

FASHION / FASHION SCOOPS

Melania Trump's White House Portrait Photographer Opens Up About Shoot and Career

Regine Mahaux started out shooting Target ads in Minneapolis in the late 1980s, when the musician known as "Prince" lived around the block.

By ROSEMARY FETTERBERG JANUARY 28, 2025, 3:36PM



While **Melania Trump's** new official White House portrait is getting global attention — and in some cases criticism, its photographer Regine Mahaux has shared some insights about its subject and the shoot.

It was a double-click situation so to speak, since the fashion photographer also took Trump's official White House portrait in 2017. On both occasions, the first lady opted for Dolce & Gabbana suits. Although this year's choice was a wool tuxedo one with satin band lapels, and a crisp white **Dolce & Gabbana** shirt was finessed with a **Ralph Lauren** menswear-inspired cummerbund.

Born in Belgium, the creative first studied **photography** in Minneapolis and started out shooting Dayton Hudson and Target newspaper ads before diving into fashion **photography** and celebrity portraiture. Oliver Stone, **Rita Ora**, Robert Federer, Karolina Kurkova and Eva Herzigova are some of the luminaries Mahaux has shot. Reached in her studio in Paris on Tuesday, Mahaux said she was working with Getty Images in 2008, when she was tapped to do "at-home" photos with the Trumps.

Busy with other projects, the photographer said she hasn't had time to see what the reaction to the portrait has been. "Some people tell me that it's great, it's different and creative. But do they tell me the truth? Maybe there are a lot of people who hate it. I don't hang out with the haters too much. I don't really have time for bad energy," Mahaux said.

"With the first lady, I can always propose ideas, and I propose a lot of ideas. She's really good at picking them and editing what she likes. Then we engage in the creative process together. She's a good guide. We stay close to who she is," Mahaux said.

Asked what the new portrait says, Mahaux said, "She's a hardworking woman. She's a good mother, a good wife. She cares about the American people and takes her mission very seriously. She's very kind. She likes a peaceful atmosphere, when we shoot, so we can do our best."



Melania Trump's official White House portrait 2025.

Declining to specify how long the shoot took for the official portrait, Mahaux said that doesn't matter. "Let's keep part of it secret. **She is a very iconic secret person**," Mahaux said. "I really do have strong ethics and morals. She has given me her trust for many years. We don't talk about everything. That's not going to make me famous."

Having had her own photography studio for more than 30 years, Mahaux said Tuesday, "I am a citizen of the world. I was born in Liège, Belgium. I studied in Minneapolis, and I started working with Getty a long time ago. I'm not really based anywhere. I'm all over. You call me — I come. I don't ever stay anywhere for more than five days, so it's hard to say where I am based."

After studying photography at a school in Minneapolis, Mahaux started out shooting for Dayton Hudson and Target, taking photos for advertising circulars that were inserted in Sunday newspapers. In the late 1980s, "Minneapolis was a place where a lot was happening. Prince was there, it was before he released 'Purple Rain.' We had the same hair and makeup artist, Robyn Lynch. General Mills had headquarters there, and Target, too, [as it still does]. It was a good time in Minneapolis then. I used to call it 'the Mini Apple.' There were a lot of things going on," she said.



Actress Eva Herzigova poses with her son George (Eduardo Marín) in 2007 in Italy. GETTY IMAGES

Helmut Newton, Peter Lindbergh and Norman Parkinson are a few of her favorite photographers. She and Parkinson shared the same agent, Catherine Johnson, who also worked with lensmen like Terry O'Neill and David Bailey. That helped Mahaux to stake some roots in New York. Recalling how Parkinson would call at 8 a.m. to say, "Hello girls, what are we doing today?" she said he routinely invited models to lunch. "It was really the old-fashioned way of doing it. I learned a lot about creating concepts," she said. "I like to respect the person so that they can be as close to who they are. And then you remember the picture, because it is telling you a story."

Her portfolio includes work for Vanity Fair, Harper's Bazaar, Paris Match, Le Figaro and other media outlets. Hesitant to single out any impressive young photographers, she said, "there are so many of them. Everybody has an iPhone and the kids' art is impressive. Also, you need to know their name and how many followers they have, which is kind of sad."



Karolina Kurkova PHOTO BY REGINE MAHAUX/COURTESY

Describing the accessibility of photography as "great," she said, "We used to have an expensive camera, and invest a lot of money in the printing and processing. Now it's free...I don't really look at what others do, because I am so busy in my own world. I don't have time to look at what others are doing."

Her upcoming projects include shooting the photography for Les Bains de Spa in Spa, Belgium, a UNESCO world heritage site that has attracted such notables as Napoleon Bonaparte, Victor Hugo, Ernest Hemingway and John Lennon, among others through the years. Dating back to the 12th century, the town is known for its healing waters and the reopening is slated for March 1. "I like iconic and transition stories to save a building, show architecture or families — anything that has to do with beauty," Mahaux said. "I think the first lady is also very touched by grace and beauty. That's her view inside."



Les Bains de Spa PHOTO BY REGINE MAHAUX/COURTESY

She also praised the first lady's team, especially her chief of staff Hayley Harrison and stylist Herve Pierre. The photographer introduced **Trump to Pierre**, who designed her 2017 and 2025 inaugural gowns. Although nothing funny or unexpected happened during the shoot, Mahaux said people don't know that FLOTUS has a good sense of humor, citing her 2018 Instagram post with an Easter bunny as an example. "She's really funny. We laugh all the time. It's really joyful. That makes the picture better, because her eyes are smiling."



Melania Trump PHOTO BY REGINE MAHAUX/COURTESY REGINE MAHAUX

Mahaux singled out a 2018 photo of the Trumps calling Santa Claus as one that she wished she had taken. "There are so many great White House photographers. They do an amazing job. They have to follow them and take pictures of what they do every day. I'm doing something different. I create a concept," she said.

As for any **future Trump assignments**, Mahaux said, "If she calls me, I'm always going to be there."