

This Artist Is Married To Her Work - Literally!

Suzanne Heintz is an art director at Starz Entertainment Group in Colorado. She is also an artist. For the past 14 years, she has been working on an art project called "Life Once Removed." The project is simple enough: Suzanne travels all over America and the rest of the world, taking happy portraits with her husband and daughter.



What's so unique about that? Just this one thing: Suzanne's husband Chauncey and young daughter Mary Margaret aren't real people. They are mannequins!

Before she began the project, people used to ask Suzanne questions about her life. Such as, "When are you getting married?" Her mother asked this question many times. "Nobody's perfect," her mother said to her one day. "If you're going to get married, you'll just have to pick somebody."

Suzanne replied, "Mom, it's not like I can go out and buy a family and make it happen."

Later that night, Suzanne was walking past an outlet mall. She saw a row of mannequins on sale. Thinking back to the conversation with her mother, Suzanne realized something.

"I can buy a family!" she thought to herself. And so she did.

"Life Once Removed" began not long after that night. Suzanne decided to take pictures of herself with the mannequins, doing family-related things together.

"If I have to go through the motions, this is what it is going to look like," she said. "They are mannequins. The candy coated shell with nothing inside. We do all those family things, all the while capturing those Kodak Moments."

Suzanne wants her art to remind people that there is more than one type of "American Dream." She wants other people to know that they don't have to live their lives a certain way just because society tells them to.

Suzanne always looks very happy in the portraits she has taken with her plastic family. She really seems to enjoy her adventures with them. And she seems to be saying to society that she doesn't need a real husband or child to make her happy.

"If I pass through life without checking off the boxes for a wedding ring and a baby carriage, I will be missing the photo album, but not the point," Suzanne said. "When I take my photos, others stop and stare, then they ask, 'why are you doing this?' They, at that moment, are starting to get the point too." Suzanne receives mixed reactions from people about her work, especially when she tries to involve the public in her shoots. "I need the public for character and context, and I also invite people to ask questions about why I'm doing what I'm doing." Some people are thrilled to be a part of it. Some people find the whole thing to be hilarious. And some people are so shocked that they just silently walk away from her.

Believe it or not, Suzanne's real love life is actually pretty normal. "I've had boyfriends my whole life," she said. She just never wanted to marry any of them. She doesn't even want to marry her current boyfriend of the past seven years.

As a matter of fact, she's planning to renew her vows with Chauncey in June. She is working with wedding planners to have a grand event - an officiated ceremony, a live band, food, and guests. Half of the venue will be filled with mannequins - guests from Chauncey's side of the family.