Visual Art

Love in fibreglass

Susan Bozic’s new SFU Gallery exhibit turns Prince Charming on his unattainable ear

Susan Bozic’s collection of photographs, The Dating Portfolio, will show at the SFU Gallery (AQ 3004) until February 23. A book of her work is available for purchase at the gallery for $20.

The ideal of Prince Charming is everywhere. His chivalry sets the standards for modern dating rituals today as much as it did 50 years ago, when Disney’s Cinderella came to theatres. To the chagrin of men and women on the dating scene everywhere, Prince Charming is all but impossible to live up to. Susan Bozic’s new photography exhibition at the SFU Gallery hones the idea of Prince Charming with hilarious and thoughtful commentary on the difficult and often superficial nature of dating.

Bozic’s series in The Dating Portfolio captures the various settings of the dating scene with a camera and a sense of the absurd. The work speaks to a world where face-to-face contact has become increasingly difficult and progressively superficial. Since, as she says, there are always about 45 million people on the dating scene worldwide at any one time, Bozic’s work is indeed relevant. Essentially, it asks us to contemplate the many stereotypes out there (and the preconceptions we all hold) that define every facet of dating and relationships. For example, we see the dating archetypal sitcom couple again and again of a man bringing flowers to his date. Does that mean that flowers are the key to dating success, or that only men should give them to women and not the other way around? When we think about this way, it seems arbitrary and ridiculous, but still, many women inexplicably expect flowers on a date and many men feel inexplicably compelled to bring them. Each of Bozic’s photographs confronts one of these specific stereotypes.
Bozic's series, The Dating Portfolio, is comprised of 15 photographs that chronicle a woman's dates with her dream man. She photographed the series with herself in the role of the female protagonist, using the 'staged' technique from her earlier series, a method that originated in the '70s with artists like Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall.

In the series, Bozic takes modern women's desire for Prince Charming to its logical extreme. In her female protagonist's world, the male suitor, Carl, is fit, perfectly coiffed, blemish-free, well-moneyed, and it goes without saying, always there for her. Unfortunately, he's also inanimate.

On the surface, the collection is funny, as in, "Har har, she's having a romantic dinner with a mannequin named Carl. How silly." The absurdity of this forbidden fibreglass-flesh relationship gives us a chuckle, but the works really represent a common relationship problem: teeteringly high expectations, and especially women's impossible expectations of the perfect man. The show also takes a deeper dig at the ridiculousness of our culture of romance, and even hints that we are setting ourselves up for relationship failure.

Increasingly spoiled: taken out for a romantic coffee in "I Enjoy Our Sunday Morning Ritual," being surprised with jewellery in "He's So Thoughtful, It Wasn't Even My Birthday," and even taken on an impromptu vacation via private plane in "He Surprised Me With A Romantic Weekend Getaway." As funny as it was, I found myself anticipating the sad moment when she would realize he was made of fibreglass. Or, suggested Bozic, does she even care? Has she adopted those unrealistic romantic expectations so sincerely that, human or mannequin, as long as Carl fulfills the Prince-Charming stereotype, she's fine with it?

Bozic witnessed telling reactions to her work even while she was in the process of shooting. As she was straightening Carl up during the shooting of "We Had A Beautiful Time" outdoors, she recalled hearing from the crowd that had gathered behind her, "He's hot!" Perhaps it was a joke, but it was nevertheless a telling reaction from a culture obsessed with the ideal of the perfect man.

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Bozic says her work is based much on what we see from day to day in stereotypes portrayed by the mass media and in advertising. She wanted to show "the difficulty in establishing and maintain-

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