

Susan Bozic

The Dating Portfolio
Galerie Art Mur, Montreal
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Susan Bozic's latest series, *The Dating Portfolio*, elicits easy, involuntary smiles but poses a serious question or two that leave the viewer in an interrogatory frame of mind. Bozic appears in each of these medium-to-large-scale photographs in the company of a plastic (clothed) male model or window-display mannequin who plays expressionless "straight (or straw) man" to Bozic's extensive repertoire of alternately adoring, quizzically blissful, expectant, and alluring expressions.

Bozic's razor-sharp wit underscores not only her blissful smiles but our own more rueful ones. She seems to be exploring the "perfect man" stereotype that women allegedly have their antennae out for in the guise of Carl, a lifeless dummy who is supposedly as attentive as he is affluent. Bozic's "stage-sets" are well chosen and appealingly framed: the yacht, the private jet, and so on. Bozic poses herself and the ubiquitous Carl in a variety of these romanticized tableaux as participants in a "true love" idyll, such as *Carl takes me to the nicest places* (2005), *We made a toast, here's to us* (2005), and *He let me pick the movie* (2005). But it is, as she further shows, a rather hollow idyll, indeed.

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It has taken Bozic a couple of years since her remarkable *Incarnation* series to come up with a worthy and equally stunning sequel. The earlier black-and-white images commented on humankind's colonization of nature and its methodical idealization. Bozic constructed amazingly well-wrought theatrical dioramas revolving around taxidermist's birds. Now, we have a plastic mannequin instead. Same difference. It is as meticulously wrought, placed, and posed as the taxidermist's birds were. And, notably, just as hollowed out. The new work is as witty and satirical as that work was, and as winning as it is winsome, although, it must be said, rather more pointed. The earlier work and the latest one share the same salutary, unswervingly interroga-

Bozic says, "Carl is the perfect man... He's young, he's tall, he's fit, he's successful, he's romantic, he's attentive. Carl's girlfriend is in bliss. There's nothing wrong with him except he's fake, but she doesn't quite see that because she's blinded by her love."¹

Perhaps Bozic is playing a highly contemporary riff on anthropologist Margaret Mead's suggestion that women should have three husbands during their lifetimes: one for young sex, one for raising children, and one for companionship later in life. Of course, Bozic, in these works with their overtly romantic idylls, clearly addresses the first-stage category of husband.

One could argue that (and Bozic makes the same point in a more subversive way), men who are "too good to be true" – that is, men rife with an abundance of looks, wealth, and status – are much less appealing to women than are those with average jobs and still attractive looks. Of course, there is the ongoing problem that crops up in life that only the most brilliant asocial cynic evades: love can and does blind one to the truth. Bozic lures us into her subversive narratives through laughter but seems to end up asking, by extension, should women shun Mr. Perfect in favour of Mr. Rather Less than Perfect?

Researchers found that "highly attractive men of medium status" scored much better with women than "highly attractive men of high status" in a survey asking women to rate the success of long-term relationships. The study indicates that one very likely reason for this is that is the belief that the so-called Mr. Perfect is more prone to infidelity. Or is it an unconscious recognition that Mr. Perfect might register with the unconscious of other women as well, as a

tory bent. Bozic is working at the top of her form and is clearly a talent to watch.

1 See Katie Apsey, "The Dating Portfolio: Susan Bozic" (Montreal: Art Mur, 2007), n.p. 2 Ibid..

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Mr. Perfect for all, and thus represents a certain risk? The flipside of this is a certain residual desire that sometimes cannot be denied. As Katie Apsey wrote, "Even while we laugh at the absurdity of Carl and his girlfriend, deep down, a part of us still desires the fantasy we see in the superficial image."²

The Dating Portfolio is highly topical, and our own inadvertent smiles cover up a rather painful dental (or, better, trepanning) op on Bozic's part (with mirth the only anaesthetic) for both women and men. Her feigned expressions hide private lack and hint at the price exacted by the personal masquerade. She stands alongside contemporary Canadian photo artists such as Diana Thorneycroft and Jennifer Long in the integrity and vertical depth of her critique.

Susan Bozic
He's so thoughtful, it wasn't even my birthday,
The Dating Portfolio, 2006
c-print, 76,2 x 101,6 cm

Carl takes me to the nicest places,
the Dating Portfolio, 2005
c-print, 76,2 x 101,6 cm
images: Art Mur Gallery, Montreal

