

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Byrne, Chris. "Act Now: Buy The Perfect Baby At Dallas Art Fair." *Patron*, (March 31, 2016).



ACT NOW: BUY THE PERFECT BABY AT DALLAS ART FAIR

March 31, 2016 Chris Byrne

On the North Dallas Tollway, about a quarter-mile from Oak Lawn Avenue, a curious billboard campaign advertising where and how to purchase the "perfect baby" is displayed. The billboard reads: *Genetically perfect children... inconceivable? Coming to Dallas April 15. www.perfect-babies.com* Surely already raising important questions; what thousands of people driving by don't know is that the billboard is actually an advertisement for an art installation that will be on view at the Dallas Art Fair April 15–17.

The *Perfect Baby Showroom* is from the mind of Rachel Lee Hovnanian, a multidisciplinary, Houston-raised, New York-based artist. In this artist's laboratory meets shopping mall, parents determine the lives and physical characteristics of their bio-engineered babies. The installation explores capitalism, narcissism and intimacy, while questioning the rapid trajectory of digital technology. Viewers are challenged to reevaluate their own relationship with the virtual medium.



Displayed in neat stainless steel racks and arranged in tidy rows, Hovnanian's super-lifelike perfect babies are posited as miracles of nature, yet they are also inventory; infants to be loved, yet products to be prized. Their heads lie on pillows inflated with brightly hued and genetically modified breakfast cereals, which are in turn filled with air.

In an interview for *PATRON*, Dallas Art Fair co-founder Chris Byrne caught up with Rachel Hovnanian prior to the opening of her solo exhibit at Leila Heller Gallery's booth in a couple of weeks.

Chris Byrne: Rachel, welcome back to Dallas. Will you tell me about what you will be showing at this year's Dallas Art Fair? I understand that the Leila Heller Gallery booth will be dedicated to your work.

Rachel Hovnanian: Thank you Chris. It's a pleasure to be back in Dallas at the Dallas Art Fair. I am doing a solo exhibition this year for Leila Heller Gallery (New York, Dubai) located at booth F2. I am showing *Breakfast of Champions Totem*, *The Dallas Cowboy's Breakfast of Champions*, my large oval *Reflections Pool Mice* and

Flowers (round), *Motherboard* (round), two Acronym Neons, *FINE* (f***ed up, insecure, neurotic and emotional) and ILYSFM (*I love you so f***ing much*), my *Foreplay* photographs, and from my *Too Good To Be True* series *The Collector* & *Get Him To Forgive You*.



CB: Your installation entitled *Perfect Baby Showroom* will also be on view in an adjacent space. How are the two bodies of work related?

RH: The mixed-media installation will include walls covered in electrical outlet-printed wallpaper. Cords that are connected to these outlets lead directly to rows of clear plastic boxes on pedestals that, resemble futuristic incubators. Inside these open-topped boxes are hyper-realistic dolls, clothed in white while resting gently on pillows filled with colorful puffed breakfast cereals. In my past shows in New York and California, a sign on the wall above the babies resembled a fast food menu, with close-up images of the babies' faces labeled with names such as *The Morgan*, *The Jordan*, and *The Joey*. But this year's exhibition in Dallas will feature babies that have been "upgraded to 2016 models."

The objective of my work shown at Dallas Art Fair is to engage the viewer in a communicative intersubjective experience. All of my work, as a woman artist, implies that there is tension between the fragility of life, and technology.

The viewer is crucial and constitutive to the work—without their response to it there is no reflection. Viewers become the object of the conversation as babies lined up in these formally arranged Lucite boxes surround them. There is a constant power relationship between the visitors, viewers of the billboard, and Lucite-boxed babies. In silence the babies lay lifeless—a dormant formal arrangement. The viewer enters the space to disrupt this formal arrangement by picking up the babies. The viewer is drawn to the tactile nature of the installation. Viewers are instructed to use hand sanitizer, put on a lab coat, and take pictures with the babies to post on Instagram.



Most directly, my *Perfect Babies* installation speaks directly to the viewer. I believe there will be companies, in the future, set up to deliver perfect baby technology and I choose to draw people's attention to the fragile possibilities.

The billboard and website present an infinite feedback loop of reflection. My *Perfect Babies* installation establishes an aesthetic experience that connects social and cultural contexts of the art, which is exhibited in the F2 booth.

CB: During the 2010 Dallas Art Fair you participated in the panel discussion *Power & Burden of Beauty*, moderated by Laurie Dhue. Can you describe the directions your work has taken since then? Are the basic themes and concerns similar?

RH: *Power and Burden of Beauty* essentially examined how personal beauty is codified and embedded in our lives as a touchstone of social prestige and power. My work looked closely at beauty as a seemingly unreachable prerequisite for sexual confidence; as a commodity that can be bought but not owned; and ultimately as an obsession that treats growth, maturation, and aging as issues that can be solved with money, discipline, a positive attitude and the right cosmetics. With all of this in mind, factor in technology and the impact it has had on how we perceive ourselves, how we communicate, and how we may even shop for custom-engineered genetically perfect offspring. The work is meant to provoke commentary and presents an ongoing consolidation of these concerns and themes.

CB: In addition to exhibiting in the Fair itself, you have also generously donated a piece to MTV RE:DEFINE. I've been informed that it's a new work, created specifically for the event...

RH: Yes, my Acronym Neon: ILYSFM (I love you so f***ing much. XL)



Along with Rachel Hovnanian's must-stop-and-see at Leila Heller Gallery, now in its eighth year, the Dallas Art Fair will host galleries from Antwerp, Berlin, Bogota, Boston, Brussels, Chicago, Detroit, Dubai, Dublin, Guadalajara, Helsinki, London, Los Angeles, Madrid, Marfa, Mexico City, Miami, Milan, Milwaukee, Newcastle, New York, Paris, Puerto Rico, Rome, San Paulo, Tokyo, Toronto, Turin, San Francisco, Santa Fe, Vancouver, Vienna, and Zurich. The Dallas Art Fair Preview Gala will be held on Thursday, April 14. The Preview Gala benefits the Dallas Museum of Art, Nasher Sculpture Center, and Dallas Contemporary and this year. There will be additional programming with these institutions as well as The Goss-Michael Foundation and the Power Station. The Dallas Art Fair is open Friday, April 15 through Sunday, April 17.