

Visual Art

Love in fibreglass

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



Stephanie Orford
Peak Staff

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 58 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 thought-



taining meaningful relationships in 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 archetype in sitcoms 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 it 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

provoking results.

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 man-

(Above) "He Surprised Me With A Romantic Weekend Getaway" (2007); (below left) "I Enjoy Our Sunday Morning Ritual" (2007); (below right) "He's So Thoughtful, It Wasn't Even My Birthday" (2007).

nequin 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

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.

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. Per-

haps this is why many of us find the over-hyped Valentines Day a letdown.

Bozic's protagonist, on the other hand, is perfectly satisfied with her man. As I went through the exhibit, I witnessed her being

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.

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 main-

Images courtesy of the SFU Gallery
one of these specific stereotypes. *The Dating Portfolio* is the first in a two-part series of photographs. In the series's in-progress second part, called *The Dating Portfolio: Meeting the Parents*, we will discover how our protagonists' fantasy relationship has progressed. Bozic thus extends the idea of the perfect relationship from the couple to the multi-person group — Carl's mannequin family.

Ultimately, Bozic leaves her work open-ended. Never at any point was I entirely sure whether she intended for me to laugh or to be struck by a particular social agenda. The indirect messages behind *The Dating Portfolio* left me pondering bigger things than what it would be like if our two protagonists had mannequin babies, although the thought did cross my mind.

