

Susan Bozic. *The Dating Portfolio*, Galerie Art Mur, Montreal. August 18 - September 22, 2007

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et image de la nuit opaque. Le dialogue qui s'institue entre la sphère sombre et l'à-plat frontal de l'image éclatante évoque certes la dualité fondamentale de l'homme, fait de nature mais que la cul-

ture fait tenir. Il offre aussi une autre métamorphose à la poussée de la vie représentée : celle qui inscrit l'œil lui-même dans son propre reflet. Comme si l'objectif était l'image qu'il assemble, comme si le

regard était l'objet qui s'offre à sa visée et l'homme cette nature qui le fait surgir au monde. Comme si, en fin de compte, un va-et-vient qu'une autre époque aurait dit dialectique rivait le «je» au «il». Comme si le réel se tordait tel un ruban de Möbius où une topologie fantasque condamne la condition humaine à se sentir à la fois incluse et étrangère.

Ces incessantes recompositions qui frappent l'image et jusqu'à son principe même sont ici relancées dans la publication qui double l'exposition. Le centre Sagamie a en effet créé récemment Sagamie Éditions d'art dont le but est d'«augmenter sensiblement la diffusion du travail des artistes tout en suscitant le développement de contenus critiques et théoriques.» Signé Jean-François Caron et intitulé «La face cachée du réel : désordre de l'ombre et de la lumière», le texte qui ponctue l'œuvre de Jocelyn Philibert augure fort bien, par sa dimension poétique et l'intelligence de

son propos, d'un travail d'édition dont on est sans doute en droit d'attendre beaucoup, au vu des autres réalisations auxquelles il a déjà donné le jour.

Il rend en tout cas pleinement justice à ce *surréal* magique où, à force d'artifice et de lumière calculée, en jouant d'une profondeur de champ qui excède le cadre et même le visible, Jocelyn Philibert nous rend, paradoxalement, l'ingénuité souveraine d'un regard envahi et relancé.

Quelque chose comme la perspective du spectre.

—
Sémioticien et écrivain, **Jean-Pierre Vidal** est professeur émérite de l'Université du Québec à Chicoutimi.
—

Susan Bozic

The Dating Portfolio

Galerie Art Mur, Montreal

August 18 – September 22, 2007

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.

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



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 Mûr Gallery, Montreal

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-

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..

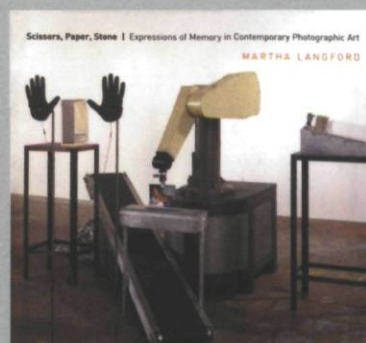
James D. Campbell is a writer on art and an independent curator based in Montreal. He is the author of over a hundred books and catalogues on art and artist



LECTURE READING

Martha Langford

Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, 342 pp



The experience of reading the latest book by Martha Langford is strangely medieval; it's a Cappelanasian compendium, an *Ars Memoriae Contemporaria Photographia*. Beckett is found on a single page with philosopher Avishai Margalit and St. Augustine; Benjamin, Penelope, and Proust in the same sentence. Drawing from literature, art history and criticism, philosophy, psychology, and more, Langford presents us with a schema for a game: viewing photography, as it relates to Memory, in terms of three relational symbols whose powers to influence the quality and type of memories vie with and complete each other.

Langford "translates" contemporary photography: scissors, "the joust between remembering and forgetting"; paper, the "meeting ground between memory and history"; stone, "the relationship between memory and history." "And this game of paper, stone, scissors, may be the Canadian way." If anyone has the right to judge the Canadian way, it's Langford, but while her qualified observations are certainly worth saying once, they are not easily read, however articulately, a hundred times. After all, the relationship between photography and public and private memory, between consciousness and history, has been the primary critical leitmotif in cultural analysis for as long as photography had been around.

Snapshots of a score of Canadian photographers are displayed surrounded by a plethora of analogy, quotation, and metaphor. The overall effect can be overwhelming, and the drama with which tautologies are stated, her revelations and

epiphanies stacked, describes a metaphor whereby photography, as a step-child of Memory, must play out its destiny as an art-form. Still, one reads on in order to encounter more of the compelling work that Langford has been known for showcasing in her long career as a scholar and curator.

The main photographers to whom Langford refers throughout the text are represented with several exemplars. They are all fascinating, and a primary pleasure of the book. After many pages in which she describes journeys that "begin in one place, and end up in another," she proposes the function of her analogy: "It could be argued that every work of art offers the opportunity for empathetic, improvisational interpretation, and no one would disagree. This book wants to raise those possibilities at every turn. At the same time, there are artists who, consciously or unconsciously, leave more room for spectatorial action..." (italics mine). What is done "unconsciously" by an artist is perhaps the least palatable aspect of imposing on artists constructs by which to view their work. Fortunately, Langford mostly sticks to learned anecdotes, fact-filled encapsulated descriptions, and on page 190 we are still reading explanations of the "metonymic" game.

Photography's mnemonic forms and concepts are put under a prism; a chapter on album works talks about "collection," "memoir," and "travelogue." Dialogue from the classic film *My Man Godfrey* frames the chapter "A Forgotten Man," and Langford is not above mentioning tea-soaked made-lines more than once.

"Remembering and forgetting" are the property of individual and collective memories; the criteria by which we choose what to keep and what to lose depends on both subject and subjectivity. What remains is History, which becomes histories of the "fugitive acts" of memory, the legacies of the past for generations who will again choose whether to remember or to consign to oblivion. She concludes with an apt pronouncement and a somewhat disingenuous question: "An art of memory is a system for encoding knowledge in signs that make it retrievable. Can that concept be translated to photography... have I done so in this book?" I believe that she has created the memory-palace in these three, albeit crowded, rooms.

It is a beautifully printed edition, the reproductions vivid and repaying close inspection, the notes, bibliography, and index thorough, if one has a tendency to name-check. Among others, we meet photographers Hamish Buchanan, Diana Thorneycroft, and Donigan Cumming in the first part, *Scissors*; Barbara Pelkey, Jin-me Yoon, and Michael Snow in *Paper*, and Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, Robert Houle, and Robert Minden in *Stone*; would they approve of their assigned categories? Answer Langford's question in the affirmative? It makes no difference to this book, which is something of a relief. As the author herself states, this book is here to raise opportunities for art, at every possible turn.

Niki Lambros is a theologian and writer of philosophical and literary criticism who recently returned to North America from twenty years abroad, mainly in Europe and Asia.