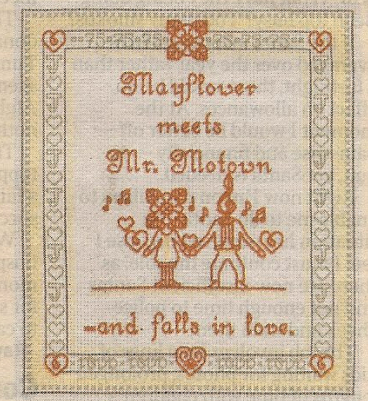


Online dating inspired a series of artworks created by Silke Raetze – and brought her face to face with her future husband, writes **Elizabeth Fortescue**

Love story stitched together on internet



Love match: Artist Silke Raetze with her husband Justin and two of *The Mayflower Series* – Mr Quick Exit (above) and Mr Motown (below)



WORKING alone in her studio and mixing only with the art crowd, Silke Raetze was keen to meet a wider group of people. So the Sydney artist registered with an internet dating site, assigning herself the online name of Mayflower.

Not really expecting to find the man of her dreams, Raetze nevertheless typed in a wishlist of the attributes he would have.

"I put things like 'genuine, sincere, kind and honest,'" Raetze says. "It was never about 'tall and handsome.'"

The first men Raetze met for coffee or a drink were all sincere, nice blokes. But the chemistry

"It's been a lovely journey," Raetze says.

That journey is the subject of Raetze's recent body of work, *The Mayflower Series*, which has just gone on show at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre in Gymea. Raetze is one of 30 artists in the show, which was curated by artist Cash Brown and is titled *Hands On: Craft In Contemporary Art*.

The Mayflower Series, which has already sold, consists of 12 meticulous cross-stitch works that, like the pages of a picture book, tell the story of Raetze's experiences with online dating.

As well as asking what Raetze was looking for in a man, the dating service's online form also asked what she was not looking

for. Raetze plays humorously with this aspect of internet dating in the first four works in *The Mayflower Series*.

"Playboys, Pushovers and Parasites Need Not Apply," she stitched on to one of these works.

The next seven works in the series refer to her experiences with some of the men she dated.

"Mayflower meets Mr Me Me Me," says one work. "Mayflower meets Mr Quick Exit", and "Mayflower meets Mr Mother Me", say others.

Finally, the 12th work in the series reads: "Mayflower meets Mr Motown — and falls in love".

The question marks that hovered around the figure of Mayflower in all the previous cross-stitch patterns are replaced

in this last one with love hearts and musical notations. A happy ending to a classic love story.

Raetze says she inadvertently discouraged Justin on their first date. "I had a show coming up and I was very focused on getting my work done," she says.

"He got the impression from me that I wasn't interested."

Two weeks later, however, Justin invited Raetze to a wine-tasting and "it just seemed to click". The couple now lives in the eastern suburbs, where Raetze also has her studio.

Cash Brown initiated the *Hands On* exhibition after noticing a significant number of contemporary artists whose working process appropriated traditional, home-spun domestic