parr has had numerous exhibitions, published over 100 solo photobooks and edited another 30, and has an impressive body of film and television work.

He has been an active member of the prestigious Magnum Photos International since 1994. He now lives in Bristol where he set up the Martin Parr Foundation, which ‘supports emerging, established and overlooked photographers who have made and continue to make work focused on Britain and Ireland’.

Teddy Gray’s Sweet Factory

Short film (20 mins) made by Martin Parr in 2011 for a series of short films depicting everyday life in the west Midlands Screened today by kind permission of Martin Parr and Multistory (multistory.org.uk) – an arts organisation based in Sandwell promoting community projects

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