

Beauty redefined

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For anyone strolling down Dundas Street, three retro-dressed mannequins in the window of the Forest City Gallery might mean very little. But for those who venture inside the gallery, the mannequins symbolize the brilliance of the art gallery's latest exhibition, *The Bod Squad — More Than a Handful*.

Curated by Victoria Stasiuk, the exhibition considers and critiques the social costs of aesthetic appearance on the bodies and lives of women.

Each of the three showcased artists consider the female body image in interesting and alluring ways. The artists present a James Bond version of women, spoofing not only the suave tendencies of Bond characters, but also questioning the "femininity" of American icons like Barbie.

Upon entering the bright and spacious gallery, visitors encounter the first installment, created by Western alumnus Jill Price. Price's works fire away at the Barbie myth at point-blank range. Entitled "Beauty for Sale," the series of Barbie dolls created by the artist, shows the extent to which women will alter their bodies in a quest for Barbie-like beauty. The series of dolls includes "Lipo-Ass Barbie," "Tummy-Tuck Barbie," and "Boob-Job Barbie". Each Barbie adorns the wall immediately beside the package it would be purchased in. These packages have before and after pictures, capturing the actual lengths to which some women have gone in trying to achieve "beauty." It is a sobering yet somewhat ironic piece of work that clearly expresses the artist's message.

Price also offers a "Barbie Goes to the Plastic Surgeon" colouring book series, depicting the story of

an older Barbie who feels the need to see a plastic surgeon in order to stay beautiful. Visitors can actually purchase copies of the colouring book, as well as cushions and magazines, from each of the other two installments.

Blayne Collins, a Fanshawe College visual arts graduate, was responsible for the second piece of the exhibit entitled "Dualities Multiplied." This is a very interesting and abstract work involving a clothesline with pillow cases and aprons hanging to dry. The piece is accompanied by the sounds of birds chirping, which gives it a springtime-fresh feel. The aprons and pillow cases are printed with silk screen pictures of women's lower bodies dressed in lingerie. It is a complex piece deserving consideration.

The final installment is "Construction Site, Deconstruction Site" by Judith Purdy, another Fanshawe College graduate. The installment represents a "re-modelling depot" for women, where they can purchase a number of products to improve their looks, including "the Ultimate Concealer"—a paper bag with a happy face plastered on it. The "Deconstruction" portion of the exhibit is a newspaper stand with articles which claim, among other things, that women are disappearing and corporations are profiting from the presentation of fake women in advertising.

The Bod Squad—More Than A Handful is a thoroughly interesting and strong art exhibition that questions the way contemporary society and the media portray women and their sexuality. It is insightful, intelligent and most definitely worthy of a visit.

The Bod Squad—More Than A Handful will be showing at the Forest City Gallery until May 19th.