Hollywood, Etc.: You may see a lot or a little in this unusual 'Real Girl'

by Norma Meyer

SANTA MONICA, Coif. - Sex doll Bianca didn't come to breakfast this morning with "Lars and the Real Girl" director Craig Gillespie. The life-size silicone star of the new PG-13 movie was back at her nearby home, which also happens to be Gillespie's, decked out in one of his wife's black Dolce & Gabbana dresses.

GOSLING'S GUEST - Ryan Gosling and his plastic friend, Bianca, can't help but attract attention in the movie 'Lars and the Real Girl.' CNS Photo courtesy of George Kraychyk. "She's sitting in the living room with a magazine right now," Gillespie says with a chuckle. No dummy, Bianca was reading the high-fashion monthly W.

The anatomically correct, jarringly humanlike brunette was still dolled up from a recent dinner party with some of the "Lars" crew at Gillespie's house, where she came to live after making her Hollywood debut. Crazy as it sounds, though, the protective director won't let his rubbery ingenue do "interviews," because he's still treating her the way she was on-set and in the quirky, touching flick starring Ryan Gosling.

"From the beginning, I said to Ryan when I met with him, 'We're going to shoot her like she has a no-nudity clause.' I wanted to give her as much respect as any actress," Gillespie says.

"We made it very clear - she had to be changed off-set all the time. She'd never be changed in front of anybody," Gillespie adds, noting Bianca had a private trailer and watchful handlers on the Toronto shoot. "She could only be on the set when she was in the scene. She was never left sitting around." On location, jokes about the inanimate brown-eyed babe were strictly off-limits.

The approach was crucial to the tone of the black comedy and Gosling's performance. The Oscar-nominated actor plays Lars, an emotionally damaged introvert who begins to emerge from his shell when the "woman" he met online comes to visit. Although pouty-lipped Bianca is pliable with no pulse, Lars interacts with her as if she's a person. She's no slutty stereotype, though. Lars makes sure Bianca, a wheelchair-using Brazilian-Swedish missionary on sabbatical, sleeps in the pink guest room of his brother's house.

To help Lars through his delusional crisis, his relatives, family doctor and residents of his small Midwestern town also treat Bianca as if she's flesh-and-blood. Bianca attends church, eats at the dinner table, volunteers at the hospital and, in the end, transforms Lars and everyone else.

Like any leading lady, the 5-foot-3, 92-pound Bianca had her own hair and makeup team and required a number of wardrobe changes - only dressing her took at least half an hour, which might have held up the shoot. "She bends, but it's surprisingly difficult," Gillespie relates. So, big scoop here, she had a double.

"Actually, there's two Biancas. I have one and Ryan has one," Gillespie reveals.

Unlike Gillespie's stay-at-home Bianca, former Mouseketeer Gosling took his plastic playmate out after "Lars" wrapped shooting and the actor returned to Los Angeles.

"I know the night she arrived, he felt a little bad about leaving her in the apartment," Gillespie says. "They went out and played some pool and hung out downtown."

REAL INSPIRATION

"Six Feet Under" writer Nancy Oliver penned "Lars" after coming across RealDoll, made by the San Marcos-based Abyss Creations, on the Internet. It was up to Gillespie to visit the upscale love-doll factory - which sells curvy companions for about $7,000 including shipping - and find his synthetic star.

"There was an overwhelming amount of choices," he recalls. "Basically, you could have any type of woman you want. I think there's 10 bodies and 14 faces to choose from, and five skin colors and all the eye colors. I didn't even know where to start."

Obviously, this was a weighty casting decision for the affable director of "Mr. Woodcock" and hundreds of commercials, including ones for H&R Block and Diet Mountain Dew. Luckily, soon after his first RealDoll showroom visit, Gillespie was in a bookstore and picked up "Still Lovers," a photographic journal of owners and their sex dolls.

"There was this one doll that just seemed so soulful and just peaceful."

Gillespie says he went back to RealDoll headquarters but was told: "'That's an older model. She's not that popular anymore.' I said, 'Well, why?' The reason was her eyelids are at half-mast, which makes her look very tranquil, but they got a lot of complaints that she looked bored." The Australian-born auteur laughs, which he does a lot during this interview over bagels and lox in a friendly hole-in-the-wall diner where he hangs out.

Bianca's inventors offer more details about her birth. RealDoll spokeswoman Bronwen Keller says the moviemakers initially selected the most popular figure, "body 7," but "felt for the screen test that the breasts were too big." They instead went with the standard still-available "body 6" (with bra size 32A) and a standard countenance, "face 8," according to Keller, who expects doll sales to increase with the movie's general release.

Six weeks after ordering, Bianca arrived in the same large wooden crate seen on-screen. At first in the odd romance, the size-4 beaut is sexily attired in fishnet stockings, glittery dress and heavy makeup, but she soon transforms into a more natural girl-next-door in sweaters and scarves. At the end, when she's ill, Bianca's complexion looks pasty.

"We actually had nine faces with variations," Gillespie says. The differences were subtle - Bianca's eyelashes were longer, or more of her freckles showed, or her mouth was slightly more open. Her fingernail polish also

changed.

Just think how much Hollywood divas could save on cosmetic surgery if they were more like Bianca. Keller says RealDolls' "patented Face-X system" allows interchangeable-like masks to be attached with Velcro to a skull structure.

Gosling apparently never dwelled on these Frankenstein-like qualities of his love interest. Gillespie says the actor was so into character he talked off-screen with the director about Lars' relationship with Bianca and improvised conversations with her. "It was never a doll in his mind for a moment."

Although Bianca had no lines, she did need help emoting. The movie's end credits list "Bianca Wrangler" and "Assistant Bianca Wrangler," which were the two handlers who positioned her for shots, tilting her head a little or moving her eyes in the sockets. Gillespie says he "was really hands-on," too, although his stiff thespian didn't always get it on the first take. For instance, there's the funny scene where Bianca topples to her side as she sits on the bed. "The first time, she took out the whole lamp and side table," says Gillespie. "She's not a graceful faller."

When the 31-day shoot was over in Canada, Gillespie says he had to bring Bianca home. "How could I not take her? What? Leave her in a box somewhere?"

So she moved in with his family, which includes his two sons, ages 9 and 12. "They think it's a little bit creepy, but they're getting used to it."

His wife, meanwhile, is putting up with the other woman. "She keeps asking me to put her back in the guest room," Gillespie says with a smile.

But that's no way to treat the new it-girl. Especially since Bianca's been buzzed about as a Best Actress nominee.

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