

ART:

Stuff it and shoot it: Dead birds make pretty pics

by Jesse Locke

"I want to create photographs that make your perceptions change," says Vancouver artist Susan Bozic. Lofty goals, one might say, but the statement is not hard to believe after viewing some of her work.

Bozic's latest project is a subtly ironic series of photographs called *Incarnation*, in which taxidermy birds are set against theatrical settings. By placing the mounted birds in an area that is obviously very different than their normal habitat, the photos hint at mankind's domination of the natural world and the lost freedom of animals.

"Birds have an important place in my life because they inspire me in my artwork," explains Bozic. "I see them as graceful creatures and a symbol of freedom. Taxidermy is a kind of re-incarnation of the animal itself, and this contradiction interests me. The birds in my photographs are the subjects of

the image. It's all about them and their context within each composition, involving this duality of life and death."

Many photos in the series contain additional inanimate objects placed next to the birds, further exposing the irony of this presentation of nature. These birds were once living, breathing creatures, but now they are reduced to items we can place on a shelf.

Bozic says her inspiration for the project came from the Dutch still life painters of the 16th century, who used drapery as a framing device. The idea to use the birds came from fellow photographer Joyce Tenneson.

"One of her photos is a portrait of a woman with a dove on her shoulder and it was something that really stuck me. I remember thinking, 'Is this a real bird?' It provoked questions," Bozic says.

Incarnation took Bozic nearly two years to complete. She admits that it was a time-consuming process, taking her seven

to 10 days to complete each image. Even if it was a lot of work, Bozic says the process was well worth it.

The photos have sparked their share of controversy. Although *Incarnation* uses the mounted birds tastefully as an artistic tool, Bozic has received some criticism from nature lovers.

"In the beginning, when I would tell people that I was using taxidermy animals, they were shocked," says Bozic. "It was an automatic reaction. I think many people have a fear of death and perhaps equate taxidermy animals with that. But after seeing the work their opinions changed because there is nothing grotesque about my images. In fact, I've had very positive feedback from this work."

The New Gallery will be showing *Incarnation* on Nov. 14 at 7 p.m. On Nov. 15 at 2 p.m., Bozic will appear at the New Gallery to host an artist's talk. The New Gallery is located at 516D-9 Avenue S.W.



photo courtesy The New Gallery

Stuffed birds are the prime subject of Vancouver artist Susan Bozic's photos to be exhibited Nov. 14 at The New Gallery.